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**AMERICAN PUBLIC DIPLOMACY AND PROPAGANDA EFFORTS  
TO CHANGE "HEARTS AND MINDS" IN A SOVIET SATELLITE  
STATE (BULGARIA) DURING THE COLD WAR, 1945-1991**

Kristian Kafozov

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AMERICAN PUBLIC DIPLOMACY AND PROPAGANDA EFFORTS TO CHANGE  
“HEARTS AND MINDS” IN A SOVIET SATELLITE STATE (BULGARIA) DURING  
THE COLD WAR, 1945-1991

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

to the faculty of the

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

of

ST. JOHN’S COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS AND SCIENCES

at

ST. JOHN’S UNIVERSITY

New York

by

Kristian Kafozov

Date Submitted: September 9, 2024

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Mauricio Borrero

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **AMERICAN PUBLIC DIPLOMACY AND PROPAGANDA EFFORTS TO CHANGE “HEARTS AND MINDS” IN A SOVIET SATELLITE STATE (BULGARIA) DURING THE COLD WAR, 1945-1991**

Kristian Kafozov

This dissertation investigates and demonstrates the nature and impact of public diplomacy and propaganda efforts employed by the United States of America across Eastern Europe throughout the Cold War, focusing on the People’s Republic of Bulgaria as a case study. Bulgaria's unique position as a steadfast ally of the Soviet Union underpinned by a deep-rooted Russian-Bulgarian “special relationship” (based on shared cultural, religious, and political ties forged over the course of a century), makes it an especially compelling subject for understanding the effectiveness of American initiatives in penetrating even the most loyal Soviet satellite states during the Cold War.

This research examines and evaluates the role played by Bulgarian public intellectuals-turned “dissident defectors,” in their contribution to the American-funded Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) and its Bulgarian broadcasting department. Although, the situation in Bulgaria according to RFE/RL internal reports remained mixed in contrast to the other Soviet satellite states, the results in regards to the top US objectives related to confronting the Bulgarian-Soviet connection as well as exposing corruption within Communism, were considered to be surprisingly successful due to the overall rise of interest in RFE broadcasting especially in the aftermath of an infamous political

assassination in London, UK which occurred in the midst of the Western human rights agenda at the end of the era of détente in the late 1970s.

The convergence of Bulgaria's global cultural diplomacy, which peaked in the early 1980s, and the strategic shifts in US public diplomacy through radio broadcasting to Bulgaria are among the main contributions to the historiography on the state and society of Bulgaria. Additionally, this study offers insights into the way by which US foreign policy developed within the Eastern bloc during the Cold War, viewed from the perspective of one of the most Soviet-aligned satellite states.

Finally, this dissertation situates the aforementioned narratives/evaluations and research/analysis within the broader context of the global diplomatic, political, and social approach to the study of history and in doing so, addresses the various historiographical debates across differing schools of thought regarding the short-term and long-term causes for the conclusion of the Cold War.

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Honor is due to my grandfather Kolyu Angelov Stoychev who since 2011 has been dearly missed by everyone in the family, including my beloved maternal grandmother Paraskeva Kostadinova Stoycheva who has served as an invaluable source of personal recollection in her memories of Bulgaria as she lived it throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, and has played her part in sparking my early interest in the study of history and geography.

As well, acknowledgment is owed to her older brother Yanaki Kirov Kostadinov who recently passed away in 2022 and who also served to provide me with his own deep perspectives on the past based on his military career. Additionally, my paternal grandmother Ruska and her husband Hristo who passed away in 2018, and their own family struggles during the course of a changing Bulgaria, will not be forgotten within our family.

Thanks is also due to all the people that I have encountered along my research journey which really started a decade ago as a graduate student at the University of London from 2012 to 2014, when I first uncovered documents at the Bulgarian State Archives in Sofia. The staff at these archives, made it possible to access a wide range of documents in

order to conduct this research over the past years. Additional thanks is owed to Krastan Vladimirov for agreeing to interview and discuss this research topic at length, last year.

Importantly, thanks is especially due to the staff at the Open Society Archives in Budapest, Hungary who accommodated me by expending my requests for some critical collections, during this past winter. Certainly, I must make mention of the staff at the Hoover Institution's Library and Archives, who aided me in initially digging through and locating the documents necessary to complete this dissertation from 2023 to 2024.

I would also like to thank the faculty of the History department at Saint John's University, particularly Dr. Mauricio Borrero without whom this dissertation would not have been possible. Dr. Borrero and I were introduced over a decade ago, while I was an undergraduate student enrolled in his two Eurasian and Russian history courses. This was my first classroom experience in seriously studying a historical topic that I had been already broadly acquainted throughout my earlier life, although as a student of history, the spark was light, which inspired me to continue on this path into my graduate studies.

Of course, neither of us would have known at that time, that I would end up returning to Saint John's University nearly 10 years later - this time as part of the PhD program, but in a very changed world, which was emerging from a global pandemic in 2020-2021. An year into the program, as I began to narrow my focus on the historiography of the Cold War and its end, the Russian-Ukrainian full-scale war erupted in early 2022.

Our long conversations discussing the past and present, all while making sure to stay ahead of the curve on all course requirements, including teaching the “Emergence of a Global Society” core class and the two back to back doctorate dissertation workshop seminars from 2023-24 will remain the highlights of my time back at the university.

I would like to extend thanks to Dr. Alejandro Quintana and Dr. Kristin Szylvian for agreeing to be part of the academic committee, and for approaching my dissertation work from different perspectives, which broadened my own purpose of this research project. The graduate seminars they were all part of teaching; from “War and Peace”, “Science and Technology”, “City and the Countryside” as well as “State and Society” were quite impactful in expanding my overall perspective on various themes within the study of World History and to incorporate those aspects into my research investigation.

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## INTRODUCTION

At the heart of the Cold War was the ideological competition between the global superpowers to “win hearts and minds” around the world, with both the US and USSR engaging in entrepreneurial subversive political warfare against each other and their respective allies’ target populations. Recognizing the need to ideologically combat totalitarianism, the US established the Voice of America initially to engage in countering the powerful propaganda strategies of the Axis powers during World War II. As the Cold War intensified, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty was founded, both initially supported by the Central Intelligence Agency. These initiatives, were specifically designed to reach receptive audiences within the Soviet Eastern bloc, providing uncensored information and promoting alternative viewpoints to those disseminated by the state-controlled media.

This dissertation investigates the impact of such American foreign policy through public diplomacy and propaganda efforts directed toward Eastern Europe throughout the Cold War time period from 1945 to 1991, focusing on Bulgaria as a case study. Unlike most Soviet satellite states, which displayed varying degrees of resistance or independence from Moscow, Bulgaria functioned as a notably loyal satellite state of the Soviet Union due its long-standing special relationship with the Soviet Union. This unwavering allegiance makes Bulgaria an intriguing case study for understanding how US propaganda and public diplomacy efforts were tailored and implemented in a setting where Soviet influence was particularly strong and unchallenged by the national government.

Bulgaria's loyalty to the USSR provides a clear and distinct benchmark for measuring the effectiveness of US-backed programs aimed at “winning hearts and minds” during the Cold War. Bulgaria has often been overlooked in broader Cold War studies,



with more attention given to countries where dramatic confrontations or uprisings occurred. Focusing on Bulgaria fills a gap in the historiography, offering a more nuanced and holistic understanding of how ideological battles were waged across the entire Eastern Bloc during the Cold War, including the impact of US-led initiatives in nations where domestic dissident movements as a form of resistance was less visible but still significant.

This research project also explores the nature of how evolutions in communications technology were strategically employed as an effective platform for the widespread dissemination of information for political purposes through propaganda as well as public diplomacy. Such promotion of ideas through technology was orchestrated by governments to achieve their foreign policy and geopolitical objectives while attempting to successfully engage in forms of ideological warfare around the world. The topic broadly addresses the intersection between ideology and technology during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, as well as how government-run information initiatives relate to intelligence operations in the context of the bipolar global struggle between the two systems of socio-economic development.

More concretely, this research examines American strategies to engage with the people of Eastern Europe behind the Iron Curtain, at the onset and throughout the duration of the multifaceted confrontation known as the Cold War. In line with the Western world's determination to ensure the containment of Communism geopolitically and in particular ideologically, one of the initial strategies of the US government involved the creation of different types of overt and covert radio broadcasting stations as well as a series of clandestine print publication or book exchange programs that sought to penetrate beyond the Iron Curtain and capture as many "hearts and minds" as potentially possible.

This research provides not only a detailed account of how these American-run efforts enlisted several famous public intellectuals-turned dissident defectors to broadcast programming weaponizing their political perspectives on behalf of the US government as part of these information operations, but also examines and evaluates the specific content of the programming and its impact measured by targeted public audience research analyses.

The purpose of this dissertation is to demonstrate the degree of effectiveness that American public diplomacy and propaganda efforts had in countering Soviet public diplomacy and propaganda efforts in Bulgaria under Communism. The dissertation explains why Bulgaria stood out in contrast to the rest of the Eastern bloc, not only due to its close ties to the Soviet Union, but also how when those ties were at their height, Bulgaria was able to pursue its own independent public diplomacy strategy of rebranding, rather successfully as a form of cultural diplomacy outside of the Communist world.

Also, the dissertation demonstrates how despite the absence of a grassroots domestic dissident movement in Bulgaria, a small but significant number of public intellectuals who initially supported the Communists, defected to the West during the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, and who began working for Western radio broadcasters with considerable impact, so much that two of those persons, were targeted for assassination while living abroad, and one was in fact, ultimately silenced.

Among the most targeted topics by Western radio broadcasters who recruited well-known émigrés, was the success of the self-styled “special relationship” between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the People’s Republic of Bulgaria. While this was itself a byproduct of Communist propaganda in one sense, in another sense, it was a significant historical development rooted in a multilayered context and complex interplay of linguistic,

religious and cultural ties. These ties were compounded by Bulgaria's drive for national unification and political survival on the Balkan geopolitical "powder keg" of Europe during the Great Power Politics of the Imperial Age, both World Wars and the Cold War.

The dissertation also incorporates a global diplomatic, political and social approach to the study of history, and in doing so, critically addresses the various historiographical debates within the differing schools of thought concerning the causes for the conclusion of the Cold War. While this is only briefly addressed at the very end, the way in which the narrative is written, implicitly demonstrates many of the arguments and assertions made as a contribution to the historiography of the study of Communism in Eastern Europe.

In retrospect, historians have acknowledged the massive role that these vast government initiatives throughout the Cold War played in bolstering American soft power for the cause of "winning the hearts and minds" throughout the world, for the American-styled ideals expressed through terms such as "freedom," "liberty," and "democracy" as well as for the values of the Capitalist free market system. These concepts and practices were rapidly adopted with varying degrees of success and failure across Eastern Europe after the collapse of Communism and the disintegration of the Soviet Union in the 1990s.

This topic has been well written about in relation to most of Central and Eastern Europe, however the academic literature has yet to expand specifically upon this topic in relation to the state and society of the People's Republic of Bulgaria, arguably the closest satellite state to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), which in a number of ways enjoyed more favorable diplomatic relations with the Russian Soviet Socialist Republic than even some of the constituent Soviet republics themselves.

In exploring the historical, state-diplomatic, and party-ideological aspects of this Soviet-Bulgarian special relationship, this dissertation utilizes Bulgaria as a way to examine the contrasting role played by American and Soviet public diplomacy and propaganda. This is among the main contributions to the larger historiography as well as debates concerning the end of the Cold War, which this dissertation attempts to make.

By focusing on Bulgaria, a nation who held a positive view of Russia and its government maintained a deeply rooted alliance with Moscow, this study sheds light on how American soft power strategies were adapted and implemented in even the most ideologically entrenched environments. This research not only fills a gap in existing scholarship but also provides valuable insights into the nuanced and multifaceted nature of Cold War-era influence campaigns via broadcasting and other methods, offering a deeper understanding of how ideological battles were waged on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

The narrative and analysis is based on a wide range of secondary and primary sources which are constructed to answer a number of questions about a subject that has not been thoroughly explored: the role of American public diplomacy and propaganda materialized through radio broadcasting designed to combat Communist ideology in the Eastern bloc, and directed at Bulgaria and its special relationship with the USSR, an alliance not shared by the other satellite states of Eastern Europe.

Bulgaria was selected as a case study on the effectiveness of this type of and public diplomacy for this particular reason but also because the writer's fluency in the Bulgarian language offers a unique opportunity to access and analyze the Bulgarian-language broadcasts in their original form as well as the declassified secret reports about them.

This practical linguistic advantage allows for a more nuanced and thorough examination of materials that might otherwise be overlooked or underutilized by scholars less familiar with the language. While the literature on this type of American public diplomacy and propaganda efforts, specifically on the Voice of America and particularly with regard to Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty is extensive, not all that much exists specifically relating to Bulgaria. Although Bulgaria is occasionally mentioned in academic articles that evaluate radio broadcasting, more attention is placed on other larger and more prominent satellite states which understandably draw more attention, but nevertheless do not share the unique circumstances that the Bulgarian state and society had in relation to the USSR. Bulgaria's Balkan Communist neighbors; Yugoslavia and Romania also lacked strong dissident movements however, unlike Bulgaria, their independent approaches to foreign policy emerged from divergent circumstances - Yugoslavia, under Tito, pursued non-alignment from the beginning and sought to defy Soviet control, while Romania, under Ceausescu, pursued an increasingly nationalistic and autonomous stance within the Eastern Bloc, both distancing themselves from the USSR rather than reinforcing close ties.

In contrast, the role of Western broadcasting has been thoroughly examined particularly in satellite states which experienced Soviet military interventions, such as with East Germany in 1953, Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968, and Poland during 1981 - all of which had developed internal dissident movements. This gap in the literature raises relevant questions about the strategic content and effectiveness of Western radio broadcasts targeting Bulgaria, a topic that has generally received minimal scholarly attention.

In fact, only one recent academic article in detail discusses the jamming of radio broadcasts in Bulgaria, offering brief but in-depth insights into their potential effectiveness though only in terms of their accessibility to the public and the Bulgarian government's approach to jamming, with little focus on the specific strategic content of the broadcasts.

Of course, much of the existing literature concerning Western broadcasts to Bulgaria, almost always involves the writer Georgi Markov who worked for both the BBC and RFE/RL before his assassination in 1978. While the Markov murder is indeed a significant event and different angles around the circumstances are discussed, including commentaries by those broadcasters who personally knew Markov, the extent of the analysis on the Markov case is mainly concentrated on exploring one specific catalyst that likely led to his assassination namely, the series of incendiary broadcasts titled *Personal Meetings with Todor Zhivkov*. Those broadcast transcripts along with others are cited and contextualized, as part of this study. Specifically, the narrative of the dissertation is among the few that connects the broadcasting records and transcripts of Georgi Markov (who will be introduced in detail in Chapter 3) as well as those of other public intellectuals who broadcasted during this period, to the broader context of the cultural diplomacy orchestrated primarily by Lyudmila Zhivkova which Bulgaria embarked upon during the 1970s and 1980s (which is examined in Chapter 4). This research also draws heavily on Radio Free Europe's corporate records and audience research surveys in order to evaluate shifting public attitudes and contrast that data to statements of how the Bulgarian state security services considered Radio Free Europe among the main ideological threats.

## **Research Methodology**

In order to conduct the research on this topic and reach the intended purpose of this dissertation, a range of primary and secondary sources located at archives within the US and abroad were consulted. Primary source archival material, such as original radio broadcast record transcripts were carefully examined. The Hoover Institution Library and Archives located at Stanford University in Palo Alto, California, houses the archives of the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe's Bulgarian Broadcast Service which were accessed and examined during the spring and summer of 2023. The Bulgarian Broadcast service's corporate archives contained different sets of documents as well as the transcripts of broadcast recordings that were available to access in quantity according to strict rules.

Also, the Open Society Archives currently located in Budapest, Hungary and previously associated with Central European University (now in Vienna, Austria) contain the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Media Research Institute where the public audience research analysis surveys were accessed in the winter of 2023-2024. Radio Free Europe (RFE) originally operated out of Munich, West Germany from 1950 to 1995 but is currently active in Prague, Czech Republic. The Bulgarian broadcast service was discontinued in 2004, but was restarted again in 2019; RFE/RL has been expanding again, since 2014.

The Bulgarian State Archives Agency in Sofia, Bulgaria which contains the archive of the former Bulgarian Communist Party (BKP) as well as other collections related to this research project, such as the "1300 Years Celebration Fond." As well, the archive of the Ministry of the Interior and by extension, the Committee for State Security (KDS) were accessed through the Dossiers Commission, also known as the Committee for Disclosing the Documents and Announcing Affiliation of Bulgarian Citizens to the State Security and

the Intelligence Services of the Bulgarian National Armed Forces, during the summer of 2023 and winter of 2023-2024, and which required an extensive waiting period.

Additional open-source primary and secondary source materials from the time period including: journal academic articles, newspapers, magazines, as well as multimedia press reports of all sorts concerning mass media were also considered, given that the timeframe studied is part of recent world history and there are some people alive who will remember and may have participated both in listening and recording for RFE. Although at the onset of the project, several people were pursued for interviews, two were found to be no longer alive and only one interview was successfully obtained. This particular interviewee (Krastan Vladimirov) retold his own personal experience during his career, and admitted that many people in his opinion, did occasionally listen out of curiosity to Western broadcasting, even those who supported the Communist government.

However, because other similar or contrasting perspectives by potential interviewees, could not be successfully conducted as part of this process, and also because the questions concern personal experiences that occurred over thirty to forty years ago or longer, the research relies primarily on interviews as part of public opinion surveys that were conducted with larger samples of the public during that time frame.

Although most of the primary sources sought and cited throughout were based in archival collections and the original published broadcast transcripts, a significant portion of the materials for this research are available as published books and through online open sources, especially various publications and even some digitized radio broadcasts.



## **Dissertation Structure**

The entirety of this research project was conducted over the course of an year and a half after the defense of the dissertation research proposal, it was written up during that timeframe. The final dissertation contains five chapters and is structured, as follows:

In the first chapter, the essence behind this contentious and self-styled (Soviet) Russian-Bulgarian “special relationship” in shaping the modern Bulgarian nation-state since its inception is explained. The first chapter introduces the reemergence of the Bulgarian nation-state and its failed aspirations at self-determination and national unification shaped by clashing Great Power interests on the Balkans. Bulgaria’s failed foreign policy during the Balkan Wars and two World Wars, marked by its military alliances made ultimately by necessity with the Central powers (during WWI) and with the Axis powers (during WWII), drove the country to turn away from its temporary ties with Vienna and Berlin and enthusiastically reorient itself back toward Moscow during the onset of the Cold War. This chapter shows how in part to this special relationship, Bulgaria’s outreach to the Third World and beyond through its cultural public diplomacy was enacted in the context of détente and leading up to the 1981 national jubilee celebrations.

In addition, how various aspects of the domestic situation changed or did not change within Bulgarian society during the 45 years of Communism are also discussed in detail. This is important in providing not only a historical context to the research topic but also a foundational backdrop against which the role of American public diplomacy efforts through radio broadcasting to Bulgaria, affected the Bulgarian society and impacted public attitudes as well as political changes toward this particular alliance rooted on multiple layers of geopolitical strategy, shared ideology and a cultural history.

In the second chapter, the intersection between Bulgaria as a loyal Soviet satellite state as well as a target of US public diplomacy and propaganda efforts is examined in detail. This chapter clarifies the distinction between public diplomacy and propaganda as part of US foreign policy, and it also provides a brief overview of the development of radio technology as a political platform and how it was utilized to enforce the rise of totalitarianism in Europe and Eurasia between the two World Wars. Then, with the start of the Cold War, the Voice of America based on the British Broadcasting Corporation and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty are introduced in detail, highlighting their failures and successes, illustrating how these broadcasting efforts shaped public perception and influenced the ideological struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union.

The chapter also discusses at length the CIA's clandestine book project, exploring its impact across the Eastern bloc, with particular attention to Bulgaria. Lastly, this chapter examines the Communist regime's censorship practices, including the electronic interference of radio broadcasting, known as jamming, all within the broader context of the role played by the US-run Free Europe Committee in relation to Communist Bulgaria.

In the third chapter, the focus shifts to the role of the Bulgarian public intellectuals who became dissident defectors during the tensions within Eastern bloc societies caused by the 1968 Prague Spring. This is illustrated through the life and career of Georgi Markov, initially in his work as part of the Bulgarian propaganda machine and later in his contributions to Western radio broadcasting. Selected broadcasts with different messages from their transcripts are cited and contextualized, particularly those that satirize society under Communism, Bulgaria's ties to Russia, and offer insider critiques of Todor Zhivkov, drawing on Georgi Markov's knowledge of the "inner circle" within the *nomenklatura*.

The chapter also details Markov's 1978 assassination in London, and introduces six other key figures: Atanas Slavov, Petar Semerdzhiev, Dimitar Inkiow, Assen Ignatov, Dimitar Bochev, and Vladimir Kostov – all who continued to work for Western broadcasters into the 1980s, although none of them were assassinated. Their perspectives and contributions, as revealed through available transcripts, are examined and analyzed.

In the fourth chapter, the audience research surveys going back to the 1950s-1960s as well as the radio broadcasts leading up to and after the 1978 assassination of Georgi Markov are evaluated in order to provide a transition toward the examination of RFE's Bulgarian broadcasting department's stance on the 1981 national jubilee celebrations as part of the country's cultural diplomacy driven by Lyudmila Zhivkova. Interestingly enough, commentaries by figures such as Vladimir Kostov, among others, address this historical anniversary and even promote its key nationalistic themes which best build up the Bulgarian national identity, while largely avoiding direct criticism of Zhivkova herself.

Although the way by which the Communist party under Todor Zhivkov successfully took control over the rebranding of Bulgarian identity as part of the cultural diplomacy is something that is often critiqued. This chapter also delves into the Bulgarian secret service archives to uncover what they knew about Western broadcasters, how they perceived those who worked for them, and why RFE's broadcasts in Bulgarian were regarded as the single most effective ideological threat against the Communist regime.

In the fifth and final chapter, the broader roles of the US and USSR leading up to the end of the Cold War are discussed, in relation to the fall of Communism in Bulgaria. The chapter addresses the role of the Western human rights agenda during the détente era and the restart of geopolitical tensions during the 1980s. In the backdrop of that global

framework, the situation in Bulgaria is examined based on RFE/RL's audience research analysis surveys, which demonstrate changing public attitudes over time but also RFE's agenda and by extension, its successes in shaping the perspectives of the political opposition after the collapse of Communism. In addition, the impact beyond radio played by television and motion pictures to enforce propaganda purposes is explored in relation to how themes changed throughout the Cold War, and especially on topics related to socialism and nationalism. How those ideas have resonated in society and been enacted into domestic and foreign policy around the time that Communism collapsed and in the aftermath of the Cold War, particularly on the Balkans during the 1990s is also briefly explored.

Finally, the factors that contributed to the end of the Cold War including the changing socio-economic dynamics in international relations and the effects of the global Digital Revolution, are addressed and categorized based on the three distinct schools of thought in the historiography concerning the Cold War's conclusion from 1989 to 1991.

**CHAPTER 1:**  
**THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE BULGARIAN-RUSSIAN (SOVIET)**  
**“SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP”**

**Chapter Introduction**

The case study for this dissertation will focus on the state and society of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria from 1944 to 1989, which was arguably the closest satellite state to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), and which in a number of ways enjoyed more favorable diplomatic relations with the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic than some of the constituent Soviet republics, themselves.

This first chapter will seek to examine the essence behind this (Soviet) Russian-Bulgarian special relationship in shaping the modern Bulgarian nation-state since its inception. Furthermore, the chapter will further argue that Bulgaria was unique as an Eastern European satellite state in Moscow’s orbit, in that it shared not only a strategic relationship, as one based on short-term bilateral interests that exists between nation-states of all sorts in international relations, but in fact, it shared a self-styled “special relationship”, one that is defined beyond mutually shared interests but is rooted in a long-term historical factors beyond interests in foreign affairs that are rooted in domestic society.

Furthermore, the historical development of these diplomatic relations as well as their impact on Bulgarian society before, during and after the era of Communism during the Cold War is essential to define and demonstrate as a backdrop to the research. In order for this dissertation to provide an examination and analysis on the impact of American public diplomacy efforts to influence Bulgaria against the USSR and its regime in Sofia,

the historical background of how and why this supposed “special relationship” between Sofia and Moscow existed must be explored first and foremost.

The purpose of this chapter is to synthesize various sources on Bulgarian national history and to explain why Bulgaria was unique as a Soviet satellite state, and in doing so, deconstruct the Russian-Bulgarian relationship, being based on three distinct aspects:

1) The shared linguistic (Slavic languages) and religious (Eastern Orthodox Christian) cultural roots as well as the historical context in which the Russian Empire is viewed as a liberating force for Bulgaria before and after the final Russian conflict with the Ottoman Empire, which resulted in its establishment as an independent nation-state. Bulgaria’s subsequent competition with Serbia for leadership of the Pan-Slavic movement in the Balkans, then leads to the Balkan Wars. After its defeat in the Second Balkan War, Bulgaria drifts away from the Russian and toward the Austrian sphere of influence, however its two “national catastrophes” occur as a result of its alliance with the defeated Central Powers in WWI. After WWII, Bulgaria re-embraces Russia in the Soviet context.

2) The ideological and interpersonal political connections between the parties in power after Bulgaria decisively falls into the Soviet sphere of influence after WWII. These relations forged between the underground Bulgarian Communist party and the Communist International (Stalin with Dimitrov and Chervenkov) and after when its leadership on more than one occasion, consistently maintains interpersonal connections with the Soviet leadership in Moscow (Zhivkov with Khrushchev and Brezhnev). This aspect also addresses the close coordination and communication between the respective secret state security services (KGB and KDS) that enforced the power of the Communists.

3) The geopolitical and pragmatic aspects of the Cold War, during which the Soviets entrusted Bulgaria as their top loyal satellite state within the Eastern bloc, and its only reliable partner in the Balkans, to achieve its grand strategic objectives with the neighboring NATO members, Greece and Turkey as well as with Non-Aligned Yugoslavia, but in doing so, Bulgaria also was able to achieve its own regional national security goals. This geopolitical aspect resembles the facets of a traditional strategic relationship, but in fact, Bulgaria was quite committed to carrying out Soviet strategic interests to a point where, this enabled it to actually pursue an independent course in foreign policy focused on a cultural public diplomacy with the world, during the global era of détente.

The Soviet-Bulgarian special relationship had its origins in the 1870s and reached its greatest material manifestation, a century later in the 1970s, although for a significant period of time, from the start of WWI up until the end of WWII, there was a breakdown in warm diplomatic relations, however it was Bulgaria's refusal to participate in the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, as the only Axis-allied nation to do so, along with the fact that the director of the Comintern was a Bulgarian in good standing with the Soviet leadership, allowed that strained relationship to be reborn right after the end of WWII.

In that context, the Bulgarian post-war government saw an opportunity to embrace its place in the Soviet sphere of influence of Eastern Europe rather than sending signals of resistance. On the other hand, the Soviet government always welcomed such positive political gestures from this small but significant satellite state. Of course, while the Bulgarian leadership had to look to Moscow much of the time, the Soviet leadership throughout much of the Cold War, had multiple issues to confront all around the world, and appreciated having a reliable partner within the Eastern bloc, that was not viewed with

suspicion. Sofia also benefitted from these circumstances, as Bulgaria was able to pursue an independent course in foreign policy outside of the Communist world, with the nations of Greece, West Germany, Japan as well as with India and Mexico in particular.

This chapter also shows how this outreach to the world through cultural public diplomacy was enacted in the context of the 1981 national jubilee celebrations. In addition, various aspects of the domestic situation within Bulgarian society is also discussed. This chapter's main framework examines the essence of the (Soviet) Russian-Bulgarian special relationship in shaping the modern Bulgarian nation-state based on a series of secondary sources. This will be important in providing not only a historical context to the topic but also a foundational backdrop against which the role of American public diplomacy efforts through radio broadcasting to Bulgaria, affected the Bulgarian society and impacted public attitudes as well as political changes toward this particular alliance which is rooted on multiple layers of geopolitical strategy, shared ideology and critically, a cultural history.

#### **The Russian Empire's Pan-Slavic connection to Bulgaria, 1878-1914**

In the historical context of the so-called "Eastern Question" during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Russian Empire's Pan-Slavic ideology was developed in order to extend its influence throughout Eastern Europe and the Balkans at a time when liberation movements by Slavs and Eastern Orthodox Christians ensued against the declining Islamic Ottoman Empire.

During this time, the Balkan peninsula of Southeastern Europe was increasingly turning into a proxy battlefield for the convergence of imperial ambitions, and as the Ottomans declined, the Russians who were most involved in the region, were joined by the British, Austrians, Germans and Italians in seeking to expand their influence in this strategic region between Europe and Eurasia. It all started with Greece in 1821 and the



1828-29 Russo-Turkish War, compounded by the European Revolutions of 1848 which further spread the ideals of national liberation to the Balkan peoples, including the Serbs who with Russian support also gained their independence from the Ottomans.

The “Great Eastern Crisis” caused in part due to the results of the 1853-56 Crimean War, increased Russia’s determination to maintain its influence in the Balkans despite its loss to the British, French and Ottoman forces which concluded an agreement to guard the religious rights of Christians living under the Ottoman Empire. Despite that treaty and the Tanzimat reforms, the Ottomans in turn were determined to crush attempts by a Bulgarian national liberation movement, evidenced by the execution of its leaders; Vassil Levski in 1873 and Hristo Botev in 1876. Furthermore, the brutally crushed uprising of April 1876 and massacre at Batak popularized as the “Bulgarian Atrocities”, turned Western public opinion against the Ottomans and opened an ideal opportunity, seized upon by the Russians, to act as humanitarian interventionists in Bulgaria. <sup>1</sup> The 1877-88 Russo-Turkish War, being the tenth and last of its kind, effectively resulted in the liberation of Bulgaria from its 500-year-long rule by the Ottoman Empire, and on March 3, 1878, that was sealed by the Treaty of San Stefano, which was signed on the outskirts of present-day Istanbul. <sup>2</sup>

Since the fall of the Byzantine Empire, that power had shifted to the Russian Empire which was ruled by the Romanovs in Saint Petersburg since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, even though the Eastern Orthodox Church since the 15<sup>th</sup> century had been in Moscow, called “the Third Rome”, and tracing its legacy back to Constantinople before its fall to the Ottomans in 1453. For that reason, Russia’s imperial designs to dominate the Black Sea and control Constantinople ran through the Balkans, and so when the Russians defeated the Ottomans

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<sup>1</sup> Crompton, Richard. *A Concise History of Bulgaria*. 47-86

<sup>2</sup> Crompton, Richard. *A Concise History of Bulgaria*. 81-86.

and pushed back to the gates of Constantinople; in securing Bulgarian independence, the Russians also were about to secure their age-old strategic ambitions. However, this would also mean the collapse of the Ottoman territories throughout the Middle East at the disposal of the Russian Empire, extending its reach potentially to dominate Eurasia and thereby, threaten the preeminent position of the British Empire in the world.<sup>3</sup>

The British as a result, voiced their support for the Ottomans as they had in the Crimean War, leaving the Russians to pause and be satisfied with having at least achieved dominance over the Balkans in a liberated Bulgaria. However, the British along with the Great Powers of Europe were still alarmed and assembled at a conference in Berlin, that same year, there the Russians agreed to hold influence in only half of liberated Bulgaria, leaving the other half as an autonomous region called “Eastern Rumelia” under Ottoman rule. This failed national territorial realization; a unified Bulgarian nation-state including Aegean Thrace and all of Macedonia as drafted at San Stefano, would be the driving factor for nation unification in Bulgaria’s disastrous Balkan foreign policy from 1878 until 1948.<sup>4</sup>

During this time, this cultural connection or “special relationship” between Russia and Bulgaria was forged as a leading cultural driving force behind the nation’s existence. After drafting the 1879 Turnovo constitution, which setup a constitutional monarchy, a pro-Russian head of state in Prince Alexander of Battenberg was appointed to rule although by 1883, he had unsuccessfully attempted to overturn the constraints of that constitution.<sup>5</sup>

Bulgaria on September 6, 1885 under his rule, was forcefully unified with Eastern Rumelia, breaking the terms of the 1878 Treaty of Berlin, after which Serbia supported by

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<sup>3</sup> Cohen, Lenard J. “Russia and the Balkans: Pan-Slavism, Partnership and Power.”

<sup>4</sup> Compton, Richard. *A Concise History of Bulgaria*. 87-121.

<sup>5</sup> Znepolski, Ivaylo and Ivanov, Martin. *Bulgaria under Communism*. 28-33.

Russia unsuccessfully attacked Bulgaria in a brief conflict. In 1887, Alexander was deposed and instead, Ferdinand of Saxe-Corbug-Gotha or Saksokorburggotski was invited to rule, thus gradually reorienting Bulgaria toward Germany and Austria-Hungary and away from Russia, with Serbia assuming the Pan-Slavic role for Russia in the Balkans.<sup>6</sup>

The Third Bulgarian Kingdom officially declared its independence from the collapsing Ottoman Empire on September 22, 1908 under Tsar Ferdinand, himself being of German-Austrian descent, he had oriented Sofia increasingly toward Vienna and Berlin at a time of enormous economic growth for Bulgaria and rapid militarization of its society.

<sup>7</sup> During this time, at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the modern-day city of Sofia was being constructed, monuments which remain today were built en masse, honoring Russian Tsar Alexander “the Liberator” for his role in the 1878 liberation of Bulgaria (although that title refers to the liberation of the Russian serfs in 1861). In addition, the largest Eastern Orthodox cathedral on the Balkans (until 2000), Sveti Aleksander Nevski (Russian saint) was built in gratitude to the Russian Empire. Thus, Bulgaria shifted between the Ottoman, German and Russian spheres of influence, to different degrees, although the public opinion constantly remained pro-Russian as evident in the fact that these monuments to the “Russian liberation” were among the first to be constructed in the modern city. <sup>8</sup>

During the First Balkan War in 1912, the Balkan League alliance was organized by the Russians to include the Bulgarians, Serbs and Greeks with the military goal of finally pushing back the Ottomans from Europe. The Bulgarians in having reached but failed to capture Constantinople, lost to the Greeks and Serbs, their claim to Macedonia, the last

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<sup>6</sup> Cohen, Lenard J. “Russia and the Balkans: Pan-Slavism, Partnership and Power.”

<sup>7</sup> Znepolski, Ivaylo and Ivanov, Martin. *Bulgaria under Communism*. 29-31.

<sup>8</sup> Compton, Richard. *A Concise History of Bulgaria*. 121-162.

remaining Ottoman territory on the Balkans. Here, Bulgaria's fatal mistake was in turning against its Balkan League ally Serbia, for what seemed to be a justified reason, due to the fact that at that time, the Macedonians associated in every way more with the Bulgarians more than with Serbs, and this led to the outbreak of the Second Balkan War of 1913. Bulgaria's loss in that conflict, a conflict started by Tsar Ferdinand against the advice of his military, was known as its "first national catastrophe", due to its territorial losses to its neighbors.<sup>9</sup> This also empowered Serbia to emerge as the leader of Pan-Slavic unification on the Balkans, championing the idea of Yugoslavia, which was formed after WWI.

After the famous assassination of the Austrian Archduke in 1914, by a Bosnian Serb in Sarajevo, Serbia being backed by Russia in effect forced Bulgaria to affirm its alliance in 1915 with the Central powers of Germany, Austria-Hungary and even its archenemy, Ottoman Turkey, which strategically ensured that its remaining territory would remain secure, at least throughout the course of the war. Bulgaria being in conflict with Serbia during the war, also meant its alliance with Russia was essentially broken.

### **The World Wars in Eastern Europe: From Fascism to Communism, 1919-1944**

In the aftermath of WWI, Bulgaria experienced its "second national catastrophe" having failed once again to realize its goal of national unification to include all Bulgarians in one nation-state. During the Inter War Era, it experienced socio-economic instability and political isolation from the rest of the world, including from its allies in Austria and notably Russia which emerged as a socialist state after the 1917-1922 Russian Revolution.

On the verge of its own civil conflict, in 1934, a royal dictatorship was established by Tsar Boris who remained in power until 1943, and who once famously remarked: "my

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<sup>9</sup> Znepolski, Ivaylo and Ivanov, Martin. *Bulgaria under Communism*. 29-31.

army is pro-German, my wife is pro-Italian, my people are pro-Russian. I alone am pro-Bulgarian”, illustrating the national disagreements on foreign alliances and attitudes held by parts of the society, as well as his own perception of the sentiment of the population. <sup>10</sup>

The Bulgarian Kingdom nevertheless joined the Axis on March 1, 1941, while the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression (Molotov-Ribbentrop) Pact from August 23, 1939 was still in force, and under the rationale of achieving national unification by annexing Macedonia from Serbia and Thrace from Greece, reversing the outcome of WWI and the Balkan Wars.

Throughout WWII, however, Bulgaria was the only Axis-allied state to openly defy the Third Reich when on June 22, 1941, Tsar Boris refused to send soldiers or support as part of Operation Barbarossa, the Nazi German-led invasion of the Soviet Union - history’s largest land-based invasion and among the deadliest military conflicts ever fought. <sup>11</sup>

Unlike, its neighbors, Axis-allied Romania, Hungary and Croatia who actively participated in the war as well as the Nazi-sponsored Holocaust, between March and May of 1943 the entirety of the nearly 48,000 Jews within Bulgaria had been rescued despite the deportations that occurred from the militarily occupied territories in Aegean Thrace and Vardar Macedonia. As a result of this defiance, it is speculated that its war-time leader, Tsar Boris was poisoned after being summoned to meet with Adolf Hitler. <sup>12</sup>

Meanwhile, Jozef Stalin had since 1934 entrusted a Bulgarian, Georgi Dimitrov to direct the Communist International, a Soviet-sponsored institution aiming to spread Communism worldwide since 1919. Dimitrov had gained fame by defending himself in court after being wrongfully accused in the Leipzig Trial for the Reichstag fire in 1933. As

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<sup>10</sup> Compton, Richard. 169.

<sup>11</sup> Compton, Richard. 171-175

<sup>12</sup> Compton, Richard. 176-177

an outsider, Dimitrov was also not subjected to the show trials and political purges of the 1930s which turned against the original Bolsheviks such as Leon Trotsky.<sup>13</sup> Through the Comintern, Dimitrov had championed Communist forces across the world but also with the Bulgarian partisans before the Soviet Red Army entered Bulgaria in 1944.

World War II in Eastern Europe had in effect been a geopolitical Nazi-Soviet War, where the ideological dimensions had implications for the alliances. While the Allied “Grand Alliance”, included what would become the United Nations (UN) of the US, UK and the USSR after 1941, the Axis powers were made up of Germany, Italy and Japan in addition to the satellite Axis states across Eastern Europe who adopted Fascism as their governing ideology. Bulgaria under the royal military rule, did not embrace Fascist policy officially until joining the Axis, which is when an underground resistance led by some Communist forces began to take shape, although they had been suppressed prior to that.

The Bulgarian Social Democratic Workers’ Party had been founded as early as 1894 by Dimitar Blagoev, and in 1919 it was renamed the Bulgarian Communist Party, with Georgi Dimitrov from abroad, being a guiding force in its creation and coordination with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which under the Bolshevik name was itself founded in 1903 and then famously gained political power by means of a coup d’état in Petrograd on the old calendar date of October 25, 1917: the Russian “October” Revolution.

The Bulgarian Communists as early as 1923 had unsuccessfully attempted their own coup before being driven underground as an organization and re-emerging in relevance as an anti-Fascist resistance force until the Soviet sponsored coup d’état on

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<sup>13</sup> Mineva, Emilia, and Regina Raycheva. “On the Reception of Marxism in Bulgaria.”

September 9, 1944 (80 years ago), allowed for the Fatherland Front, a popular front organized by Dimitrov's Comintern, to gain political power as backed by Moscow.

This Fatherland Front (FF) was a grand coalition between the Communists, other leftist parties, the agrarian union (BZNS) and a centrist populist party who called themselves "the link" (Zveno).<sup>14</sup> (FF) supported the partisans' guerrilla warfare and after September 9, 1944 were officially backed by both the Comintern and USSR in proclaiming a "September" Socialist Revolution self-styled on the Soviet "October" Revolution.

Despite, this pro-Soviet government being installed, there existed a transitional time from 1944 to 1946 that allowed for some pluralism albeit limited within the (FF) coalition government.<sup>15</sup> The People's Republic of Bulgaria was then proclaimed 2 years after the war-time coup when on September 8, 1946, a national referendum organized by (FF) was held in which 93% of the population agreed to abolish what was portrayed not entirely correctly, as the remainder of a pro-Fascist German constitutional monarchy.<sup>16</sup>

The Fatherland Front (FF) would remain in parliamentary power through 1989, although the dominant power throughout the country would be held exclusively by the Bulgarian Communist Party (BKP), which effectively banned all opposition in what remained of civil society. The party propaganda of the time proclaimed predictably that "our party holds an extremely great responsibility to the people and the country but also to the USSR, upon whose military successes and foreign policy successes a great deal depends, including the current and future position of Bulgaria in all the Balkans."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Mineva, Emilia, and Regina Raycheva. "On the Reception of Marxism in Bulgaria."

<sup>15</sup> Dimitrov, Vesselin. *Stalin's Cold War: Soviet Foreign Policy, Democracy and Communism in Bulgaria, 1941-1948*. 1-11

<sup>16</sup> Znepolski, Ivaylo. 72-74.

<sup>17</sup> Znepolski, Ivaylo. 68.

However, within the (FF), the main opposition against Georgi Dimitrov's personal rule was Nikola Petkov of the populist Agrarian Union Party (BZNS); who being a pro-Russian but anti-Communist politician was subjected to a show trial and sentenced to death for treason, despite openly stating that: "There is no Bulgarian, whatever his politics, who does not believe that friendly Soviet-Bulgarian relations and sincere co-operation with the Soviet Union represent the foundation stone of Bulgaria's foreign policy. The whole Bulgarian nation, and especially we in the opposition, believe that this policy best guarantees both the peace of the Balkans and the interests of Bulgaria." <sup>18</sup>

Indeed, historical commentaries have stated that "had the Russians chosen to let Bulgaria's political life develop along its natural lines, post-war Bulgaria could have easily become, by the free choice of the vast majority of its people, the most genuinely pro-Russian country in the world." <sup>19</sup> The other Balkan nation who aspired to that position, Serbia was at this point re-morphed into Yugoslavia but under the Communist leadership of the Croat-Slovene Josip Broz Tito. Tito's partisan forces which had largely liberated the country by 1944, did so almost independently from the Soviet Red Army.

Prior to the allied agreements between the US, UK and USSR with Bulgaria in October 1944, which set up the Allied Control Commissions (ACC), Stalin and Churchill had informally exchanged future influence in Bulgaria (75%-25%) and Romania (90%-10%) for Greece (10%-90%) and Yugoslavia (50%-50%) in what was known as the infamous "Percentages Agreement." <sup>20</sup> While Churchill and Stalin discussed a post-war division of the Balkans, war-time coordination between Dimitrov and Tito allowed for

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<sup>18</sup> M. P. "Bulgaria as a Communist State." 375

<sup>19</sup> M. P. "Bulgaria as a Communist State." 375

<sup>20</sup> Yakobson, Sergius. "The Soviet Concept of Satellite States."



Bulgaria and Yugoslavia to embark on a plan to form a socialist Balkan Federation, which would even extend to include the Aegean Thrace region, now part of Greece.

At the post-war Paris Peace Conference on February 10, 1947, the United Nations formalized its peace treaty with Bulgaria as a sovereign state although effectively a Soviet satellite state. The treaty terms on war-time reparations required that a restitution sum of \$70 million in total be paid in goods for damages to Greece (\$45) and Yugoslavia (\$25) for the war-time occupation of Greek Thrace and Yugoslav Macedonia.<sup>21</sup> However, as part of the protocols of a later Bulgarian-Yugoslav agreement, \$25 million in restitution dues owed to Belgrade by Sofia would be forgiven as part of the negotiations.<sup>22</sup>

From August 1 to November 29, 1947, after the bilateral meetings in Bled, Slovenia and Varna, Bulgaria, Dimitrov and Tito began formalizing a series of diplomatic treaties for the formation of a socialist project in the Balkan Federation which would be based on a shared common cornerstone of a unified Macedonia, including the Bulgarian, Serbian and Greek parts. Dimitrov himself being Bulgarian-born in the Macedonian region of Pirin, had evidently thought extensively about this sensitive question for his nation and offered this solution through the Comintern as early as 1934.<sup>23</sup> Throughout 1943 and 1944, Yugoslav partisans in the Bulgarian-occupied Vardar and Aegean Macedonia, had collaborated with the Albanian, Greek and Bulgarian Communists under Tito who also agreed to the creation of a Balkan “confederation” as he termed it. Dimitrov’s plans were initially endorsed by Stalin but the political disagreement between Moscow and Belgrade

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<sup>21</sup> Dimitrov, Vesselin. *Stalin's Cold War: Soviet Foreign Policy, Democracy and Communism in Bulgaria, 1941-1948*. 162-72

<sup>22</sup> Dimitrov, Vesselin. 162-72

<sup>23</sup> Perović, Jeronim. “The Tito-Stalin Split: A Reassessment in Light of New Evidence.” 32-63

resulting in the 1948 Tito-Stalin split, led to an abrupt end for the formation this Balkan federation, and so that would be the last time this century-old pan-Slavic idea was tried.<sup>24</sup>

Additionally, during the Greek Civil War from 1944 to 1949; the only place in Europe where conflict continued after 1945, the Bulgarians and Yugoslavs continued to aid the Greek Communists initially with Soviet support. However this particular situation, provoked Anglo-American geopolitical involvement to support Greece and Turkey, in containing the spread of Communism, as prescribed by the Truman doctrine announced on March 12, 1947. This led Stalin to recalculate his strategy and officially oppose the Dimitrov-Tito plan to form a Balkan Federation between the People's Republic of Bulgaria and the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia; thus the century-old idea for a unified Balkan confederation either nationalist or communist, died forever with the Cold War.

#### **The Cold War Soviet-Bulgarian “Special Relationship”, 1944-1989**

Throughout the course of the Cold War; Bulgaria and Yugoslavia remained geographically, linguistically and culturally very close, but nevertheless drifted farther apart in socio-economics and geopolitics. From 1953-55, Yugoslavia entered the Balkan Pact alliance with Greece and Turkey and thereby into an informal association with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), formed in Washington on April 4, 1949.

While certainly not pro-American, Yugoslavia assumed a leadership role in the independent Non-Aligned Movement around 1955-61, whereas Bulgaria as part of the Warsaw Pact alliance since its formation in 1955, began to build up its reputation as the most pro-Soviet aligned of the Communist satellite states within the Eastern bloc.

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<sup>24</sup> Perović, Jeronim. 32-63

During the death of Stalin in 1953, and after the death of Georgi Dimitrov in 1949, Dimitrov's brother-in-law, Vulko Chervenkov known as the "little Stalin" ruled the totalitarian state between 1950 and 1956. This was a time marked by large scale political persecution and vast prison camps, as well as forced collectivization and rapid industrialization.<sup>25</sup> However, in line with Khrushchev's succession and secret speech starting the de-Stalinization process within the Soviet Union in 1956, Vulko Cherenkov's rival within the Communist party, Todor Zhivkov used the opportunity of the moment in 1956, to seize power in the name of reform, though he remained in power until 1989.<sup>26</sup> Under Zhivkov's thirty three year reign, the Soviet-Bulgarian strategic alliance on the state and party level would truly be cemented into a self-styled "special relationship."

Throughout the Cold War, no Eastern bloc satellite state and society shared the same attitude as Bulgaria's strong sense of pro-Russian sentiment, not even present in some parts of the Soviet Union itself (i.e. the Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia which were annexed during WWII). This is explained by the fact, that Bulgaria was never under the direct control of Russia, unlike other former parts of the Russian Empire and Soviet Union, and so a lot of Bulgarians perceived the Russians as liberators first in 1878 from the Ottoman Turks and then again in 1944 from the Nazi Germans. As a result of these views held by both the government and a broad part of the population, the Bulgarian armed forces and secret services stood by in solidarity with the Soviets, when Moscow itself conducted controversial military operations in the Eastern bloc and around the world.

Before the rise of Communism and the formation of the Eastern bloc, the Comintern up until 1943 guided not only Soviet foreign policy interests on the state-diplomatic level

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<sup>25</sup> Znepolski, Ivaylo. 99-105

<sup>26</sup> Znepolski, Ivaylo. 223-28

but more importantly on the party-ideological level, as it coordinated with European left-wing parties as part of Dimitrov's "united front" strategy to aimed at combating Fascism.

At the start of the Cold War confrontation, the Comintern was renamed from 1947 to 1956 as the Cominform or the Information Bureau of the Communist and Workers' Parties. Although the 1948 Soviet-Yugoslav Split between Tito and Stalin and later on the 1961 Sino-Soviet Split between Mao and Khrushchev, marked some serious ideological and geopolitical fractures within the previously thought to be Communist monolith.

The Cominform later transitioned into the COMECON or the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance that supported Communist parties and anti-colonial movements around the world. During this time, Bulgaria acted in sync with Soviet strategic and ideological goals, volunteering its soldiers and spies to serve in conflicts that had nothing to do with Bulgaria's national security but rather in aiding the cause of "Socialist Internationalism." Unlike Sofia's Communist neighbors in Belgrade and Bucharest, both within the Soviet sphere of influence who sometimes protested Moscow and pursued their own foreign policy goals, the party and state in Sofia proudly proclaimed Bulgaria (despite not even sharing a land border with the Soviet Union) as "the 16<sup>th</sup> republic of the USSR."

<sup>27</sup> Todor Zhivkov upon consolidating power proposed this formal request to join the USSR, not once but three times over the course of his thirty-three-year long reign. <sup>28</sup>

The Bulgarian Communist Party through Zhivkov sent a request to Khrushchev in 1964, pleading that the prospect of Bulgaria "ever more closely converging with the Soviet Union, so that its economy will gradually merge with the economy of the Soviet Union has deep roots not only in the hearts of all Bulgarian Communists, but also in the hearts of a

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<sup>27</sup> Dellin, L.A.D. "Bulgaria under Soviet Leadership"

<sup>28</sup> Znepolski, Ivaylo. 223-28

huge part of the people.”<sup>29</sup> Khrushchev responded that it is better off that Bulgaria remain for purposes of “international politics” a sovereign “satellite state” and instead offered a generous interest-free credit for economic development. Later in 1973 and also in 1978, Zhivkov would attempt the same with Brezhnev, cementing Bulgaria’s status within the Soviet politburo as the most loyal and reliable country for Moscow to work with.<sup>30</sup>

Therefore, the basis of this Soviet-Bulgarian special relationship was not based only on historic and cultural ties which are significant, nor solely on a strategic military coordination, but particularly on the close party ties between Sofia and Moscow that did not exist between the other Eastern bloc states, whose Communist party leaders in some cases were imposed top-down from Moscow after crushed uprisings and their domestic and foreign actions carefully monitored, whereas the Bulgarians displayed an active approach on the party level to emulate the Soviet leadership itself.

After the 1960s, Bulgaria began manifestly benefitting from this ideological arrangement economically, especially in the growth of its technological manufacturing sector and in that it received more development aid than another satellite state in the Eastern bloc, after the GDR.<sup>31</sup> In addition, the USSR exported its vast oil and gas resources at subsidized prices much lower than their international market value, allowing Bulgaria not only to import for domestic consumption but also re-export the oil and gas at the global market value prices, and acquire hard currency in its reserves. To strangely illustrate the trade ties between Moscow and Sofia, Todor Zhivkov in 1979, remarked sarcastically that

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<sup>29</sup> Nehring, Christopher. “Bulgaria as the Sixteenth Soviet Republic? Todor Zhivkov's Proposals to Join the USSR”. 29-45

<sup>30</sup> Nehring, Christopher. 29-45.

<sup>31</sup> Znepolski, Ivaylo. 223-28

“the Soviet Union was really a Bulgarian colony, since Bulgaria received its raw materials from Russia and sold its finished good there, as it is in the classic colonial relationship.”<sup>32</sup>

During the late 1970s when the Soviet-Bulgarian relationship was at its height and such sentiments were strongest, Radio Sofia had declared in 1973 that “a cultural exchange between East and West had become extremely important in the context of détente...due to the new political climate and shift from confrontation to coexistence.”<sup>33</sup> Todor Zhivkov had always followed Leonid Brezhnev in lock step, but being in such strong solidarity, afforded Zhivkov a lot of personal autonomy in running his regime domestically. So the party under his initiative, voted to adopt the new 1971 Zhivkov constitution replacing the old 1947 Dimitrov constitution, which was basically identical to the 1936 Stalin Constitution, and which itself would be updated with the 1977 Brezhnev constitution.<sup>34</sup>

In Bulgaria, however the 1971 Zhivkov constitution removed all provisions on minority autonomy or protection, which had been included previously in the context of the negotiations on the Balkan Federation between Dimitrov and Tito. So it was in that context, that Macedonians as well as Muslim Turks and other minorities within Bulgaria were granted recognition and autonomous protection under the original 1947 constitution, despite its much more rigidly ideological character.<sup>35</sup> The removal of these recognitions would constitute among the underlying contributing factors that would set the stage for the “Revival Process” of Turkish assimilation that unfolded later throughout the 1980s.

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<sup>32</sup> Dragostinova, Theodora. *The Cold War from the Margins: A Small Socialist State on the Global Cultural Scene*. 26

<sup>33</sup> Dragostinova, Theodora. “The East in the West: Bulgarian Culture in the United States of America during the Global 1970s.”

<sup>34</sup> Kelleher, Michael. “Bulgaria’s Communist-Era Landscape.”

<sup>35</sup> Kelleher, Michael. 39–72

Zhivkov additionally was granted more legal political power under the new constitution, serving not only as Prime Minister of the National Assembly, a role held between 1962 and 1971 but from 1971 onward, he held on to the title of Chairman of the State Council (Premier or President) as well as serving as the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party. In charge of both party and state, Zhivkov had since the 1960s also emphasized “democratic centralism” within the party and launched policies of “socialist democratization” which resulted in rather relaxed ideological rigidity and criticism of Western influence in line with the global “peaceful coexistence”, while still maintaining and enforcing censorship of certain critical issues.<sup>36</sup>

Zhivkov by the 1970s promoted a much more nationalist narrative within Bulgaria while simultaneously advocating for a limited domestic socio-economic thaw. This more national approach had been pursued since the 1950s by the neighboring Tito’s Yugoslavia and Ceausescu’s Romania, neither of which enjoyed at any point in the time, the same level of party and state relations with Moscow.

### **The Bulgarian Cultural Diplomacy during the Cold War, 1970s-1980s**

Teodora Dragostinova’s recent *The Cold War from the Margins: A Small Socialist State on the Global Cultural Scene* (2022) is the single best English-language published book which thoroughly explains how Bulgaria’s independent course in foreign policy allowed for this cultural diplomacy pioneered by Zhivkov and Zhivkova due to the existence of such a special relationship with the Soviet Union under Brezhnev in the 1970s.

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<sup>36</sup> Kelleher, Michael. 39–72

Todor Zhivkov had appointed his daughter Lyudmila Zhivkova in 1975 to manage radio, television and the press, at home.<sup>37</sup> By 1980, she was allowed to run all science, culture and art initiatives but what she was widely known by the public for was her interest in Eastern mysticism and philosophy, something characteristically un-Marxist.<sup>38</sup> Even more so, she spearheaded the organization of cultural exhibitions with Non-Aligned nations in Latin America, South and East Asia and Africa, as well. She also hosted Angela Davis, Tina Turner and Ray Charles to discuss critical race relations in the US.<sup>39</sup>

Bulgaria while very much a Marxist-Leninist “people’s republic” loyal to the Soviet Union, also adopted an alternative narrative and sought to rebrand its image at home and abroad, not by subtracting from its Communist identity but adding onto it something that made Bulgaria unique, its historical and cultural heritage. The accidental archeological discovery of the oldest carbon dated gold on Earth at the Varna Necropolis in 1972, contributed to this, as those artifacts went on exhibits in museums around the world.<sup>40</sup>

Furthermore, these “Thracian Treasures” added to a sense of national identity reinforced by these new discoveries in cultural heritage. Bulgarians, predominantly part of the Slavic race have always been proud of their contributions to history, including the formation of the Cyrillic alphabet in the 9<sup>th</sup> Century, now in use throughout the Balkans and Eurasia, in fact as far East as Mongolia. The Bulgarians who adopted a Slavic (related to Eastern European) culture, were actually a genetic mixture between ancient Thracians (related to the Greeks) as well as a small group of Bulgars (related to the Mongols) who

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<sup>37</sup> Dragostinova, Theodora. *The Cold War from the Margins: A Small Socialist State on the Global Cultural Scene.*

<sup>38</sup> Dragostinova, Theodora. 36-27

<sup>39</sup> Dragostinova, Theodora. 12-13.

<sup>40</sup> The Varna Chalcolithic Necropolis, Visit Varna:  
[https://visit.varna.bg/en/varna\\_oldest\\_gold\\_treasure\\_in\\_the\\_world.html](https://visit.varna.bg/en/varna_oldest_gold_treasure_in_the_world.html).



according to history and legend, conquered most of the present-day Balkans and unified the Slavic and Thracian tribes into one nation-state in the year 681 AD, able to withstand the might of the Eastern Roman or Byzantine Empire. Bulgarians as an independent kingdom allied with the Byzantines and eventually adopted Orthodox Christianity and through the Cyrillic alphabet helped spread it to the Slavs of Eastern Europe (including Kievan Rus in Ukraine) throughout the Golden Age under Tsar Simeon which lasted until 1396 AD, after which they would fall under the Ottoman Turkish Empire for 500 years.

So, to celebrate the 1300-year anniversary of the formation of the original Bulgarian nation-state (at that time in 681, it was actually called a Khanate rather than a Kingdom) the organization of a year-long national celebration in 1981 was intended to boost the national identity at home and very much abroad. The state sponsored multiple events that year, including archeological excavations and historical studies; new monuments and museums were built; film productions, television series, and radio programs were made; in addition to a number of organized concerts, conferences, and mass celebrations; all under the direction of Lyudmila Zhivkova's grand ceremonial initiatives.

On the occasion of the 1300-year jubilee in 1981, the Communist party embarked on its most "extravagant, wide-ranging project to showcase Bulgarian culture abroad and thus boost the prestige of their country and establish its presence on the global scene... The motto of the jubilee was brief and catchy: Bulgaria was both 'ancient and modern' or as the glossy pamphlets emphasized: 'A modern nation salutes its past'." <sup>41</sup> The purpose of this event was not only to raise the national identity by demonstrating the historical depth of Bulgarian culture, but also to showcase to the world, the achievements of Bulgarian

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<sup>41</sup> Dragostinova, Theodora. 24

Socialism in industry, education, agriculture and of course, promote tourism. International observers had commented that: “Bulgarians today clearly want the world to know that they are...an ancient people with pride in their history.”<sup>42</sup> Bulgarian state and party officials claimed that “while Bulgaria ranks in size among the smaller European nations...in the field of culture there are neither big nor small nations, and the dynamism of modern Bulgaria is firmly rooted in a cultural heritage spanning thirteen centuries.”<sup>43</sup>

These celebrations boldly merged elements of historical national identity with ideological socialist doctrine, which opened up a path for Bulgaria to pursue an independent foreign policy while maintaining its close ties with the USSR. But Bulgaria was also reaching out to its southern neighbor in Greece and re-establishing diplomatic and trade relations with nations as far as Austria, West Germany and France in Western Europe and beyond, with India, Mexico, and Japan, among others outside of the Communist world; emulating its neighbor, Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia among the Non-Aligned Nations such as Indonesia and Egypt had started to pursue this independent course of foreign policy ever since 1955 after the 1948 Tito-Stalin Split. On the other hand, Albania and Romania after the 1956 Hungarian Revolution and 1968 Czechoslovak Prague Spring, began gravitating toward Mao’s Communist China. As East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary meanwhile remained firmly under Soviet domination into the 1980s, Bulgaria despite its close standing with the USSR, was allowed its independent course in foreign policy.

On the Balkans, Bulgaria was the only reliable Soviet satellite state although it aligned well with Yugoslavia and Romania, and its national and ideological enemies were

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<sup>42</sup> Dragostinova, Theodora. 23-24

<sup>43</sup> Dragostinova, Theodora. 1-2

in Greece and Turkey. Despite the Soviet-sponsored 1971 Operation Cross never carried out but designed to ferment conflict between NATO-members Greece and Turkey, the 1974 Turkish invasion of Greek Cyprus did result in that conflict during which Bulgaria was able to play off both of its neighbors. Bulgaria remained in relative tense relations with Turkey which escalated after the 1980 military coup d'état in Ankara. On the other hand, Sofia's relations with Athens, after the end of the US-backed Greek military junta from 1967 to 1974, resulted in Prime Minister Konstantinos Karamanlis' policy known as the "Greek Ostpolitik."<sup>44</sup> In turn, Bulgaria responded and actively pursued a successful regional rapprochement with Greece, perhaps the most positive diplomatic accomplishment with one of its war-time enemies and ideological adversaries. During this time, while Bulgaria managed to resolve its outstanding issues with Greece, some historical debates emerged from beneath the surface, between its Communist neighboring allies; Yugoslavia over Macedonia and Romania over Dobrudzha, in preparation for the 1981 celebrations.

At around this time, Bulgaria also restored relations with its once former ally in Vienna, a formerly powerful imperial force on the Balkans, after WWII, its empire had been reduced to a territory smaller or equal to that of Bulgaria.<sup>45</sup> However, being Western but neutral as a non-NATO nation-state allowed Austria to play a unique role early on, as one of the Cold War mediators between Western and Eastern Europe.<sup>46</sup>

So, Bulgaria's rapprochement with Western Europe, particularly West Germany ran through Austria, influenced by the shared common vision for a Europe in the "peaceful

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<sup>44</sup> Dragostinova, Theodora. 68-69

<sup>45</sup> Dragostinova, Theodora. 122

<sup>46</sup> Dragostinova, Theodora. 122-23

coexistence” of détente.<sup>47</sup> The Federal Republic of Germany in line with Chancellor Willy Brant’s policy of “Ostpolitik” toward East Germany and the Eastern bloc at large, resulted in the establishment of relations with Bulgaria in 1973, with Zhivkov being the first Communist leader to visit in 1975 after signing the Helsinki Agreement’s acknowledgement of the Soviet satellite states as sovereign, and the United Nations recognition of the GDR and FRG, as separate but sovereign states.<sup>48</sup>

As with West Germany, Bulgaria like Romania, Hungary and Croatia had been Axis allies of Japan during WWII. However, the democratic and economic superpower of Japan, ranking as the world’s second largest economy after the US, was a major player in the global landscape of the 1970s. Japan sought to expand its technology-based markets into Eastern Europe, and starting in 1972, Japan signed a limited trade agreement with Bulgaria, making it the first of its kind with a Capitalist country allied with the US, and resulting in a series of state visits leading up to 1978.<sup>49</sup> Additionally, after the archeological artifacts containing the oldest gold ever found on Earth, started touring the world by 1973, it received massive publicity especially when it was on exhibit in Tokyo during 1982, where Bulgaria was promoted as being the “first European civilization.”<sup>50</sup>

Aside from Bulgaria’s regional reproachment on the Balkans and its global recognition by Western Europe and East Asia, the 1970s also marked an outreach as far away as South Asia and South America; with Mexico and India in particular. Aside from the USSR and Eastern Bloc, where Bulgaria was rooted, by 1980, its most important trade

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<sup>47</sup> Baev, Jordan. “The Establishment of Bulgarian-West German Diplomatic Relations within the Coordinating Framework of the Warsaw Pact.” 158-80.

<sup>48</sup> Baev, Jordan. 158-80.

<sup>49</sup> Dragostinova, Theodora. 108-110.

<sup>50</sup> Nenov, Georgi. “Varna Necropolis.” [https://www.academia.edu/36765491/VARNA\\_NECROPOLIS](https://www.academia.edu/36765491/VARNA_NECROPOLIS)

partners were in fact found in India and Mexico.<sup>51</sup> However, the approach taken by Bulgaria with these two very different countries was itself totally different than the approach Bulgaria had with the First and Second world countries it dealt with.

To begin, what India and Mexico themselves had in common was that they were in effect but not always officially, Non-Aligned nations quite sympathetic to socialist states but geopolitically quite cautious of great power politics; in the case of India, it proceeded cautiously with China, and Mexico with the USSR. However, they both had a neutral but contentious relationship with the US, both having complicated historic attitudes toward the First World, with Mexico resenting American militarism and India; British colonialism.

In the aftermath of British decolonization on the subcontinent, and the 1947 partition plan between Pakistan and India, New Delhi gradually gravitated toward Moscow for a number of strategic and ideological reasons, with the Congress party adopting socialist policies without committing openly to Marxism-Leninism.<sup>52</sup> By 1971, the Soviet-Indian strategic alliance reached its apex in the midst of the Indo-Pakistan War.

The Cold War context of course, was shaped by Western decolonization and the rise of national liberation movements often supported by the Soviet Union. Bulgaria since the 1950s, had dutifully paid its economic and ideological obligations to the COMECON's Moscow Fund for supporting such anti-colonial movements throughout the Third World.<sup>53</sup> Bulgaria during the 1960s managed to secretly supply on behalf of COMECON, a large amount of arms against the French in North Africa and Southeast Asia. Additionally, Bulgarian weapons manufactures regularly supplied arms to Iraq, Syria, Libya and Algeria

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<sup>51</sup> Dragostinova, Theodora. 162-73

<sup>52</sup> Dragostinova, Theodora. 162-73

<sup>53</sup> Dragostinova, Theodora. 170

and all types of exports to Vietnam, Afghanistan, Cuba, Nicaragua, Ethiopia, Mozambique and Mongolia. <sup>54</sup> Bulgaria's 1960s "jungle offensive" throughout the Third World, as termed by the British, continued that covert support provided on behalf of the USSR.<sup>55</sup>

Thus, Eastern European relations with the Global South were always quite dynamic and shaped by geopolitical and ideological calculations, though by the mid-1970s, international cultural outreach became a core aspect of diplomacy for many including for the Bulgarians. Zhivkov being the longest in power, was the second most travelled Communist leader after Tito, who himself had died in 1980. Though it was the daughter, Zhivkova, sometimes called the "red dynasty's princess" who was the architect behind Bulgaria's outreach to such distinct and different nations like India and Mexico.

In the case of India, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's personal relationship with Lyudmila Zhivkova was quite critical, both being socialists and feminists, they also shared a fascination with mystical elements of Eastern religions as well as in utilizing cultural history for political purposes. <sup>56</sup> The idea was that culture would function as a proxy for propaganda, so an emphasis was to be placed on cultural rather than ideological arguments, as had been traditionally the approach taken at least in matters related to the USSR. <sup>57</sup>

Through the Soviet Union, Bulgaria had established relations with India since 1954, cemented by an increase in state visits during the 1960s, although the Communist Party of India was officially the ally of the Bulgarian Communist Party, at the instruction of

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<sup>54</sup> Znepolski, Ivaylo. 214-17

<sup>55</sup> Dragostinova, Theodora. 170

<sup>56</sup> Dragostinova, Theodora. 177-78

<sup>57</sup> Dragostinova, Theodora. 106-7

Moscow, it was the Congress party led by Indira Gandhi that was to be prioritized for coordination, as it was trusted by most of the Indian population, foremost. <sup>58</sup>

From the perspective of India, this was an opportunity to expand relations with the smaller Communist periphery nations like Bulgaria and increase engagement in cultural and scientific exchanges with Eastern European nations without having to always go through the USSR itself, and expand India's own public diplomacy and soft power there.

Bulgaria on the other hand embraced the idea that despite being this small state on the periphery, its cultural heritage backed by the discovery of the oldest gold in the world and an emphasis on its ancient Thracian roots in combination with its cultural Slavic and genetic Mongol ethnic makeup, made Bulgaria a crossroads of civilization between Europe and Eurasia. This then would elevate its historic legacy on par with Greece and Italy and thus makes the Bulgarians to be the heirs to an ancient civilization which shares similarities in timeframe, with the likes of the Mesopotamians, Mesoamericans, and the Mughals.

So Bulgaria in emphasizing the cultural aspect rather than the traditional ideological approach to its diplomacy, actually allowed it to exercise autonomy from the Soviet Union, presenting itself to the world not merely as the "16<sup>th</sup> Soviet republic" bound to Moscow by a shared history with Bulgaria as the junior partner and Russia, the senior partner.

Now, by this new cultural approach, Bulgaria was emphasizing itself as the senior at least in terms of its historical heritage, but also the Communist nation with the oldest historical heritage in Europe, older than Russia (with the exception of Armenia) .

Perhaps it is this factor that intrigued the Indians and Mexicans, who interacted culturally on the same equal level as the Bulgarians, despite their clear demographic and

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<sup>58</sup> Dragostinova, Theodora. "The 'Natural Ally' of the 'Developing World': Bulgarian Culture in India and Mexico."

even geopolitical superiority on the world stage.<sup>59</sup> While the approach taken by Russia or for that matter by Western Europe or the US toward Bulgaria was that of an inferior state subject entirely to forces beyond its control. India and Mexico at least in the way they sought to portray Bulgaria to their own population, was that of a small yet clever nation that is European but without a colonial legacy, and which is distinct from Russia but yet can act as a gateway to Moscow's sphere of influence, although much more indirectly.

An All India Radio broadcast made in 1981 at the peak of Bulgaria's ascent onto the world stage during the 1970s, proclaimed:

Bulgaria is a small country but it also has now highly developed modern industry and large-scale mechanized agriculture based on a the field of knowledge, culture and science that may open new vistas of understand between two of the most ancient civilizations.<sup>60</sup>

For Bulgaria, India and Mexico were partners, "each 10,000 miles and 11 time zones apart"<sup>61</sup>, in totally opposite corners of the world; but in 1981, Bulgaria's approach to both was the same, having printed out the following propagandized statements summarizing each bilateral relationship, vis-a-vie India, the statement was that they were "both heirs of a rich culture and civilization, bearer of centuries-old life experience, having survived the tests of life and fate...and having preserved intact their quest for perfection...".<sup>62</sup> The statement vis-a-vie Mexico similarly announced:

Our peoples with ancient history and rich culture, heirs of important and rich civilizations. Overcoming the challenges of time, they have preserved alive the flame and fire of their freedom-loving and strong spirit, the flame of Quetzalcoatl and the light of Orpheus.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Dragostinova, Theodora. "The 'Natural Ally' of the 'Developing World': Bulgarian Culture in India and Mexico."

<sup>60</sup> Dragostinova, Theodora. 182

<sup>61</sup> Dragostinova, Theodora. 173

<sup>62</sup> Dragostinova, Theodora. 190-91

<sup>63</sup> Dragostinova, Theodora. 190-91



In observation of Bulgaria's diplomacy leading up to 1981, Moscow supposedly believed that this increased outreach to Mexico City and New Delhi in particular was due to Sofia being driven primarily by Zhivkova's political initiatives and personal interests. In addition to her own cancer, rumors persisted that her exhausting travelling to both India and Mexico during which she was meeting with various gurus and clairvoyants in addition to politicians, resulted in her death which occurred in the midst of the 1981 celebrations. <sup>64</sup>

The interpersonal relations that she shared with India's Indira Gandhi on one hand and with Mexico's President Jose Lopez Portillo, on the other were definitely the driving force behind the organization of these cultural exchanges. Mexico had only established relations with Bulgaria in 1974 although its Industrial Revolutionary Party had championed a relatively pro-Cuban stance against the US, seeking to strengthen its autonomy. <sup>65</sup>

Unlike New Delhi, for Mexico City, Moscow was not the main framework for interaction with Sofia, but rather its own interests across Europe. As the Mexican economy improved in part due to trade with the US and due to other factors, Mexico did not want to adopt the same exact American approach to the Eastern bloc, and sought to establish its own economic presence among the Second World developing economies.

Therefore, across the chessboard of the Cold War, ideological competition was as central as geopolitics and economic dominance, however the conflict over Capitalist or Communist ideology also had a cultural dimension as Dragostinova argues in her book.

<sup>66</sup>This cultural approach not only showcased the advantages over one system and its way of life, but also in bolstering cultural and national pride in people-to-people contact in order

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<sup>64</sup> Dragostinova, Theodora. 192

<sup>65</sup> Dragostinova, Theodora. 179

<sup>66</sup> Dragostinova, Theodora. *The Cold War from the Margins: A Small Socialist State on the Global Cultural Scene.*

to have societies relate to different cultures in nations who have gone through similar experiences, despite under different economic systems. By that logic, the state-sponsored and party-organized events of 1981 also sought to encourage to an increased but yet controlled degree, such people-to-people cultural exchanges, hosting students from schools throughout countries in the Second and Third Worlds.

In addition, while organizing the national elements of the celebrations, the Bulgarian officials led by Zhivkova had “consciously avoided crude nationalist characterizations and adhered to more refined, universal, and even cosmopolitan messages...to inscribe the history of the Bulgarian nation in the context of universal human values and shared civilizational characteristics.”<sup>67</sup> Thus universal messages, pertaining to oppression and rebellion, injustice and justice, unity over division, the triumph of good over evil, were emphasized alongside Bulgaria’s national and cultural image.

In a concluding speech to the celebrations, Zhivkov reminded the Bulgarians: Bulgaria, one of the oldest states of Europe, which emerged on the ground of the ancient civilizations in our lands, covered a long distance in its development, and has now reached the highest peak in contemporary progress - the triumph of the socialist social order...the victory of the socialist revolution marked the greatest ever radical breakthrough in our thirteen century-long history.<sup>68</sup>

The rhetoric of the narrative emphasized that according to human evolution, the highest stage of socio-economic development is Socialism. So as the propaganda often proclaimed that Communism would be reached by 1980, conveniently it was also in 1981 that the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the formation of the Bulgarian Communist Party was also marked.<sup>69</sup> The planning and designs for these anniversary celebrations were inspired in

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<sup>67</sup> Dragostinova, Theodora. 41

<sup>68</sup> Dragostinova, Theodora. 22

<sup>69</sup> Dragostinova, Theodora. 230

part by the infamous 2,500 year anniversary of Persian civilization marked by Iran in 1971, the Polish Catholic Millennium marked in 1966, as well as the American Revolution's bicentennial marked in 1976 as well as the 1977 Soviet Union's 60<sup>th</sup> year anniversary of the Russian Revolution. (This 1981 national jubilee is explained more in Chapter 4)

### **The Bulgarian Economy, State and Society during the Height of Communism, 1970s-1980s**

As Bulgaria ended the stable yet stagnant decade of the 1970s, it triumphally entered the 1980s, celebrating its national identity on the world stage and at home proclaiming the successful transition from “realized” Socialism into “true” Communism with 1980 being held as the imagined threshold. It was by the end of the dramatic year of 1981 going into 1982, though that Zhivkov's daughter would die due to brain cancer at the age of 38, causing a sense of national mourning and provoking rumors that she might have been murdered by the KGB.<sup>70</sup> Although, such speculation was censored at time, no evidence exists to this day that she was assassinated by any state security service.<sup>71</sup>

At the core of the Soviet-Bulgarian alliance in addition to social and political ties, was the coordination between its Committee for State Security (KDS) and the Soviet Committee for State Security (KGB). The KGB often employed the KDS for assassinations, with the notorious 1978 poisoning of Georgi Markov in London (a lot of evidence, not officially proven) and the 1981 alleged attempted shooting of the Polish Pope John Paul II in Rome (speculative evidence, nothing proven).<sup>72</sup> Like the KGB, the KDS functioned as an agency for intelligence and counterintelligence, disinformation

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<sup>70</sup> Dragostinova, Theodora. 192-93

<sup>71</sup> Znepolski, Ivaylo. 185-87

<sup>72</sup> Znepolski, Ivaylo. 168-83

dissemination, border security, secret police force and for other covert functions to control aspects of society. While, all the Communist regimes in the Eastern bloc, had equally repressive secret police and security services, Bulgarians were deemed much more reliable and trustworthy for the Soviets. So, if these regime repressive tactics were shared by all satellite states, some speculate that those who did not develop dissident movements were due to a larger share of ingrained indifference toward the regime in power and the passivity of the population or perhaps a stronger domestic propaganda machine at work in society.

Most contemporary observers often pointed out this particular characteristic of Bulgaria in relation to the other satellite states in the Eastern bloc as well as the fact, that it did not develop any sort of longstanding or significant internal dissident movements, with the exception of a few dissident defectors, those being the public intellectuals who came to prominence during the 1970s (introduced and examined in Chapter 3).

The People's Court which functioned as a postwar criminal tribunal from 1945 to 1947 eliminated most of the war-time political opposition parties, the dissenters in the *intelligentsia* and bourgeois business class, in the establishment of the regime early on.<sup>73</sup> Only dragging into the late 1940s and 1950s, did the "goryani" (mountaineers) movement which diverged from the partisans, present a sort of isolated but armed resistance against the construction of the Communist regime. Also, the only case of an attempted coup d'état against the regime, occurred in April 1965 when a plot within the party and among the general staff to overthrow a newly empowered Zhivkov was uncovered and exposed.<sup>74</sup>

The KDS was then reformed in the 1960s to be under the complete command of the party, meaning the Politburo rather than state structures including the military

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<sup>73</sup> Kelleher, Michael. "Bulgaria's Communist-Era Landscape." 39–72

<sup>74</sup> Kelleher, Michael. "Bulgaria's Communist-Era Landscape." 39–72

leadership. The Soviets also helped design the KDS campaign against a “unified conspiracy” between class enemies within the country and the “imperialist forces” abroad, training the secret police on how to go abroad in targeting émigrés marked as dissidents.<sup>75</sup> The secret police also recruited non-party members for “voluntary cooperation”, though an exact number of those co-opted “collaborators” has never been released.<sup>76</sup>

Internationally, the Bulgarian state security services were associated with missions particularly in Greece and Turkey as well as throughout the Arab world, though on domestic matters unlike in relation to the other satellite states, the Soviets seemed not involved nor interested.<sup>77</sup> The KDS also focused on jamming the so-called “enemy radio stations” – VOA, RFL/RL, BBC, DW which apparently were quite accessible by the public and eventually influenced the formation of an alternative but hidden counterculture.<sup>78</sup>

In matters of religion, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church was not suppressed as the Russian Orthodox Church was by the Soviets nor as the Roman Catholics had been in parts of the Eastern bloc. Though, at first, the church leadership was targeted, the state structures soon effectively infiltrated the church hierarchical structure.<sup>79</sup> Thus, most churches and monasteries were not destroyed nor closed, functioning as cultural monuments, church attendance was discouraged and only civil ceremonies for weddings and funerals were officially recognized, while religious ceremonies were not banned. The church had a role with the state in emphasizing the Bulgarian national historic conflict with the Muslim Turks, as a reminder that Turkey in NATO still constituted a threat to Soviet Bulgaria.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Znepolski, Ivaylo. 168-83

<sup>76</sup> Znepolski, Ivaylo. 168-83

<sup>77</sup> Znepolski, Ivaylo. 168-83

<sup>78</sup> Znepolski, Ivaylo. 168-83

<sup>79</sup> Znepolski, Ivaylo. 325-38

<sup>80</sup> Znepolski, Ivaylo. 325-38

In *Bulgaria under Communism* (2019), Ivaylo Znepolski explains how most of civil society had been co-opted by the Communist party and its long arms in every level of national and regional government. Nearly all professional organizations and trade unions which technically existed outside of the party, could not in any way criticize any aspect of state ideology. Only perhaps in athletic associations and some ecological movements did a non-political form of civic organization exist. Furthermore, education in particular was among the most heavily censored and controlled aspects of this society. Although, literacy rates and that of educated citizens among the rural population rapidly increased under Communism, the Ministry of Propaganda as it was called, established strict guidelines for what could be read and what could be studied across both schools and universities.<sup>81</sup>

Marxism-Leninism as a philosophical framework was the only way that every aspect of science and the arts could be interpreted, scientific studies and publications which were quite advanced in their own right, especially in terms of engineering, still had to conform ideologically. Libraries banned some classical literature and that of some authors from the pre-war time period, whereas others were allowed despite possibly being categorized as a “fascist literature.”<sup>82</sup> Instead the publications of political leaders were promoted as required readings for everyone in the public education system, with titles such as; *Georgi Dimitrov on Literature and Science* (1971), *Vulko Chervenkov on Science, Art and Culture* (1950) and Todor Zhivkov’s two volumes of *Art, Science and Culture in the Service of the People* (1965).<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Znepolski, Ivaylo. 189-202

<sup>82</sup> Znepolski, Ivaylo. 189-202

<sup>83</sup> Znepolski, Ivaylo. 189-202

The teaching of history and the national historiography of Bulgaria was also censored and rewritten to conform not only to ideological standards but also in favor of the official Soviet narrative of world history prior to the Russian Revolution and leading up to the two world wars. In regards to the press, a notorious sense of strict censorship and at times, a comic display of negligence on delaying official announcements in news stories that were already wide spread and known, applied quite thoroughly, as well. <sup>84</sup>

Despite all this, there were some rewarding aspects during Communism, as workers were guaranteed a form of employment and even allowed month-long summer vacations, the Bulgarian Black Sea coast known as the “Red Riviera” attracted foreigners regularly, particularly East German, Polish, Czechoslovak, Hungarian, Ukrainian and Russian tourists. The Soviet Union also promoted Bulgaria vis-a-vie its Balkan neighbors, as a “show case of Socialism” in the way that Cuba was promoted in contrast to the rest of the Caribbean. <sup>85</sup> So, while Second World countries did even not attempt to compete with First World countries, they did provide an attractive model of development for the Third World.

### **The Bulgarian Economy, State and Society during the Fall of Communism, 1970s-1980s**

The rise and fall of Communism in Bulgaria as part of the Soviet sphere of influence developed simultaneously to that of the other satellite states of the Eastern bloc, with similar shared patterns of political consolidation over the state and society. Though the circumstance of each country was distinctly different; some satellite states had underground Communist parties that had mass appeal and others did not.

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<sup>84</sup> Znepolski, Ivaylo. 189-202

<sup>85</sup> Znepolski, Ivaylo. 299-303

In Bulgaria's case, while the country was occupied initially by the Red Army from 1944 to 1947, and a top-down Sovietization certainly did not take place without resistance and with massive political persecutions at least at first; for a number of reasons already examined, Bulgaria did not develop a defined dissident movement and its population generally welcomed the construction of socialism as a positive economic development.

Bulgarian economic socialism unlike the Yugoslav socialist self-management style was entirely based on the Soviet centrally-planned command economy, and its five-year plans actually resulted in more immediate growth and results compared to the other satellite states in the 1950s. This occurred against the backdrop of the totalitarian Stalinist forced collectivization of the countryside and industrialization of the cities. The Soviets supported the industrialization in Bulgaria by supplying the raw materials and energy resources, and in turn providing an assured market for the manufacturers.<sup>86</sup> Nevertheless, by the 1960s, there was a decrease in the rate of growth as well as labor productivity, which allowed for some experimentation to promote growth in various sectors of the already fully nationalized centrally-planned economy.<sup>87</sup> Throughout the 1970s, industrial output proceeded to grow after adjustments were made, and from 1960 to 1975, the net material product rose at 7.7 percent per year, according to state records.<sup>88</sup> This was also due in part to Soviet subsidization, which allowed Bulgaria to run large surplus of exports over imports. However, at the same time, in the late 1970s, the external foreign debt increased by 226%, making Bulgaria's the fastest and largest acquired, and the country was unable to generate, through its export of oil, the hard currencies it was accustomed to acquiring

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<sup>86</sup> Znepolski, Ivaylo. 118-123

<sup>87</sup> Znepolski, Ivaylo. 118-123

<sup>88</sup> Gomes, Luiz. "Economic trajectory of the People's Republic of Bulgaria (1946-1990)"



going into the 1980s, as Soviet subsidies decreased. After the collapse of Communism Third World nations did not pay back Bulgaria, such as the \$2.8 billion in debt owed by Libya, which it would never receive (particularly after the NATO war in Libya, 2011).<sup>89</sup>

The 1980s would be a dramatic decade of change for Bulgaria as it would be for the rest of the Eastern bloc. As this became more evident within the Communist party, Zhivkov in 1982 implemented the “New Economic Mechanism” (NEM) to put the 1970s era of stagnation behind and pay for the cost of the 1981 celebrations; this five-year plan was designed to raise productivity, improve the quality of goods and services and secure the exports needed to eliminate existing trade deficits and hard currency debts. Being a command economy, this proposal was imposed from top-down as “a new approach to the management of the economy in the scientific-technological revolution.”<sup>90</sup>

Bulgaria did develop a small but significant manufacturing sector in computer technologies, known as the “Silicon Valley of the Eastern Bloc.”<sup>91</sup> However, its command economy as with the USSR, was being seriously challenged by the ongoing Digital Revolution. The NEM plan was not making any progress either, with Zhivkov himself commenting in a 1983 speech aired on the radio, admitting its failure and even stating that superior foreign products assembled within Bulgaria had been “Bulgarized.”<sup>92</sup> Moreover, industrial management was trained according to the command economy not to make decisions based on profit but based on political loyalty, reinforcing the corruption that characterized the era of stagnation, which had not been all that negative in Bulgaria, however what followed from the mid-1980s onward was far worse.

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<sup>89</sup> Gomes, Luiz. “Economic trajectory of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria (1946-1990)”

<sup>90</sup> Gomes, Luiz. “Economic trajectory of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria (1946-1990)”

<sup>91</sup> Compton, Richard. 204-206

<sup>92</sup> Compton, Richard. 204-206

Bulgaria as most of Eastern Europe was heavily dependent on Soviet oil and gas to meet energy needs, however by the mid-1980s, the USSR facing increased domestic economic challenges due to both external and internal factors, was no longer providing oil and gas at cheap, subsidized prices, and Bulgaria was forced to buy oil and gas at actual international market prices.<sup>93</sup> This contributed to a growing domestic economic crisis.

In addition, changes in Soviet leadership after 1985, particularly the reform policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika* under Mikhail Gorbachev, would cause a rift with Todor Zhivkov who began arguing absurdly around 1987 that “the purpose of *glasnost* in the USSR was to expose the need for *perestroika* in the economy, but since Bulgaria had already introduced economic *perestroika*, it had no need for *glasnost*.”<sup>94</sup> This resembled an argument which was proposed to be adopted by other socialist nation-states and what some refer to as “the Chinese road to Communism.”<sup>95</sup>

Meanwhile, as an economic crisis was gradually growing, and political change in Moscow threatened to destabilize the backbone of the Soviet-Bulgarian special relationship, in reaction to a number of Turkish terrorist-staged attacks, from 1984 to 1989, the Bulgarian Communist Party and its state organs began escalating the so-called “regenerative or revival” national process which was a policy began in 1970s but in the late 1980s would manifest with public support into a policy of forced assimilation for the Turkish minority who made up 10% of the population.<sup>96</sup>

This controversial domestic policy would result in the largest ethnic expulsion or ethnic cleansing in Europe until 1989, an approach that neighboring Serbia attempted in

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<sup>93</sup> Bottoni, Stefano, and Sean Lambert. “The Decline and Fall of the Soviet Bloc (1973–1991).”

<sup>94</sup> Compton, Richard. 208-215

<sup>95</sup> Bottoni, Stefano, and Sean Lambert. “The Decline and Fall of the Soviet Bloc (1973–1991).”

<sup>96</sup> Compton, Richard. 208-215

Bosnia and Kosovo in the aftermath of the breakup of Yugoslavia during the Balkan Wars from 1991 to 1999. On one hand, Bulgaria avoided the fate of its Communist neighbor, Yugoslavia in that during in the late 1990s despite being still ruled by the renamed Bulgarian Socialist Party until 1997, it gradually re-oriented itself toward the West, joining NATO in 2004 and then the EU by 2007.<sup>97</sup>

On the other, the socio-economic state of the transition period of the 1990s across Eastern Europe compounded by the wars in the Balkans, shaped the attitude of a democratic Bulgaria towards the West. Although nostalgia for Communism remained in Bulgaria like it did with neighboring Yugoslavia and Romania, the nation throughout the 2000s, has most notably been confronted with many challenges in rooting out corruption and Russian influence, despite being structurally integrated within the “Euro-Atlantic” Western structures by the end of the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>98</sup>

### **The Bulgarian-American Diaspora and American-Bulgarian Relations**

Over the past three decades since the end of Communism, Bulgaria has been ranked as among the top nations in the world with the fastest demographic population decline, with more than 2 million people in total leaving since 1991.<sup>99</sup> As a result, the Bulgarian global diaspora has grown and is concentrated mostly in Western Europe with European Union nations; Germany, Italy and Spain as well as Great Britain having the highest share. Also, there is a substantial amount of Bulgarians living abroad in Turkey, Greece, Ukraine and Russia, as well.<sup>100</sup> The Bulgarian diaspora in America is not as large in population as

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<sup>97</sup> Tashev, Blagovest. “Security Through Integration: Bulgaria’s Long Road to Foreign Policy Consensus.”

<sup>98</sup> Tashev, Blagovest. “Security Through Integration: Bulgaria’s Long Road to Foreign Policy Consensus.”

<sup>99</sup> Todorov, Stetoslav. “Bulgaria’s Population Shrinks by 11.5 per cent in Decade.” January 6, 2022. <https://balkaninsight.com/2022/01/06/bulgarias-population-shrinks-by-11-5-per-cent-in-decade/?cmplz-force-reload=1717264184958>

<sup>100</sup> National Statistics Institute: <https://www.nsi.bg/bg/content>

other Eastern European diasporas such as the Ukrainians, Poles or Hungarians nor is it as well organized and politically motivated as the Greeks, Armenians or Turks within the US.

Bulgarian-Americans today are approximately over 250,000 including those who have acquired US citizenship and those who reside long-term for work.<sup>101</sup> The most recent wave of Bulgarian immigrants to the United States occurred throughout the 1990s (the writer's family was part of it) but the initial wave goes back to the 1890s and was focused primarily on Chicago, as illustrated in the classic book; *To Chicago and Back* (1894) by its author Aleko Konstantinov who describes his own journey to the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, where newly independent Bulgaria was represented in any way, for the first time on the world's stage.<sup>102</sup> The author describes among other stories, how often he was confused by Westerners to be as either a legal Ottoman subject or as a Russian language speaker, and on several occasions, he had to inform them of his new country of Bulgaria which had re-emerged on the world map a decade and a half prior to his worldwide journey.<sup>103</sup> Interestingly, one of the innovators in mass electrification which was displayed at the 1893 world's fair was the famous Nikola Tesla, a fellow Balkan traveler from Serbia.

On the way to Chicago, Kostantinov describes in detail his journey which starts in Sofia and passes through Belgrade on the way to Vienna, from which he takes a train to Paris. From Paris he makes his way by ship to New York, and from there up the Eire Canal to Niagara Falls where he expresses a particular high of amazement. Additionally, the

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<sup>101</sup> "120 Years of Diplomatic Relations between the United States and Bulgaria." September 19, 2023. <https://www.state.gov/120-years-of-diplomatic-relations-between-the-united-states-and-bulgaria/>

<sup>102</sup> Kostantinov, Aleko. *To Chicago and Back*. 1894.

<sup>103</sup> Kostantinov, Aleko. *To Chicago and Back*. 1894.

author passes through Detroit, as well as Philadelphia and Boston via train, returning via ship to London on his way back to Europe. <sup>104</sup>

Although this narrative does not address immigration per se, the focal point of Kostantinov's journey to the Chicago World's Fair has been conflated over time with the formation of the Bulgarian-American diaspora in Chicago which began around that time period, and this book is ranked as among the most famous in Bulgarian literature, concerning an average Bulgarians' initial interactions with the Western world.

Among the earliest contact between Americans and Bulgarians on an institutional level took place through the American Robert College of Istanbul associated with the State University of New York (SUNY) and founded in 1863 by the American philanthropist Christopher Robert initially as a high school, and is still today the oldest continuously operating American school outside the United States. <sup>105</sup> But even before that in 1860, American Christian evangelical missionaries had established in Plovdiv a school which would by the 1870s, be renamed as the American College of Sofia and which still exists today. <sup>106</sup> Indeed, the inception of Bulgarian-American relations was actually based on religious missions rather than traditional shared economic, political or cultural ties, which is quite interesting as Bulgaria has always been a majority Eastern Orthodox nation with very small minorities of Roman Catholic or Evangelical Protestant Christians.

Another initial link beyond this foundational Christian religious connection, involves the character of the Irish-American journalist Januarius A. MacGahan from New Lexington, Ohio who worked as a correspondent for the *New York Herald* and the London-

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<sup>104</sup> Kostantinov, Aleko. *To Chicago and Back*. 1894.

<sup>105</sup> "History of Roberts College." <https://website.robcol.k12.tr/en/about-rc/history>

<sup>106</sup> "The American College in Sofia: History." <https://www.acs.bg/about-acs/history/>

based *Daily News* during the 1870s. McGahan is notable as he served as the only Western correspondent to be present in Bulgaria during the 1876 Ottoman atrocities against Bulgarians, and the subsequent 1877-78 Russo-Turkish War which resulted in the formation of modern Bulgaria.<sup>107</sup> In fact, it was his press reporting that contributed to the British and other Europeans paying attention to these “Bulgarian atrocities” committed by the Ottoman Turks against Eastern Orthodox Christians across the Balkans. Following the Bulgarian liberation in 1878, and the unification of the Principality of Bulgaria with Ottoman-held Eastern Rumelia in 1885, that led up to the official proclamation of independence of the Kingdom of Bulgaria in 1908, Bulgaria began to be officially but slowly recognized by the West, including the United States of America.

#### **A Century of Pax Americana and Eastern Europe, 1990s-2000s**

The United States officially established diplomatic relations with Bulgaria on September 19, 1903 (120 years ago) although stood on the opposite side of every alliance Bulgaria joined as an enemy throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>108</sup> US-Bulgarian relations even briefly broke down between 1950 and 1959 but were not relatively stabilized until some time around 1975. Between 1990 and 2004, US-Bulgarian relations improved and have been on generally positive terms since Bulgaria joined NATO and the EU during the 2000s.

America’s relationship with Bulgaria is not even considered a shared strategic one, but is mostly defined through the prism of Bulgaria’s membership in NATO, its position on the Black Sea vis-a-vie Russia as well Bulgaria’s own vastly improved economic and diplomatic relationship with today’s regional power players in the Balkans; that being

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<sup>107</sup> MacGahan, Januarius. *The Turkish Atrocities in Bulgaria: Letters of the Special Commissioner of the “Daily News.”* London: Bradbury, Agnew & Co, 1876.

<sup>108</sup> “120 Years of Diplomatic Relations between the United States and Bulgaria.” September 19, 2023. <https://www.state.gov/120-years-of-diplomatic-relations-between-the-united-states-and-bulgaria/>

Turkey and Germany. German economic investment and Turkish cultural influence has greatly grown in Bulgaria since the late 1990s. Bulgaria's overall diplomatic relations with Ankara and Berlin in recent decades are in much better standing than ties with Moscow.

Although, a relationship with Russia does still exist defined primarily by economic energy needs and the influence of shadowy organized crime networks, but also by the collective memory and history of the now extinct "special relationship" it once shared with Moscow. Also, the fact that these type of close ties are shared by Serbia, Bulgaria's Balkan neighbor, who since the NATO bombing of 1999 has emerged as perhaps the most pro-Russian nation-state in Europe, considering that Russia today only holds the same level of cultural, economic and political influence only over Belarus in Eastern Europe, and somewhat in the Caucasus nations of Georgia and Armenia (although recently there have been changes there), as well as in parts of former Soviet Central Asia, such as with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tadjikistan and Uzbekistan, where Moscow's historic influence is in recent times, being balanced out with that of Ankara and also by Beijing.

Unlike the British, which were the global superpower throughout most of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the Americans prior to emerging as a global superpower experimented with colonialism but held an isolationist foreign policy without any diplomatic commitments. Since the end of WWII, the US has developed a number of such special relationship(s) with several nations, including the best known, termed "the special relationship" with the UK, but also with France and especially Israel. The US also maintains an abundance of strategic relationships indirectly through NATO but also directly with its former wartime enemies in Germany and Japan and with those who serve strategic military and economic

goals in different parts of the world such as with South Korea, Saudi Arabia and Australia among others and its own immediate North American neighbors in Mexico and Canada.

The American relationship with Russia even after the Cold War has remained contentious except for a brief period in the early 1990s in the immediate aftermath of the end of the Cold War. During America's Global War on Terrorism starting in 2001, a US-Russian counter-terrorism temporary partnership ensued in Afghanistan and not as much in Iraq, as that began to break down in 2011 around the US interventions in Libya during Arab Spring, although it was in Syria where Russia itself ended up intervening after 2015. The US had tried to reset relations back in 2010 despite, Russia having invaded Georgia as early as 2008. However, it was the Russian annexation of the Crimea in 2014 after the "Euromaidan" revolution in Ukraine, which was a turning point that has gradually led to this atmosphere in world affairs sometimes referred to as a "New Cold War." Most recently, Russia has been engaged in a full-scale war in Ukraine since February 24, 2022.

This war has been characterized by some, as marking "the end of the post-Cold War world order" forged in the past 30 years. It has drastically increased military and economic tensions between Russia and China on one hand and the US its allies, and NATO on the other. A nearly total breakdown of political and economic relations between Russia and the EU has also unfolded over the past two years and a half, whereby Bulgaria, which did not definitively shift its diplomatic stance on Russia after 2014 but in the wake of the most recent invasion changed course on Russia, much more on board with the EU and NATO.

However, over the past three years (as of 2024), Bulgaria since April 2021 has been experiencing a political crisis and after six elections (going on to seven) has been unable to form a governing coalition and thus unable to appoint a long-term Prime Minister, with



power residing within the Presidency. This political crisis is caused by an increase in political polarization but also because of changes within the main political parties and their leadership, which cannot agree to form an elected governing coalition and seem to waiting for the direction of “where the wind blows” in world affairs. This has been in part due to changes in the domestic discourse as well as internal debates over endemic corruption, Bulgaria’s role in the EU and NATO, concerning its neighbor Macedonia joining these institutions but also concerning Bulgaria’s position on the 2022 Russian war in Ukraine.

The ongoing political crisis along with the economic and energy consequences of the war for Bulgaria and Eastern Europe at large, demonstrates clearly that the legacy of the history between Russia and Bulgaria is very much alive and well in its society. Therefore, understanding the past and present of Bulgaria’s relations with Russia is foundational to how the nation-state has been shaped by its history, thus it is critical for further researching how American public diplomacy played a role in Bulgaria in the above established context of Communism in Eastern Europe during the Cold War.

### **Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter’s purpose is to explain the main three aspects of the so-called Russian (Soviet)-Bulgarian special relationship by narrating through modern Bulgarian history and further highlighting the nuances that existed in Sofia’s internal and external relations toward Moscow during the two world wars, and how that changed throughout the course of the Cold War.

Furthermore, this chapter also shows the manifestation of some material benefits that Bulgaria’s independent foreign policy with the rest of the world allowed for, while also discussing its impact on the domestic society, as well as how things changed

drastically once the arrangement began to disappear as Communism collapsed throughout the Eastern bloc, the USSR disintegrated and the Cold War ended.

Also, to broaden the scope, Bulgaria's place in the world and its relationship with its neighbors since 1989 is mentioned, as well as a brief overview of Bulgarian-American relations, providing context for the second chapter.

**CHAPTER 2:**  
**AMERICAN PUBLIC DIPLOMACY AND PROPAGANDA THROUGHOUT THE**  
**COLD WAR: THE ROLE OF THE VOICE OF AMERICA, RADIO FREE**  
**EUROPE/RADIO LIBERTY AND THE CIA’S SECRET BOOK PROGRAM IN**  
**RELATION TO COMMUNIST BULGARIA, 1940s-1980s**

**Chapter Introduction**

This dissertation’s timeframe is set within the context of the Cold War era which began sometime in 1944-1949 and lasted until 1985-1991, more concretely between 1945 and 1991. This Cold War era also coincided with a number of indirectly-related global developments such as Decolonization and the onset of the Digital Revolution and directly related developments between the US and the USSR as in the Nuclear Arms Race and the Space Race. Of course, while this era was most famously marked by the military and socio-economic conflict between Capitalism and Communism, at its core it certainly involved an ideological dimension. In fact, central to the Cold War was the ideological competition to “win hearts and minds”, with both the US and USSR as superpowers, engaging in an entrepreneurial subversive political warfare against each other and their respective allies. This type of confrontation was intended to shape the perceptions, attitudes, motives, behavior and ultimately the political decision-making of the intended target.

In this case, the target nation-state being that of Bulgaria, which is selected as a case study among the satellite states of the Eastern bloc especially, due to its multilayered historical, socio-cultural, political-military and strategic special relationship with the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union that ended in 1991, as examined and established in

the previous first chapter of this dissertation. In this second chapter, the intersection between Bulgaria as a loyal Soviet satellite state as well as a target of US public diplomacy and propaganda efforts will be examined in detail throughout.

For the United States, the ability to balance between its “hard and soft power” projection into post-war Eastern Europe was essential for the success of its foreign policy throughout the Cold War. While “hard power” implies military force, “soft power” can be economic and socio-cultural, but is often used to mean comprehensive approaches involving intelligence and information operations to promote “political warfare”.

While terms such as “political warfare” or especially “propaganda” generally have a negative connotation, in the context of the start of the Cold War, declassified documents often used the term “propaganda” in a neutral connotation, implying it as “information with a purpose.” The term “public diplomacy” was developed later to signify the comprehensive approach currently being used. This chapter starts by defining the terms “propaganda” and “public diplomacy” while also examining their origins and their modern meanings throughout WWI and WWII and after. Then a background on the role of radio in information operations is introduced, setting the stage for the main subject at hand.

At the forefront of American public diplomacy and propaganda efforts in the Cold War, was the CIA, which in addition to covert and clandestine operations was also tasked with combatting its counterpart, the KGB and its “active measures” against the West. Alongside the CIA, which directed and funded most of the initial plans for these programs, the main US government agencies tasked with advancing these above goals are today are structured as part of the independently-run Agency for Global Media, which administers the Voice of America (formed in 1942) as well as Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty

(formed respectively in 1949 and 1953, and later merged in 1976). VOA broadcasting the official US government public position in the midst of WWII to its global audience including to Eastern Europeans, later worked together with RFE to specifically broadcast special programming within the Eastern bloc while RL aimed solely at the USSR. RFL/RL were reorganized after a Congressional investigation ended CIA funding in the early 1970s. The chapter also examines in detail the role of the CIA's clandestine book program founded as the Free Europe Press (FEP) alongside RFE/RL and its impact on Bulgaria in the 1950s and 1960s. Communist Bulgaria's censorship of books, electronic interference of radio broadcasting as well as its own radio in relation to others in the world are examined. Finally, the series of counterintelligence efforts against US public diplomacy and propaganda are researched, analyzed and examined, herein throughout this second chapter.

### **“Public Diplomacy” vs. “Propaganda”**

By making use of the terms “public diplomacy” and “propaganda” in the title of this dissertation and throughout its contents, especially in this second chapter, it is important to briefly define their origins and meanings: Propaganda in particular is an art of advertising that is as old as time, being utilized by empires and nation-states throughout history essentially to further an agenda by influencing people to agree with a series of ideas or actions. In fact, there are different types of propaganda which can constitute multiple meanings depending on the context in which it is applied, but essentially propaganda has to do with “any ideas of beliefs that are intentionally propagated” according to the American Historical Association.<sup>109</sup> In a basic sense; the manipulation of information.

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<sup>109</sup> “Defining Propaganda 1.” American Historical Association.  
[https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/gi-roundtable-series/pamphlets/em-2-what-is-propaganda-\(1944\)/defining-propaganda-i](https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/gi-roundtable-series/pamphlets/em-2-what-is-propaganda-(1944)/defining-propaganda-i)

The term “propaganda” derives from the Latin for “to spread around” and had an honorable, positive connotation when used in the socio-political and religious context by the Roman Catholic Church in the late Medieval time period although the terms acquired a much more negative connotation during and after the Age of Enlightenment.<sup>110</sup>

Throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries, modern political propaganda was developed by nation-state governments to essentially advertise their agendas and ideologies among other things by means of communicating effectively with their target domestic and foreign audiences. The message could be disseminated to the masses through traditional art forms and publications such as paintings, pamphlets, cartoons as well as emerging technologies like radio, television and the internet. However, it is important to point out that the propagandistic approach in theory differs from the journalistic in that its purpose is not to objectively portray the facts but only to have those facts be useful within the reinforcement of a particular argument or narrative. This of course, does not mean that the reporting of the news is not actually factually reported even in the form of propaganda.

<sup>111</sup> In contrast, while the term “public diplomacy” or (PD) is part of the broader idea of “propaganda” as a form of political advertising, it is less associated with manipulation of information for socio-political advertising, but rather as a form of political “public relations” or (PR) which has a more positive contemporary connotation. The term “public diplomacy”<sup>112</sup> was coined in 1965 by American diplomat and academic Edmund Gullion

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<sup>110</sup> “The Story of Propaganda.” American Historical Association.  
[https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/gi-roundtable-series/pamphlets/em-2-what-is-propaganda-\(1944\)/the-story-of-propaganda](https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/gi-roundtable-series/pamphlets/em-2-what-is-propaganda-(1944)/the-story-of-propaganda)

<sup>111</sup> “News and Propaganda.” American Historical Association.  
[https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/gi-roundtable-series/pamphlets/em-2-what-is-propaganda-\(1944\)/news-and-propaganda](https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/gi-roundtable-series/pamphlets/em-2-what-is-propaganda-(1944)/news-and-propaganda)

<sup>112</sup> “What is Public Diplomacy?” USC Center of Public Diplomacy.  
<https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/page/what-is-pd>

to differentiate it from “propaganda” and also from “public affairs” which is related to a government’s information initiatives and public programs aimed at a domestic audience.

<sup>113</sup> Thus, “public diplomacy” plays the role of complimenting traditional diplomacy in international relations, by enhancing a government’s public communications strategy to advance its foreign policy agenda, which often includes; bolstering its image around the world and in doing so influencing the politics of foreign governments and populations to maintain or change their opinion. In a sense, if diplomacy engages the elite political decision-makers of a nation-state, then public diplomacy targets in their messaging the common person from that nation that they seek to be interacting with.

Although, public diplomacy itself does include strategic communications by means of advocacy, exchange programs, cultural diplomacy and international broadcasting. More recently, it has expanded to include how governments set up partnerships with non-governmental organizations, non-profit firms, and the global media to promote their foreign policy goals in international relations. There is some debate within the social sciences about the difference between these concepts, and while some seek to emphasize the distinct differences between these two terms, others argue that they mean the same thing and “public diplomacy” is just a modern rebranding of “propaganda.”

US diplomat Richard Holbrooke in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001 had echoed that sentiment in regards to foreign relations with the Islamic World: public diplomacy, or public affairs, or psychological warfare, or if you really want to be blunt – propaganda.

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<sup>113</sup> “‘Public Diplomacy’ before Gullon: The Evolution of a Phrase.” USC Center on Public Diplomacy, 2006. <https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/blog/public-diplomacy-gullion-evolution-phrase>

<sup>114</sup> “Public Diplomacy and Propaganda: Their Differences”. American Diplomacy, Est. 1996. 2008. <https://americandiplomacy.web.unc.edu/2008/09/public-diplomacy-propaganda-their-differences/>

So, while these two terms are not theoretically interchangeable, they are related to each other and essentially have the same purpose which has to do with political power and persuasion, though their methods and strategies differ, their goal is the same. For the purpose of this research though, the terms will be used to signify the distinct but related approaches pursued by the US government. Both of these concepts are expressions of the idea of “soft power” which involves power projection without the use of the military and/or coercive and clandestine methods of “hard power”. None of these terms are used in an altruistic or moralistic context, to be sure, they both seek to gain credibility with the audience in order to serve as a political instrument of influence for persuasion.

While, propaganda at its worst can cause its audiences to disbelieve it as dishonest, at its best it can convince people to believe or act in a way that they otherwise would have not; public diplomacy at its best can encourage global understanding and be perceived as believable and honest, and at its worst, it can be ineffective and even equated with the manipulative element of propaganda it tries to avoid.<sup>115</sup> In liberal democracies, “propaganda” has seemingly always been a toxic term to be avoided for public use, as it is associated with totalitarianism, thus “public diplomacy” has become the term to encompass both the actual purpose of public diplomacy and at times, even the propaganda itself. Liberal democracies tend to avoid publicly embracing the term “propaganda” at all costs, while totalitarian regimes have openly and proudly institutionalized it, as with Nazi Germany’s Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda<sup>116</sup>, Fascist Spain’s Department of Propaganda from 1936 to 1947 as well as the internal sections on Agitation

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<sup>115</sup> “Public Diplomacy and Propaganda: Their Differences”. American Diplomacy, Est. 1996. 2008. <https://americandiplomacy.web.unc.edu/2008/09/public-diplomacy-propaganda-their-differences/>

<sup>116</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2019. “Ministry of Propaganda and Public Enlightenment.” <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/ministry-of-propaganda-and-public-enlightenment>



and Propaganda (Agit-Prop) embedded within the regional committees and the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.<sup>117</sup> Even before the 1930s, the term had not been used overtly by Western governments even during WWI when it was clearly utilized, however in time period after WWII, internal reports reveal its abundant use. Although it should be noted that the sometimes controversial term “propaganda” is utilized in a neutral connotation, throughout this dissertation and reflects its use in the archival data.

### **American Public Diplomacy and Propaganda during World War I, 1914-1919**

From the American perspective, “propaganda” is indeed a toxic term to be avoided as well, as Americans have generally been uncomfortable with the notion that as a liberal democracy but also as beacon of the free world in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the US government would engage in such efforts. The first time the term “public diplomacy” was used was in regards to a critique of the US President in a 1856 article by *The London Times*, later in 1871 it was used again by *The New York Times* in reporting on a Congressional debate and in a domestic context.<sup>118</sup> However, it was not until the Great War that the phrase began to appear in a foreign context, as in 1916 with *The New York Times* as well as in 1917, with *The Washington Post*, both concerning German wartime relations with the British and Russians. During this time, “public diplomacy” vaguely referred to statements on warfare, public declarations on the terms for peace but most importantly, President Woodrow Wilson’s internationalist vision embodied in the “Fourteen Points” speech of January 1918.

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<sup>117</sup> Denny, Andrew. “Soviet Propaganda.” *The Military Engineer* 43, No. 294 (1951): 259–62.

<sup>118</sup> “‘Public Diplomacy’ before Gullon: The Evolution of a Phrase.” USC Center on Public Diplomacy, 2006. <https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/blog/public-diplomacy-gullion-evolution-phrase>

<sup>119</sup> Public diplomacy in itself, was something Wilson himself often spoke of leading up to the 1919 Paris Peace Conference.

In that sense, public diplomacy has also been used in various contexts to imply an alternative for traditional diplomacy, however it was during the timeframe of World War I, that propaganda and mass media played a significant role both informing and influencing public attitudes toward the war. <sup>120</sup> During WWI, the propaganda poster became more widespread than ever and as the conflict turned into a total war for some societies, strict censorship was enforced even in the liberal democracies, impacting the free press. In the United States, the Wilson administration advocated for the 1917 Espionage Act and 1918 Sedition Act on the grounds of wartime national security, and additionally created the Committee on Public Information (CPI) also known as the Creel Committee which existed from 1917 to 1919, in order to purposefully disseminate propaganda for the war effort.

This US Committee on Public Information (CPI) was known as the Creel Committee as it was chaired by George Creel, an investigative journalist who would now serve as a public official. He had pointed out to Woodrow Wilson, that this government agency would coordinate propaganda but “not propaganda as the Germans defined it, but propaganda in the true sense of the world, meaning the propagation of faith.” <sup>121</sup> This was during the time right before the era of mass radio broadcasting and the publication of weekly news magazines, when the average American consumed political information primarily through propaganda posters and printed newspapers. <sup>122</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> “‘Public Diplomacy’ before Gullon: The Evolution of a Phrase.” USC Center on Public Diplomacy, 2006. <https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/blog/public-diplomacy-gullion-evolution-phrase>

<sup>120</sup> “Patriotism and Nationalism: World War I”. The British Library. [www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/patriotism-and-nationalism](http://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/patriotism-and-nationalism)

<sup>121</sup> Crumm, Robin K. “A Historical Perspective of Military Propaganda.”

<sup>122</sup> Daly, Christopher B. “How Woodrow Wilson’s Propaganda Machine Changed American Journalism.” Smithsonian Magazine, 2017.

The CPI's News Division would publish the Official Bulletin daily newspaper as an exclusively government-based publication to be posted in every public office around the country.<sup>123</sup> This was unusual for the US, which did not have any government mouth piece publications, leading many contemporary critics to correctly deem its contents as pro-war propaganda.<sup>124</sup> Of course, the prevailing isolationist sentiment in America leading up to its involvement in WWI as with WWII, was a public opinion issue that the US government had to address once war had been declared. Since Wilson was re-elected in 1916 on the isolationist platform: "He Kept Us Out of War" and in April 1917, announced US participation in WWI with strong public support, the committee could be credited for being able to change public opinion as a result of the "revolutionary change" done by the work of its "zealous amateurs propagandists" in effectively executing "perhaps the most effective job of large-scale war propaganda which the world had ever witnessed."<sup>125</sup> US involvement in WWI has often been acknowledged as being a critical factor leading up to the end of the war with the Armistice of November 11, 1918.

Later on, a relative of Sigmund Freud's, Edward Bernays in his *Propaganda: The Public Mind in the Making* (1928) worked on describing and transferring these war-time techniques into mass advertising as well as modern-day private sector "public relations."

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<sup>123</sup> Official Bulletin – World War I Centennial.”  
<https://www.worldwar1centennial.org/index.php/educate/places/official-bulletin.html>

<sup>124</sup> “Official Bulletin – World War I Centennial.”  
<https://www.worldwar1centennial.org/index.php/educate/places/official-bulletin.html>

<sup>125</sup> Tobin, Harold & Bidwell, Percy (1940). “Mobilizing Civilian America.” Council on Foreign Relations.

## **Public Diplomacy and Propaganda via International Radio Broadcasting, 1920s-1950s**

The “Golden Age of Radio Broadcasting” in the West was from the 1920s to 1950s, although this medium remained influential in spreading information around the world for much longer. This so-called “Old Time Radio” Era in the United States was defined by the rise of mass media and the availability of this technology for personal consumption.<sup>126</sup> Broadcasting over radio waves was developed initially for military communication purposes, and later for entertainment, as well. By 1920, the first news program was broadcast in the US, later the Radio Corporation for America (RCA) would be formed but the ability to broadcast content remained within a network of private companies.<sup>127</sup>

Radio broadcasting was an important technological advancement in mass media, due to its ability to spread a well-articulated verbal message quickly to a vast audience over large distances. Therefore, radio would have the capacity to broadcast powerful propaganda campaigns directed for social mobilization. Additionally, radio waves surpassed and bypassed national borders, and the easy accessibility made it an important tool in promoting propaganda efforts especially during the Inter War Era.

One of the earliest and most prominent use of radio broadcasting for political purposes, began with the Russian Revolution, when the Bolsheviks created an organized propaganda machine by taking over the radio stations to announce revolutionary social change to the largely illiterate population and over the vast territorial size of the Russian Empire in the midst of a civil war. While radio broadcasting had been used during WWI to a limited extent for political purposes, it was the Soviet Union formed in 1922 that became

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<sup>126</sup> Lewis, Tom. *Empire of the Air: The Men Who Made Radio*. 1-6

<sup>127</sup> Lewis, Tom. *Empire of the Air: The Men Who Made Radio*. 1-6

the pioneer in propaganda broadcasting via radio as well as making use of early motion pictures and cinema technology to quickly spread a new idea, that being Communism.<sup>128</sup>

This is evident when the founder of the USSR, Vladimir Lenin in 1921 wrote that: The matter is of gigantic importance: A newspaper without paper and without wires, for with a loudspeaker and with the receiver...and we will easily get hundreds of receivers, all of Russia will hear a newspaper being read in Moscow.<sup>129</sup>

Later on, during the early 1930s, the Nazis in Germany further perfected their propaganda through movies and radio, adding sophisticated programming by recruiting US citizen Mildred Gillars for the “Axis Sally” show broadcast in English for an American and European audience, while also criminalizing those tuning into foreign broadcasting stations from Britain or France. The infamous German propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels in regards to radio, acknowledged in open terms as early as 1933 that:

It would not have been possible for us to take power or to use it in the ways we have without the radio... It is no exaggeration to say that the German revolution, at least in the form it took, would have been impossible without the airplane and the radio (and) the radio will be for the 20th Century what the press was for the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>130</sup>

The irony of international radio broadcasting is that it was a product of the Capitalist system but initially utilized much more effectively by the totalitarian systems of Communism, Fascism and Nazism.<sup>131</sup> These regimes could announce revolutionary social change after a covert coup d'état and then enforce their ideology with news updates confirming the progress made by the regime and by long charismatic speeches delivered in

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<sup>128</sup> Nelson, *War of The Black Heavens: The Battles of Western Broadcasting in the Cold War*, 1-2.

<sup>129</sup> Nelson, *War of The Black Heavens: The Battles of Western Broadcasting in the Cold War*, 1-2.

<sup>130</sup> Goebbels, Joseph. “The Radio as the Eight Great Power”. German Propaganda Archive (Online).

<sup>131</sup> Nelson, *War of The Black Heavens: The Battles of Western Broadcasting in the Cold War*, 2-3.

real time by the dictator in charge, with the pioneer among the dictators, being *Il Duce*, Benito Mussolini in Italy followed by the *Der Fuhrer*, Adolf Hitler in Germany.

British and American broadcasters were behind strategically in making use of the radio but not at all technologically, in fact, they produced better versions of the invention for personal use.<sup>132</sup> Unlike the Americans, the British did act to form a national public service broadcaster in the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) as early as 1922, followed up by the BBC “Empire” or World Service in 1932, which is known to this day as “the world’s best-known and most-respected voice in international broadcasting.”<sup>133</sup> The main issue was that in between the two world wars, the US and UK did not utilize their own radio technology in much of a uniformed way for propaganda purposes. This however changed dramatically during and after the course of World War II.

### **Anglo-American Public Diplomacy and Propaganda during World War II, 1939-1945**

After the official start of World War II in September 1939, the world changed and so did radio broadcasting as it was rapidly adapted as a propaganda instrument of war by all sides involved. The British as among the leaders in international intelligence gathering due to their extensive diplomatic presence and trading networks resulting from their Empire, were in a position to declare war on the Germans after the 1939 invasion of Poland. Having failed during the 1938 Munich conference crisis with Prime Minister Neville Chamberlin and under pressure from Winston Churchill who would assume power in 1940, the UK urgently set in motion a series of military and diplomatic actions. This placed the BBC in an urgent position to reinvent their propaganda messaging strategy, and so they

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<sup>132</sup> Lewis, Tom. *Empire of the Air: The Men Who Made Radio*. 1-6

<sup>133</sup> BBC. “History of the BBC: Overseas Programming.”

did, doubling its size as the BBC Forces Programme which began broadcasting in every major European language; adding Spanish, Portuguese and Arabic for the Middle East and Latin America, in addition to new special services targeting Fascist Japan, Colonial India, Iran, and the Soviet Union with a total of 40 foreign language services.<sup>134</sup> This resulted in the BBC successfully broadcasting more extensively than any other international radio station throughout the entirety of the war.<sup>135</sup>

During the Battle of Britain of 1940, the BBC broadcast not only news reports of the air raid bombings known as the Blitz over London but also an effective propaganda program organized by the British Ministry of Information. By targeting an American audience led by Edward R. Murrow, who had worked for CBS but broadcasted for the BBC in London during the war with an objective to show day by day how the UK was standing alone in its fight against the Nazis, and in doing so convince the US of the necessity to join the war. Also, he addressed American isolationists who charged that the British were fighting the Germans primarily to maintain their colonial possessions, and instead he sought to show Great Britain was the last great defender of Western civilization.<sup>136</sup>

The United States, indeed a leader in producing radio technology, had built up its entire communications network completely in private hands, and which was dominated by a few corporations: the American Broadcasting Company (ABC), the Columbia Broadcasting Company (CBS), and the National Broadcasting Company (NBC).<sup>137</sup>

In the depth of the Great Depression in 1933 up until 1944, President Franklin D. Roosevelt delivered a series of so-called evening “fireside chat” radio broadcasts to the

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<sup>134</sup> BBC. “History of the BBC: Overseas Programming.”

<sup>135</sup> Nelson, Michael. *War of The Black Heavens: The Battles of Western Broadcasting in the Cold War*, 2-6.

<sup>136</sup> Horten, Gerd. *Radio Goes to War: The Cultural Politics of Propaganda During WWII*. 38-39.

<sup>137</sup> Lewis, Tom. *Empire of the Air: The Men Who Made Radio*. 1-6

American people, although by means of these privately held companies. The use of radio as a media platform for direct communication with the masses in the midst of crisis, was an important part of FDR's political appeal during his four-term presidency.<sup>138</sup> While addressing the New Deal throughout the 1930s, after 1940 he started to address the war in the now famous "Arsenal of Democracy" speech in which the US began supporting the Allied war effort. Additionally, FDR's "Day of Infamy" speech as well as the official declaration of war against Japan after the December 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor was also broadcast as part of this format. In particular, the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor became a central focus of US domestic propaganda efforts against the previously popular isolationist stance and in support of the war against the Axis powers in Europe and Asia.

After the attack, on December 9, 1941, the Writers War Board as part of the already formed Office of Civilian Defense began its work on domestic propaganda, as a civilian organization, it received public funding and was established to promote the policy of the government. They launched a radio show called "Our Secret Weapon" on CBS in 1942 to counter the English language infamous propaganda programming of "Axis Sally" from Germany and "Tokyo Rose" from Japan.<sup>139</sup> The Office of Censorship together with the War Advertising Council were not government agencies but rather an association of news networks led by the Associated Press (AP) who willingly self-censored in order to maintain secrecy in a state of total war. These efforts allowed the top-secret Manhattan Project from 1942 to 1945, to remain the "best kept hidden secret of the war."<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> "The Fireside Chats: Roosevelt's Radio Talks". The White House Historical Association.

<sup>139</sup> Howell, Thomas. "The Writers' War Board: U.S. Domestic Propaganda in World War II."

<sup>140</sup> *Associated Press. Lawrence Journal-World*. "No News Leaked Out About Bomb". 1945-08-08. 5.



Prior to entering WWII, FDR had initially established in August 1940, the Office for Coordination of Commercial and Cultural Relations between the American Republics to broadcast in Spanish throughout the Western hemisphere. Later in July 1941, the Office of the Coordinator of Information was established to function as the only federal propaganda and intelligence agency of the government. Roosevelt had hired his foreign relations speechwriter and famous playwright Robert Sherwood as well as New York lawyer and Army veteran William J. Donovan to lead the taskforce. They disagreed on the use of propaganda tactics and would apply this to their leadership styles with Donovan taking over the OSS and Sherwood leading the Foreign Information Service (FIS).<sup>141</sup>

In June 1942, FDR purposefully split up the Office of the Coordinator of Information into the Office of War Information (OWI) and the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). The OSS as an intelligence agency would serve to inform the President and the US Armed Forces in combat as well as disseminate propaganda and engage in subversion and espionage. The OWI, however would act as the connection between the battle front and the home front, and was charged with creating war time propaganda through radio broadcasts, newspapers, posters, photographs, films and other forms of media, overseeing the largest-scale propaganda campaign since the CPI in WWI. In contrast, the OWI adopted an official “strategy of truth” in its propaganda, an early form of public diplomacy.<sup>142</sup> The OWI’s Domestic Radio division with NBC produced the program: “This is Our Enemy” and its Bureau of Motion Pictures worked with Hollywood movie studios to produce films that promoted patriotism and the war effort. Famous films of the time such as the *Why We Fight* series were produced under this particular arrangement. Its director Elmer Davis

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<sup>141</sup> Tyson, James L. *US International Broadcasting and National Security*. 5

<sup>142</sup> Tyson, James L. *US International Broadcasting and National Security*. 5

admittingly remarked that: “the easiest way to inject a propaganda idea into most people’s minds is to let it go through the medium of an entertainment picture when they do not realize that they are being propagandized.”<sup>143</sup>

Essentially, the war-time divisions in strategies between the OWI and OSS sowed the seeds of what would later become the US Information Agency (USIA) in 1953 and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in 1947. Both were considered to be quite influential in the home front and in mobilizing American support for the Allied victory in 1945.

In the midst of WWII, the OWI’s Overseas Radio had hired a British-American of Romanian origin by the name of John Houseman (who participated in producing the 1941 film *Citizen Kane*) and would become the first managing director of the VOA, under the leadership of Robert Sherwood who led the Foreign Information Service (FIS). Houseman is today known as the “father of the VOA.”<sup>144</sup>

### **The Voice of America: Broadcasting the United States of America to the World**

The Voice of America (VOA) would play a permanent role in forging US public diplomacy, though it was created in the midst of a wartime emergency effort, necessary to counter Axis propaganda after the US entry into WWII in 1941. The VOA was formed in 1942 as part of the FIS and began broadcasting from San Francisco via the General Electric Company to the US-held territory of the Philippines in English and Spanish.<sup>145</sup> On February 1, 1942, its first official broadcast was recorded in New York and titled “Voices from America” which was broadcast to Europe on February 24, in English, French and German with this audio message played after the “Battle Hymn of the Republic” song:

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<sup>143</sup> Koppes, Clayton R., and Gregory D. Black.

“What to Show the World: The Office of War Information and Hollywood, 1942-1945.”

<sup>144</sup> VOA, “VOA through the Years”

<sup>145</sup> Nelson, Michael. *War of The Black Heavens: The Battles of Western Broadcasting in the Cold War*, 5-6.

“We bring you Voices from America. Daily at this time we shall speak to you about America and the war. The news may be good or bad. We shall tell you the truth.”<sup>146</sup> By the end of WWII, VOA, employed more than 3,000 personnel and broadcast 160 hours a day in 39 languages, emerging second to the BBC’s worldwide lead.<sup>147</sup> During the war, the Americans and British did not regularly jam enemy propaganda broadcasting; while the Russians and Germans employed electronic interference. The Germans and British on the Western front engaged in a new tactic called “black broadcasting”; pretending to be a domestic broadcaster disseminating disinformation critical to the war effort.<sup>148</sup>

The VOA as a new actor on the world stage played an essential role in unifying and informing listeners across war-torn regions, contributing to a sense of shared purpose among Allied nations. VOA understood that in order to effectively counter enemy propaganda, it had to gain and maintain credibility with its overseas audience by objectively reporting the news, although it faced some challenges in how to balance news reporting on initial military setbacks against the Axis.<sup>149</sup>

Another aspect of the VOA’s purpose aside from wartime reporting was to spread a positive message about America’s unique position in world history across war-ravaged Europe and Asia, reminding people of America’s growing presence in the world as the war wrapped up. The VOA advertised the “American Dream” of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness as well as the Capitalist lifestyle, intended to capture listeners’

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<sup>146</sup> VOA, “VOA through the Years.”

<sup>147</sup> Tyson, James L. *US International Broadcasting and National Security*. 6-10

<sup>148</sup> Briggs, Asa. *History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom*, 433-34

<sup>149</sup> VOA, “VOA through the Years.”

“hearts and minds” while supporting US military objectives, including the dropping of the two atomic bombs which ultimately led to the surrender of Japan.<sup>150</sup>

As the war officially ended on September 2, 1945, the VOA was transferred to the US State Department and much of its programming was reduced and eliminated, having achieved its purpose. However, between 1945 to 1948, as the Cold War conflict ensued in international relations between the USSR and US, the VOA had to revive and repurpose itself, making sure to reverse course of its established previous messaging about the Soviet Union as a former allied power.<sup>151</sup> This was critical, as the VOA under its supervising wartime agency OWI was allowed to promote a positive image of the Soviets during the war, in line with fact that the Soviets played the critical role in the defeat of the Nazis by May 9, 1945 and suffered the highest amount of casualties, estimated at 27 million, in what is considered to be, the deadliest conflict ever fought in human history. This important post-war reality would have to be downplayed by the US by emphasizing the then present-danger that the USSR posed to US interests around the world as the new enemy.<sup>152</sup>

After nearly 2 years of revamping itself, the VOA on February 17, 1947, began broadcasting in Russian toward the Soviet Union.<sup>153</sup> An year later, on February 3, 1948, the USSR counteracted by deliberately jamming VOA transmissions.<sup>154</sup> (The jamming of radio broadcasts will be explored in the last section of this chapter). The US immediately claimed all jamming as illegal, based on Article 44 of the Atlantic City Regulations of 1947, which were ironically signed off by the USSR and had stated that:

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<sup>150</sup> Heil, Alan L. *Chapter 3: The Voice of America: A Brief Cold War History* in Johnson. A Ross, and R. Eugene Parta. *Cold War Broadcasting: Impact on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*, 25-31.

<sup>151</sup> Heil, Alan L. *Chapter 3: The Voice of America: A Brief Cold War History*, 25-31.

<sup>152</sup> Tyson, James L. *US International Broadcasting and National Security*. 15

<sup>153</sup> VOA. “70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of VOA Broadcasts to Russia.”

<sup>154</sup> Nelson, Michael. *War of The Black Heavens: The Battles of Western Broadcasting in the Cold War*, 20.

All (radio) stations, whatever their purpose, must be established and operated in such a manner as not to cause harmful interference to the radio service or communications...<sup>155</sup>

The US Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948 known as the Smith-Mundt Act created the US Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy as a permanent agency to advise on changes to public diplomacy efforts with the start of the Cold War.<sup>156</sup> The VOA was bolstered through this legislation, as during the war, it operated as a temporary emergency information operation with nearly 75% of its output being handled by private broadcasters even though it was public program.<sup>157</sup> Later, the VOA would receive more funding to acquire its own transmitters; improving on its first one from 1944 based near Cincinnati, Ohio and called Bethany Relay Station alongside operations on the Atlantic East Coast and the Pacific West Coast among other locations, and its headquarters relocated in 1954 to the National Mall near the US Congress in Washington, DC.<sup>158</sup>

As the Cold War heated up between 1947 and 1948, President Truman was advised by the newly created National Security Council (NSC), that the US needed to do more in terms of these information initiatives against the USSR, and around this time Truman announced the so-called “Campaign for Truth” was the seed sown for the Free Europe Committee (FEC) and the CIA’s covert creation of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty.

During the “Red Scare” of the 1950s, Senator Joseph McCarthy’s allegations of Communist subversion and espionage within the US government especially targeted the State Department which supervised the VOA. After an investigation, the Hoover commission recommended to President Eisenhower to move VOA to a new United States

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<sup>155</sup> Nelson, Michael. *War of The Black Heavens: The Battles of Western Broadcasting in the Cold War*, 24.

<sup>156</sup> USAGM. “US Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948.”

<sup>157</sup> Nelson, Michael. *War of The Black Heavens: The Battles of Western Broadcasting in the Cold War*, 36.

<sup>158</sup> VOA Museum. “What to See.” <https://voamuseum.org/what-to-see/>

Information Agency (USIA) in August 1953.<sup>159</sup> The VOA during the 1950s sought to toughen its messaging under its director Foy Kohler who told Congress in 1950 that the VOA's "broadcast output will be practically doubled...as propaganda must be made a potent weapon in our effort to avoid another great conflict..."<sup>160</sup>

The Space Race which began after the Sputnik moment in 1957 pushed the VOA toward messaging against a lagging US effort in this new contest. As early as 1954, Willis Conover's much listened to *Music USA* and *Jazz America* programs was added, as well.<sup>161</sup> Soviet jamming of the VOA decreased during the Soviet-American cultural exchange agreements leading up to the American National Exhibition in Moscow in 1959 where the famous televised "Kitchen debate" between Khrushchev and Nixon occurred.

During the early 1960s, despite setbacks in foreign policy over Cuba leading to the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, during which all American broadcasting was jammed up again by the Soviets, President Kennedy was eager to respond to many critiques as made by *The New York Times* that "the Voice (VOA) still betrays a tone of stridency not too dissimilar from that of Radio Moscow."<sup>162</sup> JFK appointed Edward R. Murrow to lead the USIA and reform the VOA as a neutral news agency to be independent from the strategic foreign policy goals of the State Department. Under his leadership, the VOA was to go back to emulating the BBC, as a state-subsidized journalism-only operation with a well-deserved reputation for independence and accuracy.<sup>163</sup> Whereas Murrow argued that the VOA would be more valuable for US foreign policy if it was not held up by strategy and could

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<sup>159</sup> Heil, Alan L. *Chapter 3: The Voice of America: A Brief Cold War History*, 26.

<sup>160</sup> Tyson, James L. *US International Broadcasting and National Security*. 28

<sup>161</sup> VOA, "Willis Conover, Jazz Icon."

<sup>162</sup> Ghodsee, Kristen R. "An American Tale: How Cold War officialdom made the world safe for propaganda", 41

<sup>163</sup> Schumacher, Frank. "*Murrow's Cold War: Public Diplomacy for the Kennedy Administration*."

function as an independent news agency, Congress had insisted that it must promote US interests abroad.<sup>164</sup> While these plans did not manifest right away, the USIA did eventually endorse a VOA charter which had been drafted by its employees between 1958 and 1959.<sup>165</sup> However, this charter was not made official until 1976, when Congress sponsored legislation creating the VOA Charter Public Law 94-350. On July 12, 1976, President Gerald Ford formally approved it. This VOA charter set forth the three principles that: 1) “VOA news will be accurate, objective and comprehensive.”, that 2) “VOA will represent America, not any single segment of American society, and will therefore present a balanced and comprehensive projection of significant American thought and institutions” and that 3) “VOA will present the policies of the United States clearly and effectively.”<sup>166</sup>

Throughout the late 1960s and into the 1970s, VOA would become the world’s leading international broadcaster.<sup>167</sup> Although this occurred during a time when the American image abroad was increasingly being challenged by Soviet propaganda especially throughout the Third World. The VOA had to honestly cover controversial developments concerning the US, starting with the assassination of President Kennedy on November 22, 1963 and later concerning the anti-war protests against its failed War in Vietnam from 1965 to 1975, the Watergate scandal involving President Nixon in 1974, and the Congressional Church Committee from 1975 to 1976. This commitment to truthful news, increased its integrity with its foreign audience, allowing it expand globally.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Ghodsee, Kristen R. “An American Tale: How Cold War officialdom made the world safe for propaganda”, 41

<sup>165</sup> VOA, “Mission in the 1960s and 1970s.”

<sup>166</sup> VOA. “The VOA Charter.”

<sup>167</sup> VOA, “VOA through the Years.”

<sup>168</sup> VOA, “VOA through the Years.”

VOA's role and impact alongside RFE/RL during the 1970s and 1980s and the end of the Cold War will be covered later in the final chapters. From 1978 to 1982, the USIA would briefly be renamed as US International Communications Agency (USICA) to emphasize the structural change that had just occurred. The USIA would oversee the VOA until 1999, when it was renamed the Broadcasting Board of Governors and in 2018, the organization was restructured as the US Agency for Global Media (USAGM).<sup>169</sup>

Today, this US Agency for Global Media supervises both the VOA and the RFE/RL together. More recently in the year 2022, the VOA marked the 80 year anniversary since its formation during WWII and likewise in 2020 and 2023, RFE/RL had marked their respective 70 year anniversaries since their inception with the Cold War, as well.

### **Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty: A Much More Provocative Propaganda Strategy for Waging the Cold War**

Today, RFE/RL is considered to be among the most effective and comprehensive media organizations in the world, producing radio, television and online programs in nations across Europe and Eurasia.<sup>170</sup> Originally, Radio Free Europe (RFE) and Radio Liberty (RL) were separate organizations funded through the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) after it was established on September 18, 1947. That same year, the newly established National Security Council (NSC) issued directive NSC 4-A in order to “initiate and conduct covert psychological operations designed to counteract Soviet and Soviet inspired activities, which constitute a threat to world peace.”<sup>171</sup> This psychological warfare campaign included a plan to create such “surrogate” radio stations that would be intended

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<sup>169</sup> USAGM, “Who We Are.”

<sup>170</sup> RFE/RL, “History.”

<sup>171</sup> Cummings, Richard. *Cold War Radio: The Dangerous History of American Broadcasting in Europe, 1950-1989*, 6.



to target the Soviet satellite states but would not be officially connected to the US government as was the Voice of America. The idea of American radio broadcasting in Russian toward the Soviet Union from Germany originated with General Lucius Clay, the US military commander in Berlin who was behind the German-language radio station, Radio in the American Sector (RIAS) formed in 1946, a program that continued until 1993, as the GDR did not get included as a target country of RFE/RL.<sup>172</sup>

The main architects at the inception for RFE/RL however were George F. Kennan (from the State Department) who had issued his “Long Telegram” from Moscow in 1946 and published the 1947 *Foreign Affairs* article titled “The Sources of Soviet Conduct” together with Frank G. Wisner of the OSS (now CIA) who became the first director of its Office of Policy Coordination (OPC). Kennan’s grand strategy of “containing Communism” was institutionalized through the 1947 Truman Doctrine, but the idea of RFE/RL as an institution, would link the ideological to the geopolitical warfare.

The National Security Council in 1948 issued other directives including NSC 20/4, which called for the US to “place the maximum strain on the Soviet structure of power and particularly on the relationships between Moscow and the satellite countries.”<sup>173</sup> As well as, NSC 10/2 which defined the covert operations that were to be organized by the CIA; these included the formation of “liberation committees” to engage in “propaganda activities” led by recruited and cleared former citizens of the target countries who spoke

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<sup>172</sup> Cummings, Richard. *Cold War Frequencies, CIA Clandestine Radio Broadcasting to Eastern Europe*, 2-3.

<sup>173</sup> US Department of State: Office of the Historian Foreign Relations of the United States, 1948: Report to the President by the National Security Council. NSC 20/4. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1948v01p2/d60>

the language and understood the situation on the ground. This set up the operational groundwork to use the émigrés for covert radio broadcasting operations.<sup>174</sup>

*The Inauguration of Organized Political Warfare* was the report drafted by Kennan, that defined political warfare as the “logical application of Clausewitz’s doctrine in time of peace... (by) operations...ranging from ‘white’ propaganda to ‘black’ psychological warfare and even the encouragement of underground resistance in hostile states.”<sup>175</sup> In the *Utilization of Refuges from the Soviet World* he concluded that “the most effective method of penetrating the iron curtain would be via clandestine radio situated in an artificially created sterile area of our occupied zone.”<sup>176</sup>

The Free Europe Committee (FEP) was set up in New York on May 17, 1949 though it was incorporated under the name of National Committee for a Free Europe (NCFE) on June 1, 1949.<sup>177</sup> NCFE, Inc. was submitted to New York State for incorporation approval by the New York City law firm, where incoming CIA director Allen Dulles had worked. This front organization also included incoming President Dwight Eisenhower as well as Henry Luce, publisher of *Time*, *Fortune* and *Life* Magazines among other members. Interestingly enough, the legal language of the organization overtly stated that “no part of the activities of the corporation shall be the carrying on of propaganda or otherwise attempting to influence legislation.”<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> US Department of State: Office of the Historian. Foreign Relations of the United States, 1945-1950: Emergence of the Intelligence Establishment. 292. National Security Council Directive on Office of Special Projects. NSC 10/2. June 18, 1948: <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1945-50Intel/d292>

<sup>175</sup> Cummings, Richard. *Cold War Frequencies*,  
*CIA Clandestine Radio Broadcasting to Eastern Europe*, 8-9.

<sup>176</sup> Cummings, Richard. *Cold War Frequencies*,  
*CIA Clandestine Radio Broadcasting to Eastern Europe*, 8-9.

<sup>177</sup> Cummings, Richard. *Cold War Radio*:  
*The Dangerous History of American Broadcasting in Europe, 1950-1989*, 9-10.

<sup>178</sup> Cummings, Richard. *Cold War Radio*:  
*The Dangerous History of American Broadcasting in Europe, 1950-1989*, 9-10.

The Committee created the “Crusade for Freedom” which purposefully coincided with President Truman’s already declared “Campaign for Truth” in which he stated that: Propaganda is one of the most powerful weapons the Communists have in this struggle. Deceit, distortion and lies are systemically used by them as a matter of deliberate policy. This propaganda can be overcome by the truth... We must make our serves heard round the world in a great campaign of truth!”<sup>179</sup>

The Crusade for Freedom was inaugurated soon after by Eisenhower in a televised speech on Labor Day 1950 introducing the initiative and asking the public for donations to fight Communism.<sup>180</sup> This Crusade for Freedom as a successful propaganda campaign involving the intelligence community, mass media, academia, private industry, religious leaders and average Americans, lasted from 1950 to 1960 and resulted in more than 16 million Americans contributing over \$1.3 million in “truth dollars” to the cause, though these were only supplemental donations and the overwhelming majority of its operations were covertly funded.<sup>181</sup> This campaign had used the Liberty Bell as the symbol of the fundraising initiative which was indented to cement in the public view, that the launching of the station would have been as a private effort and also for CIA, plausible deniability.

The paradox of RFE/RL is that an organization dedicated to the truth was founded on a lie.<sup>182</sup> In 1949, RFE began recruiting émigrés from the five target “captive nations” (Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Bulgaria) and trained them at the operational office in New York. Later, a facility near the English Garden in Munich, West Germany was built to serve as the headquarters.<sup>183</sup> The records were made in Germany but

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<sup>179</sup> Cummings, Richard. *Radio Free Europe’s Crusade for Freedom*, 20.

<sup>180</sup> Cummings, Richard. *Radio Free Europe’s Crusade for Freedom*, 21-22.

<sup>181</sup> Cummings, Richard. *Radio Free Europe’s Crusade for Freedom*, 1-10.

<sup>182</sup> Nelson, Michael. *War of The Black Heavens: The Battles of Western Broadcasting in the Cold War*, 43.

<sup>183</sup> Nelson, Michael. *War of The Black Heavens: The Battles of Western Broadcasting in the Cold War*, 46-7.

were broadcast on shortwave and medium wave transition centers located in Germany, Spain and Portugal as well as Taiwan, until the 1970s. RFE/RL's first manager Paul B. Henze in reflecting the attitude of the organization at that time remarked in retrospect that: Radio Free Europe was an experiment...its success was far from foreordained. <sup>184</sup>

On July 4, 1950, Radio Free Europe (RFE) broadcast its first program to Czechoslovakia, with the press release emphasizing the covert operation's goal, in that it was organized and sponsored by "a group of private American citizens." <sup>185</sup> RFE's first broadcast made the following statement about its intent and purpose as an organization: We will speak to you freely and without restraint...Thus, to speak for freedom, Americans and the democratic leaders exiled from Eastern Europe have united to bring you the voice of Radio Free Europe. <sup>186</sup>

On July 14, 1950, RFE made its initial broadcasts to the remaining Eastern bloc nations: Poland, Hungary, Romania and later on August 11 to Bulgaria. <sup>187</sup> Yugoslavia would not be targeted, although VOA had a Serbo-Croatian program, and East Germany was covered under the RIAS. By spring of 1951, a full schedule of programming would include any news not covered by the state-owned local domestic media, as well as topics like religion, science, sports, music and discussions of banned music and literature. In this sense, radio propaganda had to contain two distinct things; the interesting content but also the programming schedule. While, central to the program schedule was indeed reporting the news and providing political commentary, successful radio propaganda had to include

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<sup>184</sup> Henze, Paul B. *Chapter 1: RFE's Early Years: Evolution of Broadcast Policy and Evidence of Broadcast Impact*, 3.

<sup>185</sup> Cummings, Richard. *Cold War Radio: The Dangerous History of American Broadcasting in Europe, 1950-1989*, 10.

<sup>186</sup> Cummings, Richard. *Cold War Radio: The Dangerous History of American Broadcasting in Europe, 1950-1989*, 11.

<sup>187</sup> RFE/RL. "History."

interviews and forums about culture and comedy, drama and music, and so on.<sup>188</sup> RFE programming in contrast to the VOA or BBC did not broadcast in hour long intervals but instead was on air throughout the day, starting at 5 AM and continuing past 12 AM.<sup>189</sup>

Also, RFE did have to speak in the name of the US government or simply broadcast the American news in a foreign language, this meant that it could present a variety of contentious arguments and narratives without ever presenting its message as being neutral. In fact, its messages were not supposed to be neutral and could be openly hostile and provocative on purpose, because after all, these radios were broadcasting the uncensored opinions of private citizens, émigrés or even dissidents who encouraged protest against each of the Communist regimes through its talk shows. Furthermore, when RFE reported the news, that reporting did have to be factual but not necessarily objective like that of VOA, as it had to gain credibility with the audience but also because that way, the local state-owned home service news station's news propaganda could be disbelieved or debunked.<sup>190</sup> RFE also had to be quick to report the news, aiming to announce a breaking news story before the home service press decides how the story should be altered in accordance with censorship. Ultimately, RFE's value was in being a substitute for the home service radio station in the minds of the audience, who can tune in as if it were Radio Warsaw or Radio Prague.<sup>191</sup> Indeed, that is the reason each of Radio Free Europe's five "captive nations" on air programs were called "Voice of Free Poland", "Voice of Free Romania" or "Voice of Free Bulgaria" although not the "Voice of America" as the VOA

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<sup>188</sup> Holt, Robert R. *Radio Free Europe*. 4-5.

<sup>189</sup> Holt, Robert R. *Radio Free Europe*. 4-5.

<sup>190</sup> Henze, Paul B. *Chapter 1: RFE's Early Years: Evolution of Broadcast Policy and Evidence of Broadcast Impact*, 13.

<sup>191</sup> Holt, Robert R. *Radio Free Europe*. 43

already broadcast the news in each foreign language, but what the RFE as an operation did was much more compelling and provocative, in the American strategy to try to win “hearts and minds” for Western values and against Soviet values at the start of the Cold War. <sup>192</sup>

In addition, to its initial operational center in New York and main headquarters at the foot of the Bavarian Alps in Munich, local hubs were established in West Berlin for Germany, for Austria in Vienna, Salzburg and Graz, for Greece in Thessaloniki and Athens and for Turkey in Istanbul. <sup>193</sup> All these cities located along the entirety of the Iron Curtain all had field offices to supporting in recruiting political refugees to work for RFE.

Eventually, RFE/RL together with their staff of Eastern European émigrés and refugees, who would come to know exactly the type of information operations that they were engaging in, became a “talent pool” source of agents, contacts, information and cover for operations to be utilized by the CIA but also to be tracked by the KGB and the satellite state secret services. <sup>194</sup> The CIA initially had much bigger plans for its FEC beyond a news operation; it was envisioned as political process for training émigrés to bring back freedom to their homeland, once an opportunity appeared to do so. <sup>195</sup> Also, the start of Radio Free Europe (RFE) in 1949-1950 is actually slightly different than that of Radio Liberty (RL) in 1953, although both merged in 1976 and today operate quite similarly, in their inception, they were two different projects that shared a similar approach than that of the VOA. <sup>196</sup> Thus, while RFE began in New York, RL actually originated in Frankfurt, and at some point they were both moved to their headquarters in Munich but overseen by Washington.

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<sup>192</sup> Holt, Robert R. *Radio Free Europe*. 43-45.

<sup>193</sup> Holt, Robert R. *Radio Free Europe*. 104.

<sup>194</sup> Nelson, Michael. *War of The Black Heavens: The Battles of Western Broadcasting in the Cold War*, 100-01.

<sup>195</sup> Johnson. Ross, A. *Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty: the CIA years and beyond*. 21.

<sup>196</sup> RFE/RL, “History.”

As with RFE, RL was created by a CIA covert front committee, this one called the American Committee for Liberation from Bolshevism formed on January 1951. Like, RFE it was covert but RL was part of a more complex CIA Project QKACTIVE which had originally called it the Committee for the Liberation of the Peoples of Russia.<sup>197</sup> This happened to be the same exact name for an organization of Nazi collaborators working against the Soviet Union during WWII, so eventually the committee itself was dissolved.

Unlike RFE, RL had no public fundraising campaign, and unlike RFE, RL had some serious issues with the émigrés it recruited as there were of course, problems in unifying ethnic differences between Russian speakers and other peoples from the Soviet Union.<sup>198</sup> Also, due to the legacy of the Russian Civil War, having White Russians preach against Communism seemed to be the de facto approach that created particular issues that did not exist with the émigrés from the satellite states of Eastern Europe.

On March 1, 1953, Radio Liberation from Bolshevism (which was in 1956 renamed Radio Liberation) and only in 1959 would it keep the name Radio Liberty as it began broadcasting in Russian toward the Soviet Union.<sup>199</sup> In 1954, it was broadcasting in a total of 17 Soviet languages including major programs in Ukrainian, Belarussian, Georgian, Armenian, Azerbaijani, Kazakh, Uzbek, Tadzhik, Turkmen among others.

Although Radio Liberty experienced some organizational issues early on, it happened to schedule its launch around the same time that the infamous leader of the Soviet Union, Stalin happened to die. Stalin might have died before March 5, but his death was

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<sup>197</sup> Cummings, Richard. *Cold War Frequencies, CIA Clandestine Radio Broadcasting to Eastern Europe*, 47-52.

<sup>198</sup> Sosin, Gene. *Chapter 2: Goals of Radio Liberty in Cold War Broadcasting*, 17-24.

<sup>199</sup> Cummings, Richard. *Cold War Radio: The Dangerous History of American Broadcasting in Europe*, 28-33.

not announced until a few days later, even so, it was the same week as Radio Liberty began broadcasting to the people of the Soviet Union who were for the first time, free from Stalin's iron fist which had ruled over the totalitarian superstate for nearly 30 years.

RFE and RL had a lot more in common than the VOA or BBC, but they did develop distinctly, and took on different approaches in their broadcasts: RFE had formed a more dynamic five program radio broadcasting system with programming that challenged the Soviet narrative. By comparison, due to the nature of RL's wide ranging audience and other issues, RL had some provocative programming but tended to rely on a more traditional approach to news reporting.<sup>200</sup> So, while RFE was respectively targeting the ethnic Polish, Hungarian, Czechoslovak, Romanian and Bulgarian audiences, all of which had an independent nation-state with some level of democratic traditions prior to WWII and prior to WWI as parts of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (with the exception of Romania and Bulgaria). RL had employed émigrés who did not always agree with each other, to then target a vast Soviet audience that had very little memory of any sort of democratic traditions and who had been subjected to ideological totalitarian propaganda since WWI.

Both RFE and RL essentially contested the Communist philosophy, the "Soviet Empire" and its occupation of Eastern Europe, although their approach to fomenting any sort of opposition or dissident movements could never be the same. Both RFE and RL broadcasts could take an aggressive stance to draw attention to the discrepancies between Communist regime propaganda and the reality for the populations living under them,

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<sup>200</sup> Henze, Paul B. *Chapter 1: RFE's Early Years: Evolution of Broadcast Policy and Evidence of Broadcast Impact* in Johnson, A. Ross. *Cold War Broadcasting: Impact on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*. 3-16.



providing alternative perspectives and unfiltered information while being an outlet for cultural, intellectual, and artistic expression, intended to engage audiences.<sup>201</sup>

Both did employ confrontational critiques on Communism while promoting the democratic ideals of freedom and human rights and broadly expanding on intellectual and cultural dialogue. Finally, both had faced questions of suspected covert funding, editorial independence, and striking the right balance between fulfilling public diplomacy objectives and adhering to journalistic standards.<sup>202</sup> RFE/RL strategies inevitably changed over time in response to changing geopolitics. Throughout the height of the Cold War in the 1950s and 1960s, RFE/RL continued to expand and even overpowered the USIA's VOA in a contest for government funding and for effectiveness in their respective propaganda and public diplomacy strategies, at the time.<sup>203</sup>

Though, RL gained some opportunities in broadcasting alternative messages that inspired some sort of social change and liberalization right away after the 1953 death of Stalin, the subsequent Communist party's internal leadership struggles and the 1956 secret speech denouncing Stalinism as delivered by Khrushchev.<sup>204</sup>

Meanwhile, RFE experienced some opportunities broadcasting to the Eastern bloc nations during the June 1953 East German uprising but suffered some serious setbacks during the crushed Hungarian Revolution of October 1956. The reason is that with its name being to "free Europe", Radio Free Europe broadcast messages assuring the Hungarians of Western support in their uprising for freedom against the regime, so when the protest was crushed by the Soviet military, on one hand, the USSR with its own propaganda and public

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<sup>201</sup> Sosin, Gene. *Chapter 2: Goals of Radio Liberty in Cold War Broadcasting*, 17-24.

<sup>202</sup> RFE/RL. "History."

<sup>203</sup> Tyson, James L. *US International Broadcasting and National Security*. 17-22.

<sup>204</sup> Sosin, Gene. *Chapter 2: Goals of Radio Liberty in Cold War Broadcasting*, 17-24.

diplomacy “accused” RFE as being CIA-supported but also, resulted in the Hungarian people feeling betrayed by what they had heard over the radio, as the West did not and could not do much in protest against the USSR for its invasion of Hungary. This sentiment was recorded by a refugee who listened to the broadcasts prior to the uprising:

The wrong was not with Radio Free Europe. It was partly our fault for trusting in the words. It was partly America’s fault for thinking that words can be used so loosely. Words like ‘freedom’...‘liberation’ have meanings, stand for something. Believe me when I say that you cannot tell Hungarians or Bulgarians or Poles every day for six years to love liberty and then sit back philosophically and say, ‘but the Hungarians and Bulgarians and Poles mustn’t do anything about liberty. They must remember that we’re only using words’ Such words, to a man in chains, are not merely words. They are weapons whereby he can break his chains.

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Finally, while this was more damaging for US efforts than anything else, in the aftermath, the Hungarian government’s investigation determined in a report that “subversive broadcasts from Radio Free Europe, backed by dollars from America and functioning on the territory of West Germany played an essential role” in instigating the uprisings.<sup>206</sup> In this case, this was not exaggeration but rather the correct conclusion.

Furthermore, Soviet and satellite state secret security services increased jamming across the board to counter the threat of Western propaganda.<sup>207</sup> Even in the midst of the cultural exchanges, when the Soviets stopped jamming the VOA, they expressed explicit concerns only with RFE/RL.<sup>208</sup> In a sense, they had admitted to RFE/RL’s successful effectiveness in its information operations.

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<sup>205</sup> Cummings, Richard. *Cold War Radio: The Dangerous History of American Broadcasting in Europe*, 26.

<sup>206</sup> Cummings, Richard. *Cold War Radio: The Dangerous History of American Broadcasting in Europe*, 26.

<sup>207</sup> Ghodsee, Kristen R. “An American Tale: How Cold War officialdom made the world safe for propaganda”, 41

<sup>208</sup> Nelson, *War of The Black Heavens: The Battles of Western Broadcasting in the Cold War*, 93.

On the topic of electronic interference in broadcasting known as jamming: which can either be skywave, meaning long distance or groundwave, meaning short distance. But basically, in order to interfere with the radio waves, the jammer would create some sort of artificial noise by means of a machine in front of a microphone, which itself would be broadcasted at the same frequency and direction intended for the target broadcasts, resulting in the recorded content being drowned out by loud military music blasting.<sup>209</sup>

The most common technique by which this is done, according an RFE engineer, is to “employ a basic transmitter, tuned to the same channel, modulated by random rubles, rattles, buzz-saw noises, and high pitched shrieks in a repeating cycle.”<sup>210</sup> Naturally, an increased amount of jamming might mean that the regime is reacting to internal or external events that are not connected to the program content of the radio broadcasting itself, so it does not always necessarily indicate the effectiveness of the information operations.

Therefore, RFE/RL’s effectiveness was quite difficult to assess quantifiably or even qualitatively, although mechanisms of measurements did include a Research and Audience Analysis Section, which published a monthly report on target countries which includes the possible regime responses, and also the audience analysis assessment memoranda; which assessed trends in radio registration and the possible trends in changing public attitudes in target countries over time (later examined in Chapters 4 and 5).<sup>211</sup> Additionally, the Free Europe Committee had kept an internal publication called “the Black Book” which would

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<sup>209</sup> Holt, Robert R. *Radio Free Europe*, 112.

<sup>210</sup> Holt, Robert R. *Radio Free Europe*, 115.

<sup>211</sup> Holt, Robert R. *Radio Free Europe*, 122.

track how target governments reacted over time to the broadcasts.<sup>212</sup> This collected information was later integrated into the RFE/RL administrative decision-making process.

An important measure of RFE/RL's effectiveness could be any direct regime response; including criticism of RFE/RL, disclosed comments that reflect concern about audience growth, or an action that goes beyond just jamming, such as targeting and tracking down RFE/RL employees.<sup>213</sup> A common method that the CIA used to measure the effectiveness of these radio broadcasts was to monitor how the regimes reacted in public; such as in 1959, when Politburo member and Minister of Culture Yekaterina Furtseva spoke about strengthening Marxist-Leninist ideology in response to Western broadcasters: ...at the service of the organizers of the Cold War are all sorts of private committees, funds and unions, a numerous radio stations with provocative names like 'Radio Liberty' and 'Radio Free Europe'.<sup>214</sup>

A decade later during the détente era, in a 1969 meeting between KGB and East German Stasi officials, these CIA sponsored clandestine radio stations were mentioned, as “a particularly important role in the struggle against the Soviet Union is played by radio propaganda.”<sup>215</sup> Also, the CIA that same year had described RFE/RL as being the: Oldest, largest, most costly, and probably most successful covert action projects aimed at the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> Cummings, Richard. *Cold War Radio: The Dangerous History of American Broadcasting in Europe*, 17.

<sup>213</sup> Holt, Robert R. *Radio Free Europe*, 135.

<sup>214</sup> Cummings, Richard. *Cold War Frequencies, CIA Clandestine Radio Broadcasting to Eastern Europe*, 18.

<sup>215</sup> Stasi Note on Meeting with KGB Officials, 13 November 1969. Wilson Center, Digital Archive: <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/stasi-note-meeting-kgb-officials-13-november-1969>

<sup>216</sup> “RFE/RL Memorandum for the 303 Committee, 1/27/1969,” Foreign Relations, 1969-1976, Vol. 29, Document 28, 81. <https://2001-2009.state.gov/documents/organization/97929.pdf>

That moment marked perhaps the peak of the CIA's covert coordination behind the FEC, however its operations would experience their biggest challenges in the decade ahead. This turning point had its beginnings as early as 1967, when the March edition of *Ramparts Magazine* (which existed from 1962 to 1975 and was a prominent anti-war, counter-culture publication) had published an article titled *A Short Account of International Student Politics and the Cold War with Particular Reference to the NSA, CIA, etc.*<sup>217</sup> The investigative journalist Sol Stern alleged that the National Student Association (NSA), a confederation of college administrations and student governments (in existence from 1947 to 1978) had been coordinating with and was funded covertly by the CIA.<sup>218</sup>

The first time these allegations concerning the NSA-CIA clandestine relationship appeared in *The New York Times* was on February 14<sup>219</sup> and 16<sup>220</sup> 1967, a month prior to the *Ramparts* piece. These articles' allegations led to the CBS television network broadcasting a special report titled "In the Pay of the CIA: An American Dilemma" with Mike Wallace on March 13, 1967, which then investigated more allegations about the CIA's role in RFE/RL going back to the Crusade for Freedom in the 1950s.<sup>221</sup> Meanwhile, *The New York Times* characterized RFE/RL as "an intelligence agency operation represented as a non-profit enterprise."<sup>222</sup> Later, CIA operative Thomas Branden wrote an op-ed in the *Saturday Evening Post* saying "I'm glad the CIA is immoral" and defending

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<sup>217</sup> *Ramparts Magazine*, March 1967, pp. 29-38

<sup>218</sup> *Ramparts Magazine*, March 1967, pp. 29-38

<sup>219</sup> Sheenan, Niel. "A Student Group Concedes It Took Funds from C.I.A." February 14, 1967. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/1967/02/14/archives/a-student-group-concedes-it-took-funds-from-cia-national.html>

<sup>220</sup> Sheenan, Niel. "Foundations linked to C.I.A. are found to subsidize 4 other youth organizations; Funds identified as go-betweens one student group, a rival of Soviet-controlled Body, was established in 1950," February 16, 1967. The New York Times, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1967/02/16/82591745.html?>

<sup>221</sup> Johnson. Ross, A. *Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty: the CIA years and beyond*, 204.

<sup>222</sup> Johnson. Ross, A. *Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty: the CIA years and beyond*, 205.

its clandestine operations.<sup>223</sup> This contributed to further growing public outrage that eventually would manifest in the first serious crack in “a wall of secrecy” around the US government, that had existed for over 20 years.<sup>224</sup> In response, President Johnson quickly announced publicly that the CIA has been and will be forbidden from funding private organizations, and issued a statement but not an official executive order.<sup>225</sup> However, because LBJ explicitly did not explicitly issue an executive order, the CIA clandestine funding for RFE/RL could legally continue for another four to five years until 1971.<sup>226</sup>

From 1967 to 1971, public attention was focused more on the US military in Vietnam and the domestic anti-war movement, however with the release of the classified Pentagon Papers concerning this topic, public interest was redirected back to uncovering government secrecy. This particular problem was compounded when the Watergate scandal unfolded between 1972 and 1974, a moment when the global and American perception of the US government hit rock bottom.

The first public official to acknowledge CIA support for RFE/RL was Senator Clifford Chase (R-NJ) in 1971, and in response a so-called 303 Senate subcommittee created a “Radio Study Group” composed of CIA, Department of Defense and Department of State employees who naturally recommended that despite the public scandal, due to national security, the CIA funding should continue.<sup>227</sup> During this Congressional

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<sup>223</sup> Thomas W. Braden, *The Saturday Evening Post*, 20 May 1967, 10-14.

<sup>224</sup> Johnson. Ross, A. *Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty: the CIA years and beyond*, 202-204.

<sup>225</sup> “LBJ tells CIA to end Subsidies.” March 29, 1967. Washington.

<https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP75-00149R000400220028-7.pdf>

<sup>226</sup> Vries, Tity. “The 1967 Central Intelligence Agency Scandal: Catalyst in a Transforming Relationship between State and People.” *The Journal of American History* 98, no. 4 (2012): 1075–92.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/41509576>.

<sup>227</sup> US Department of State: Office of the Historian Foreign Relations of the United States, “Memorandum for the 303 Committee, Washington, January 27, 1969.” Foreign Relations, 1969-1976, Volume 29, Document 28, 93. <https://2001-2009.state.gov/documents/organization/97929.pdf>

investigation, some suggested that funding should be eliminated entirely for the FEC and its associated agencies. As the debate dragged on, and no determining decision was made, the CIA released a report defending the need for the two programs, titled *Tensions in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe: Challenge and Opportunity*.<sup>228</sup> President Nixon and his National Security Adviser and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger agreed with the CIA's argument, and led an effort to push back against defunding the programs.<sup>229</sup>

Nevertheless on June 30, 1971, the CIA officially ended funding for RFE/RL.<sup>230</sup> From 1971 to 1973, the stations and their previous work and records were studied extensively by information specialists at the Library of Congress, the Comptroller General (General Accounting Office) and by a special Presidential commission under Dr. Milton S. Eisenhower which issued a report that recommended the creation of an International Broadcasting Board (BIB) to be established in October 1973.<sup>231</sup>

By 1973, in another report on the matter, titled *The Right to Know*, the CIA recommended to Congress that RFE and RL under the BIB, be reorganized into one organization whose budget would be determined by Congress. The merger of RFE/RL was finalized by 1976, right in the midst of a series of serious investigations uncovering wrongdoings that occurred within the US Intelligence Community.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> "Memorandum for the 303 Committee, Washington, January 27, 1969." Foreign Relations, 1969-1976, Volume 29, Document 28, 93. <https://2001-2009.state.gov/documents/organization/97929.pdf>

<sup>229</sup> US Department of State: Office of the Historian Foreign Relations of the United States, "Memorandum from the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs, Henry Kissinger to President Nixon, Tab A," Foreign Relations, 1969-1976, Document 149, 463.

<sup>230</sup> "Facts on Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty, US Government, State Department", 1973-1977. Box 3164, RFE/RL Corporate Records, Hoover Library and Archives.

<sup>231</sup> Cummings, Richard. *Cold War Radio: The Dangerous History of American Broadcasting in Europe*, 28-29.

<sup>232</sup> "Supplemental Authorization for Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty." Committee on Foreign Relations, 1973. <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP75B00380R000400020004-6.pdf>

From 1974 to 1976, the Congressional Church Committee <sup>233</sup> and the Presidential Rockefeller Commission <sup>234</sup> investigated alleged abuses committed by the CIA, NSA and FBI. <sup>235</sup> These high profile investigations exposed illegal operations conducted by US government agencies starting in the 1950s. The FBI's domestic surveillance program of US citizens (COINTELPRO) <sup>236</sup> from 1956 to 1971, the NSA's (Project SHAMROCK) <sup>237</sup> involving the collection of signals intelligence from US citizens, and the CIA's infamous (Project MK-ULTRA) <sup>238</sup> involving experiments with mind control on unwilling participants along with Operation Mockingbird's attempts to infiltrate the mass media by posing as journalists, with the purpose of influencing public opinion. <sup>239</sup>

By the standards of 1975, the CIA connection to RFE/RL exposed in 1967 did not seem to be much of a scandal, in comparison to everything else. The initial public shock after the *Ramparts* expose had become seemingly irrelevant by 1976 as RFE/RL had an entire decade to reorganize and restructure itself, while the more recent revelations concerned the public attention much more. <sup>240</sup> Of course, RFE/RL had never operated as clandestine operations, they were both overt organizations with overt broadcasting and overt publications, but with covert coordination and funding. <sup>241</sup> By the late 1970s, RFE/RL were positively received by the public, having demonstrated an added value in effectively

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<sup>233</sup> Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities. April 1976. <https://www.senate.gov/about/powers-procedures/investigations/church-committee.htm>

<sup>234</sup> "Report to the President by the Commission on CIA Activities within the United States," June 1975. <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/Digitization/36326NCJRS.pdf>

<sup>235</sup> Weiner, Tim. *Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA*.

<sup>236</sup> FBI Records: The Vault. COINTELPRO. <https://vault.fbi.gov/cointel-pro>

<sup>237</sup> "Recollections from the Church Committee's Investigation of NSA" Studies in Intelligence, 2000.

<sup>238</sup> "Project MK-Ultra." Intellipedia, CIA Reading Room, 2018.

<https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/project%20mk-ultra%5B15545700%5D.pdf>

<sup>239</sup> "Project Mockingbird" Intellipedia, CIA Reading Room, 2020.

<https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/PROJECT%20MOCKINGBIRD%20TRANS%5B15787961%5D.pdf>

<sup>240</sup> Weiner, Tim. *Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA*. 406-407.

<sup>241</sup> Johnson. Ross, A. *Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty: the CIA years and beyond*, 221-235.



promoting democracy in accordance with US foreign policy toward the satellite states of Eastern Europe and the socialist republics of the Soviet Union. <sup>242</sup>

This time period was also the era of détente or “peaceful coexistence” between the US and USSR, when a number of nuclear arms limitation agreements were signed as well as the 1975 Helsinki Accords, with which the US recognized the satellite states as sovereign, legitimizing the USSR’s sphere of influence in Eastern Europe. In that context, RFE/RL had changed their approach to messaging; the notion of a “free Eastern Europe” or any sort of “liberation” was no longer propagated. <sup>243</sup> While this issue was present since 1956, up until 1971, these themes did subtly or overtly reemerge, but the new guidelines explicitly prohibited the open encouragement any sort of uprising or rebellion, and/or the propagation of any sort of separatist or secessionist movements. <sup>244</sup>

RL in particular had always been careful not to openly push for any types of ideas associated with the disintegration of the Soviet Union based on the national republics but also based on ethnic and regional separatist movements, although these did exist in Eastern Europe, it had been much easier for RFE to promote nationalism to the separate five audiences of the “captive countries” than those within the USSR. RFE/RL according to some employees, seemed to be losing its direction in contrast to the VOA. <sup>245</sup>

From the 1960s into the 1970s, the BBC and VOA had already been trying to dissociate their news broadcasting and public diplomacy efforts with the notion of it being essentially propaganda. RFE/RL after being disconnected from the CIA in 1971 and being reorganized in 1976, also tried to distance itself from being perceived as being at the cutting

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<sup>242</sup> Johnson. Ross, A. *Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty: the CIA years and beyond*, 221-235.

<sup>243</sup> Urban, George R. *Radio Free Europe and the Pursuit of Democracy*, 75-81.

<sup>244</sup> Urban, George R. *Radio Free Europe and the Pursuit of Democracy*, 75-81.

<sup>245</sup> Urban, George R. *Radio Free Europe and the Pursuit of Democracy*, 75-81.

edge of the Western propaganda machine. Soon enough though with the election of Ronald Reagan whose presidency would dominate the political landscape of the 1980s, a restart of Cold War tensions resulted in the return of RFE/RL's original purpose but in a different context. This matter will be explored in the final chapter of the dissertation which is to be entirely dedicated to the series of events leading up to the end of the Cold War and the role of US public diplomacy and propaganda efforts, specifically through the Bulgarian Broadcasting departments of the VOA and RFE from the late 1970s to the late 1980s.

### **The CIA's Secret Book Program, 1950s-1980s**

The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)'s very first and original front organization, called the Free Europe Committee (FEC) had created the well-known broadcasting stations of Radio Free Europe (RFL) and Radio Liberty (RL) as well as the lesser well-known but much more secretive, Free Europe Press (FEP) book program in August 1951.<sup>246</sup> The FEC projects such as FEP were under CIA's Publications and Special Projects Division (PSPD), were began in New York but was later moved to the RFE/RL headquarters in Munich where they coordinated a shared strategy and similar agenda. Between 1956 and 1991, this clandestine CIA-funded book program was among the least known but perhaps most effective methods of penetrating the Iron Curtain, sending in approximately 10 million books in total, targeted at the intellectually educated classes of Eastern Europe.

From 1967 to 1975, a time during which the public exposure of CIA's covert funding for RFE/RL led to an internal bureaucratic reorganization and transformation, RFE's leading role in the book project ended as well, but the program continued to receive CIA clandestine coordination and funding until 1991. Instead, the CIA renamed and

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<sup>246</sup> Cummings, Richard. *Cold War Frequencies, CIA Clandestine Radio Broadcasting to Eastern Europe*, 31.

merged the FEC and FEP together with its already established RL front, the Bedford Publishing Company into the International Advisory Council (IAC) also known as the International Literary Center (ILC), a non-profit organization.<sup>247</sup> Unlike the CIA's covert mission for RFL/RL broadcasting which aimed to attract an audience and whose origins which were eventually exposed, the book program managed to remain disconnected from its clandestine source, appearing as a private initiative in the public view. However, most of the book program's files after 1970 have yet to be declassified and released, thus most of the material addresses in this section concerns the time from 1956 to 1971.<sup>248</sup>

An extensive amount of academic and journalistic content about RFE/RL has developed over time, but not much has been written about the history of its affiliated FEC/FEP book program. Recently, an English-language academic article on the book program in relation to its most targeted nation, Poland was published by Pawel Sowinski, titled "Cold War Books: George Minden and His Field Workers, 1973–1990" (2020).<sup>249</sup>

Among the only assessments that explicitly concern the entire program, were written by those who were in some way involved in its operations; such as John P.C. Matthews who in 2003 called it a "Marshall Plan for the Mind" and believed that the program had a significant influence on the hearts and minds of its target audience.<sup>250</sup> By adding new research and explaining how the program worked as he remembered it, (professor at Manhattan College and Georgetown University) Alfred Reisch's *Hot Books*

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<sup>247</sup> Reisch, Alfred A. *Hot Books in the Cold War: The CIA-funded Secret Western Book Distribution Program*, X-XI.

<sup>248</sup> Reisch, Alfred A. *Hot Books in the Cold War: The CIA-funded Secret Western Book Distribution Program*, X-XI.

<sup>249</sup> Sowiński, Pawel. "Cold War Books: George Minden and His Field Workers, 1973–1990." *East European Politics and Societies*, 34(1), 48-66.

<https://doi-org.jerome.stjohns.edu/10.1177/0888325419857151>

<sup>250</sup> Mathews, John, P.C. *The West's Secret Marshall Plan for the Mind*, *International Journal of Intelligence and Counter Intelligence*, 2003. 16:3, 409-427.

*in the Cold War: The CIA-Funded Secret Western Book Program Behind the Iron Curtain* (2013), remains perhaps the single best authoritative academic work on this topic, based on the papers of the program's supervisor George C. Minden, which are part of the RFE/RL archives and which were examined, although any additional information was not found.<sup>251</sup>

Unlike, the broader international radio broadcasting efforts, Reisch asserts that this book program was able to produce much more tangible metrics on its ability to successfully achieve its target objectives. However due to its secret nature, the only evaluations of the program's effectiveness were undertaken by the CIA, which in a 1970 report, concluded: The book program (is) for the most part, demonstrably effective in reaching directly significant segments of the professional and technical elite, and through them their colleagues in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, with material that can inferentially be said to influence attitudes and reinforce predispositions toward intellectual and cultural freedom, and dissatisfaction with its absence.<sup>252</sup>

This report does not cite any explanation of how it was "demonstrably effective" as the agency would not have had a way to receive feedback by interacting with the "professional and technical elite" that this program was intending to primarily target.<sup>253</sup>

However, in a separate 1976 report for the Church Committee, CIA stated that the book program had held a "special place in the world of covert propaganda", explaining: Books differ from all other propaganda media, primarily because one single book can significantly change the reader's attitude and action to an extent unmatched by the impact of any other single medium...this is, of

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<sup>251</sup> Box 2322, Minden Collection, RFE/RL Corporate Records, Hoover Library and Archives.

<sup>252</sup> CIA, "Tensions in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe: Challenge and Opportunity," (March 1970), Foreign Relations, 1969–1976, Vol. XII, 463.

<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v12/d149>.

<sup>253</sup> CIA, "Tensions in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe: Challenge and Opportunity," (March 1970), Foreign Relations, 1969–1976, Vol. XII, 463.

<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v12/d149>.

course, not true of all books at all times and with all readers – but it is true significantly often enough to make books the most important weapon of strategic propaganda. <sup>254</sup>

Indeed, the program was in its inception in part reserved for and designed to specifically target the *intelligentsia* (educated elite) while not focusing on the broader mass public, the way the broadcasters did. Their target audience essentially constituted the professional classes including academics, economists, reporters, economists, lawyers, doctors, artists and writers. Overall, by analyzing its internal reports from the year 1962 on the success of this book program, it was found that university students followed by the teachers and professors were the largest participants in the program, overall. <sup>255</sup>

The program functioned as an organized network composed of book publishers and distributors which worked with stores, libraries and universities in the US and across Western Europe. <sup>256</sup> Those selected institutions then interacted with target institutions in the USSR and Eastern Europe, in the way that a cultural or educational exchange program operates but with its focus being on publications including academic, technical, non-fiction and fiction entertainment literature. However, for all of this to be successful, these efforts would obviously have to be done discretely and strategically, making sure that the publications are carefully selected to bypass the censorship regulations of the target nations, as well as ensuring that along the process, from the publishers to the distributors

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<sup>254</sup> U.S. Congress, Senate, Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, Foreign and Military Intelligence: Final Report, 7 vols., 94th Cong., 2nd Sess., 24 April 1976, Book I, 193. [https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755\\_I.pdf](https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_I.pdf).

<sup>255</sup> “Mailing Project: A Summary,” July 1962, The President [FEC] to the Executive Committee, July 26, 1962. Box 32. Minden Collection, RFE/RL Corporate Records, Hoover Library and Archives.

<sup>256</sup> Reisch, Alfred A. *Hot Books in the Cold War: The CIA-funded Secret Western Book Distribution Program*, 42.

all the way to the recipients, all persons involved would have to believe that these are initiatives of private individuals or institutions not connected to the US government.

This became ever more challenging, following the disclosure of the CIA's role in RFE/RL, when all products of collaboration between RFE/RL and the FEC/FEP were terminated, such as the magazine called *East Europe*. Its original "New York Book Center" located on the 26<sup>th</sup> floor at 2 Park Avenue closed and a new office was re-opened on the 14<sup>th</sup> floor of a property on 475 Park Avenue in Midtown Manhattan, New York.<sup>257</sup>

The origins of the Free Europe Committee (FEC)'s Free Europe Press (FEP) go back to two early CIA projects: Project Ultimate and Project Troy. Troy was essentially a government-academia partnership, and as outlined in a NSC memo from 1950; this collaboration between thirty of the nation's top scientists and subject experts, was assembled at MIT in Boston, in order to explore conventional and unconventional ways beyond radio broadcasting for "penetrating the Iron Curtain."<sup>258</sup> During that time while, "war raged in Korea, and the USSR tested its atomic bomb, the Soviets were jamming the VOA radio propaganda broadcasts..." these academics and engineers attempted to address not only the technical issues in orchestrating an effective broadcasting system but also how to successfully circumnavigate the electronic interference on the other side, and to best inform their target audiences of how, when and where to tune in.<sup>259</sup>

Project Ultimate, on the other hand utilized those experts' recommendations and formed a Special Procedures Group which prepared a stockpile of meteorological balloons

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<sup>257</sup> Reisch, Alfred A. *Hot Books in the Cold War:*

*The CIA-funded Secret Western Book Distribution Program*, 58.

<sup>258</sup> US Department of State: Office of the Historian. Foreign Relations of the United States, The Intelligence Community, 1950-1955. "The Foreign Information Program and Psychological Warfare Planning." <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1950-55Intel/d57#fn:1.5.4.2.10.164.14.32.2>

<sup>259</sup> Needell, Allan A. "Truth is Our Weapon": Diplomatic History, Summer 1993, Vol. 17, No. 3, 399-420

to carry and deliver propaganda leaflets above Eastern Europe in the early 1950s.<sup>260</sup> This was how the FEP was formed; in order to print those leaflets on which details about RFE/RL broadcasting hours and specific radio wavelengths to tune into, were detailed for those that were interested to follow up.

This “Secret Book Project” referred to as the “book project” or “book program” began as the Free Europe Committee’s (FEC) Free Europe Press (FEP) initiative in order: ...to communicate Western ideas to Soviet citizens by providing them with books on politics, economics, philosophy, art, and some technology all denied them by the Soviet dictatorship.<sup>261</sup>

As RFE was focused on Eastern Europe and RL on the Soviet Union, so RFE as part of FEC worked with FEP, whereas RL’s front organization, called the Bedford Publishing Company was formed as a private non-profit to publish Western books that had not been previously translated into Russian, and had several offices based in London, Paris, Munich and Rome.<sup>262</sup> So that Soviet visitors to such cities could acquire access to certain “quasi-forbidden” books. In the course of its association with RL until 1970, over 1 million books were delivered to the USSR.<sup>263</sup> One of the architects of this secret program was Isaac Patch, a career diplomat in Moscow during WWII who would later take charge of the CIA Special Projects Division. He believed that the program stood out in its success: The Book Program was a rewarding endeavor...Americans in the Department of State approved of the project and... my liaison with CIA, told me that the Book Program was highly regarded by his agency...

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<sup>260</sup> Cummings, Richard. *Cold War Radio: The Dangerous History of American Broadcasting in Europe*, 15.

<sup>261</sup> Cummings, Richard. *Cold War Frequencies, CIA Clandestine Radio Broadcasting to Eastern Europe*, 54-55.

<sup>262</sup> Reisch, Alfred A. *Hot Books in the Cold War: The CIA-funded Secret Western Book Distribution Program*, 507.

<sup>263</sup> Cummings, Richard. *Cold War Frequencies, CIA Clandestine Radio Broadcasting to Eastern Europe*, 55.

Those of us working on the Program were thrilled to think that those hundreds of thousands of books perhaps helped to broaden Soviet minds and horizons toward democracy and western economic ideas.<sup>264</sup>

Thus, clearly the CIA played a fundamental part in ensuring the book program's successful outcome by clandestine funding but also by coordinating all aspects of the appropriation and transportation of the published materials as well as keeping records of trends that developed. By utilizing proper channels to send these books, the program ultimately allowed dissidents as well as ordinary citizens to access new ideas, reinforce old ideas or simply be able to read new books. The key to its success, was its ability to discreetly bypass the stranglehold of censorship enforced by regulators of content and the state-owned media, highly skilled at disseminating counter-propaganda messaging. This book program like the radio broadcasters it was created alongside with, penetrated effectively beyond the Iron Curtain and reached the "hearts and minds" of its target audience.

The CIA's book program is a critical but not much studied component of RFE/RL's broader mission of promoting democracy through the free flow of information by all means necessary; "ideological warfare".<sup>265</sup> The program's target audience could receive the published materials in English and translate them into the local language, then distribute those materials within an underground community based on shared dissenting perspectives that resisted national narratives.

However, this type of "ideological warfare" inevitably encountered resistance, even if these books did bypass the censors and became available to the public, and even if the critics never recognized these efforts as being part of a broader plan. Such critics often

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<sup>264</sup> Cummings, Richard. *Cold War Frequencies, CIA Clandestine Radio Broadcasting to Eastern Europe*, 56.

<sup>265</sup> Mathews, John, P.C. *The West's Secret Marshall Plan for the Mind*, *International Journal of Intelligence and Counter Intelligence*, 2003. 16:3, 409-427.



constituting part of the *nomenklatura* ruling elite, usually characterized any propagation of foreign ideas as external subversion against their ideologically-driven society, although they ironically might have been just as interested to access the imported ideas in these books. Of course, most books that were distributed by the program were not at all ideological or political, in fact, those would not have been allowed officially, though actual forbidden political and religious literature was smuggled in and circulated through various channels linked to the program, most books concerned topics that did not pose a threat to the ideological censor, and instead functioned more as an opportunity for individuals to be able to mentally escape their world by becoming informed of different perspectives on things, though critically this being curated covertly through an American agenda.

By the mid-1960s, the program had 7 Western European nations hosting 22 East-West collaboration exchanges, which included the sponsorship of student seminars and summer schools as well as travel funding for some writers from Eastern Europe to visit the West.<sup>266</sup> From 1967 to 1968, there was a 20% increase in activity with a total of 327,628 books and periodicals distributed to over 70,000 individuals and institutions.

Thus it reached its peak by 1968, which would go down as the program's single best year, according to its director, George C. Minden.<sup>267</sup> This was due in large part to a relaxation of censorship standards in some Eastern bloc nations inspired by to the developments of the 1968 Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia that was ultimately crushed by the Soviet Union during that fateful year.

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<sup>266</sup> Reisch, Alfred A. *Hot Books in the Cold War: The CIA-funded Secret Western Book Distribution Program*, 104.

<sup>267</sup> Reisch, Alfred A. *Hot Books in the Cold War: The CIA-funded Secret Western Book Distribution Program*, 81-82.

As part of the CIA's book program, released declassified published reports up until 1970 which are about 20 pages each, containing the exact titles and the number of copies of publications, including magazines, catalogues, pamphlets as well as the content, target and political aim of the particular item were sent to each of the so-called "captive nations" across Eastern Europe.<sup>268</sup>

An FEC Policy Paper from the late 1950s emphasized that most critical country for the book program was naturally, the largest and most populated in Eastern Europe; Poland. The Polish section of the program was intentionally designed to be the busiest in terms of publications sent.<sup>269</sup> In addition, the FEC paper had also recommended that the FEP and the all broader aspects of program should continue to develop initiatives with Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria but "with a lighter proportion of political material than is recommended for Poland."<sup>270</sup>

FEP had initially within its first 6 months in 1956, mailed a total of 127 titles and 87,283 books, with 34% of the publications going to Poland, 26% to Bulgaria and 18% to Romania, and the remaining 22% to Hungary and Czechoslovakia.<sup>271</sup> Interestingly, Bulgaria received quite a high percentage at the outstart though over time that would change. What did not change was that Poland with a population percentage of 37%, always proportionally received over 30% of the volume of all the books distributed.<sup>272</sup> Hungary

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<sup>268</sup> Reisch, Alfred A. *Hot Books in the Cold War: The CIA-funded Secret Western Book Distribution Program*, 23.

<sup>269</sup> FEC Policy Paper, January 11, 1957. Box 191. RFE/RL Corporate Records, Hoover Library and Archives.

<sup>270</sup> FEC Policy Paper, January 11, 1957. Box 191. RFE/RL Corporate Records, Hoover Library and Archives.

<sup>271</sup> Reisch, Alfred A. *Hot Books in the Cold War: The CIA-funded Secret Western Book Distribution Program*, 28.

<sup>272</sup> George C. Minden, IAC Semi-Annual Report on Book Distribution, July 1 to December 31, 1971, Minden Collection, Box 1. RFE/RL Corporate Records, Hoover Library and Archives.

however had acquired special status within the program due in part to the failed 1956 uprisings. Hungary had only 12% of population total but it received roughly nearly double that proportionally, with 22% of the books sent, whereas Czechoslovakia, with its 17%, received only between 19%-23% of the books distributed.<sup>273</sup> Romania with its disproportionately larger 23% share, only received 16% of the books and Bulgaria, with its 10% population percentage, received the least with 5%-6% of all books distributed.<sup>274</sup>

### **The CIA's Secret Book Program and its Impact on Communist Bulgaria, 1950s-1960s**

Since the Bulgarian state and society will constitute the core case study for this dissertation, all the data in relation to targeting Bulgaria is going to be examined, going forward. In *Hot Books in the Cold War*, Reisch has an entire chapter titled *Letters from Bulgaria Despite Very Strict Censorship*, in which he observes that alongside state censorship, public mutual mistrust and the relatively strong Soviet influence, resulted as the reason why Bulgarians were least represented in as participants in the book program.

However, despite these factors, he compiles and studies the books that were exchanged and the letters from some recipients that were received, over time. Reisch also concludes based on the program's internal reports as well as content of the letter responses, that the intended publications did eventually reach their target recipients in Bulgaria. Such letters from their target audience, could constitute: letters acknowledging receipt of books, acknowledgement letters requesting the mailing of another book, included in the program or not, and individual request letters, in which in a particular book title was requested.<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> George C. Minden, IAC Semi-Annual Report on Book Distribution, July 1 to December 31, 1971

<sup>274</sup> George C. Minden, IAC Semi-Annual Report on Book Distribution, July 1 to December 31, 1971.

<sup>275</sup> Reisch, Alfred A. *Hot Books in the Cold War*:

*The CIA-funded Secret Western Book Distribution Program*, 69.

Under the leadership of George Caputineanu Minden, a Romanian-American, the Bulgarian section of the Free Europe Press (FEP) and broader book program run by the CIA since the 1950s was organized by Tosho Damianoff, followed by Dragomir Nenoff into the 1970s. <sup>276</sup> In launching the program, Minden acknowledged the challenge posed by censorship but speculated about the ways that people would react to the availability of “quasi-forbidden” books found at certain libraries or by means of mailing to target individuals. Minden referenced a 1958 Bulgarian press report which reported that “(throughout) 1957 alone, thousands of Bulgarian citizens and patriots delivered to the Ministry (of the Interior) over hundred different kinds of pamphlets, papers, magazines, and books they had received from capitalist countries” noting that there is no way of knowing if Bulgarians had not read those books for themselves, before turning them in. <sup>277</sup>

The Bulgarian Council of Ministers had in 1952, established an official censorship bureau based on the Soviet Union’s Main Directorate for the Protection of State Secrets in the Press also known as *GlavLit*, established in 1922. The Bulgarian censorship bureau had some 137 individuals tasked with monitoring the public’s mail correspondence at post offices and scrutinizing the contents of all published materials including books, pamphlets, posters and newspapers. <sup>278</sup> By 1956, the bureau was moved to the Propaganda office of the Ministry of Internal Affairs under the secret police. <sup>279</sup> This bureau initially had a list of 58 particular publications explicitly banned from the West, though only certain approved

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<sup>276</sup> Reisch, Alfred A. *Hot Books in the Cold War: The CIA-funded Secret Western Book Distribution Program*, 61.

<sup>277</sup> Reisch, Alfred A. *Hot Books in the Cold War: The CIA-funded Secret Western Book Distribution Program*, 132.

<sup>278</sup> Dimitrova, Alekseniia. *The Iron Fist: Inside the Archives of the Bulgarian Secret Police*, 141-148.

<sup>279</sup> Dimitrova, Alekseniia. *The Iron Fist: Inside the Archives of the Bulgarian Secret Police*, 141-148.

individuals within government intelligence would be allowed to study Western publications without restrictions on the type of content.<sup>280</sup>

However, as the CIA program increased the volume of massively mailing books, the censors could not intercept all “forbidden” books sent out based on private letter correspondences, whereas the “quasi-forbidden” ones which bypassed censorship could be acquired at libraries as part of exchanges that were initiated covertly by the book program across the Eastern bloc.<sup>281</sup>

The Bulgarian censors controlled what went in and went out of the country more than any other in the Eastern bloc, and due to strict censorship, most Bulgarians did not prefer to correspond through private letters to Western institutions and instead channeled requests for books by means of representatives who worked through Bulgarian institutions such as national libraries and universities and already established exchange programs.<sup>282</sup>

On the other hand, Reisch notes that “Bulgarian visitors to the West were less timid in their choice of books, and some 60% of the literature they took with them had a general political content censorship was still tighter than that of any of the other target countries.”<sup>283</sup> Until 1972, Frankfurt and Munich in West Germany and Vienna in Austria all hosted distribution centers for the book program’s publications, including those meant for Bulgaria however, only the one in Vienna would remain for books to Bulgaria.<sup>284</sup> Austria

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<sup>280</sup> Reisch, Alfred A. *Hot Books in the Cold War: The CIA-funded Secret Western Book Distribution Program*, 130.

<sup>281</sup> Mathews, John, P.C. *The West's Secret Marshall Plan for the Mind*, International Journal of Intelligence and Counter Intelligence, 2003. 16:3, 409-427.

<sup>282</sup> Reisch, Alfred A. *Hot Books in the Cold War: The CIA-funded Secret Western Book Distribution Program*, 194.

<sup>283</sup> Reisch, Alfred A. *Hot Books in the Cold War: The CIA-funded Secret Western Book Distribution Program*, 194.

<sup>284</sup> Reisch, Alfred A. *Hot Books in the Cold War: The CIA-funded Secret Western Book Distribution Program*, 121.

due to its geographical proximity to the borders of the Eastern bloc but also due to its relatively neutral diplomatic stance with each of Soviet satellite states, played a key strategic role for the program. Especially when Bulgarian visitors to Austria increased dramatically after a 1966 agreement for tourism reached between the two countries.<sup>285</sup> Although only the most trusted citizens who were loyal Communist party members were allowed to obtain visas for travel, either for official work or as part of an organized tourist group, some of those individuals could be given permission to bring back any books from the West, which could be then sold on the black market through a person-to-person exchange method, this is how half of the total distribution of books were smuggled in.<sup>286</sup>

An important event was the International Book Fair held in Bulgaria in October 1968.<sup>287</sup> This book fair has been hosted ever since in Sofia, but its first time proved to be a watershed moment that marked a shift in perceptions about Western books among Bulgaria's intellectual elite and also allowed the program to better understand Bulgaria's interest in international books. The event was hosted at the onset of the détente era of "peaceful coexistence", and was visited by Bulgaria's Communist leader Todor Zhivkov, who approved of it and agreed to continue on with such cultural interactions. At the time, *The New York Times* described it as inducing public excitement, prompting calls for more extensive cultural exchanges, and attracting booksellers who exhibited 15,00 publications from 20 Western nations in several languages for the 40,000 attendees.<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> Reisch, Alfred A. *Hot Books in the Cold War: The CIA-funded Secret Western Book Distribution Program*, 264.

<sup>286</sup> Reisch, Alfred A. *Hot Books in the Cold War: The CIA-funded Secret Western Book Distribution Program*, 266.

<sup>287</sup> Reisch, Alfred A. *Hot Books in the Cold War: The CIA-funded Secret Western Book Distribution Program*, 307.

<sup>288</sup> Reisch, Alfred A. *Hot Books in the Cold War: The CIA-funded Secret Western Book Distribution Program*, 307.

The book program was positively impacted by the shift in atmosphere after this book fair, where English overtook French as the primary foreign language of publications. Additionally, publications on subjects such as medicine and engineering which were previously less restricted by censors, were now expanded to include more material on linguistics, literature, philosophy as well as some in the social sciences.<sup>289</sup>

The impact of the 1968 book fair also allowed intellectuals to increasingly participate in cultural exchange programs and request books from Western institutions, such as when a professor at Sofia University requested two books that he saw exhibited at the fair, and wrote a letter unwittingly to one of the secret book program's publishers.<sup>290</sup> During a time when there was a relative relaxation in censorship, a Bulgarian professor visiting Paris that year reported that "books are stolen and sold at high prices on the back market...the post office usually blames the censors, but in fact most of the books are stolen while in the post office" after the disappearance of several mailed books, including *La France historique et Culturelle* (Historical and cultural France), *Panorama des arts plastique* (Panorama of plastic arts), and *La peste* (The Plague).<sup>291</sup>

So the Bulgarian postal control always remained strict in censorship, sometimes it was the postal office workers who were the first to receive the mail, rather than the political officials were the ones who seized the packages of books, in order to sell at a high price on the black market for personal profit. Such "inside stealing" apparently occurred often though not enough to affect the book exchange programs between institutions, which

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<sup>289</sup> Reisch, Alfred A. *Hot Books in the Cold War: The CIA-funded Secret Western Book Distribution Program*, 307.

<sup>290</sup> Reisch, Alfred A. *Hot Books in the Cold War: The CIA-funded Secret Western Book Distribution Program*, 307.

<sup>291</sup> Reisch, Alfred A. *Hot Books in the Cold War: The CIA-funded Secret Western Book Distribution Program*, 167.

increased in the late 1960s and in the 1970s. The main book exchange program based in the US, was the New York Public Library (NYPL), which worked (although without knowing it) with the CIA's clandestine book program but also with other libraries and institutions in Western Europe such as the Libraire du XXème Siècle in Paris.<sup>292</sup> On the Bulgarian side, the Central Library of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and the Cyril and Methodius National Library in Sofia, as well as the Sofia and Varna University Libraries, and the Institute for Advanced Studies of Economics and Finances in Svishtov, were the among the top recipients of books.<sup>293</sup> In addition, the Foreign Language Press in Sofia interacted with several Western publishers including Penguin Books in the United Kingdom, among others. Also, as early 1968<sup>294</sup>, it has been documented that some Bulgarian universities had even requested copies of several news US-based magazines such as *The American Sociological Review*, *The New Yorker*, *Newsweek*, *National Geographic*, *International Law*, *Orbis* and *Vogue*.<sup>295</sup>

In *Letters from Bulgaria Despite Very Strict Censorship*, Reisch cites the requests given to the New York Public Library in May 1964, and only points out in his analysis of the text that: "Approximately a third of the 92 books requested by the three libraries dealt with Soviet policies or were anti-Communist. They included Adam Ulam's *The New Face of Soviet Totalitarianism*, Herbert Muller's *Freedom in the Western World*, Merle

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<sup>292</sup> Reisch, Alfred A. *Hot Books in the Cold War: The CIA-funded Secret Western Book Distribution Program*, 482.

<sup>293</sup> Reisch, Alfred A. *Hot Books in the Cold War: The CIA-funded Secret Western Book Distribution Program*, 482.

<sup>294</sup> NOTE: The Book Program's records after 1970 for the most part not been declassified and released, so the focus on the research in regards to this secret program spans the 1950s through to the late 1960s.

<sup>295</sup> Reisch, Alfred A. *Hot Books in the Cold War: The CIA-funded Secret Western Book Distribution Program*, 484.



Fainsod's *How Russia is Ruled*, and Roger Pethybridge's *A Key to Soviet Politics*.”<sup>296</sup> Although it is not clear if these titles were sent and received or were simply documented requests that readers would have liked to have received.

Reisch does find that using the New York Public Library as a sponsor, a number of books were actually requested and successfully sent to the National Libraries in Varna and in Sofia as well as to the Cyril and Methodius National Library in Sofia, and included: *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-Tung* by Stuart Schram, S. N. Eisenstadt's *The Political Systems of Empires*, Triska Frederick Barghoorn's *Soviet Foreign Propaganda* and Merle Fainso's *How Russia is Ruled*.<sup>297</sup> Additionally, Reisch then goes through a number of examples of similar political book requests made by the Sofia University Library which had 20 out of 25 addresses who requested offers, accept them, including 18 books and 28 subscriptions including *Martov: Political Biography of a Russian Social Democrat* by Israel Getzler, *Mussolini and Italian Fascism* and *Soviet Russian Imperialism* by Victor Mamtey, and *British Constitutional History since 1832*.<sup>298</sup>

What makes the above titles particularly stand out is that they are historical books but of a particularly politically sensitive nature. So, the fact that these were requested and received by the institutions bypassing the censor also indicates that the censor bureau while it may not approve the actual content for public distribution, in some way must have had to approve at least the individual for being able to receive such literature. Of course, beyond intelligence services, the regime did grant researchers the right to access such books.

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<sup>296</sup> Reisch, Alfred A. *Hot Books in the Cold War: The CIA-funded Secret Western Book Distribution Program*, 482.

<sup>297</sup> Reisch, Alfred A. *Hot Books in the Cold War: The CIA-funded Secret Western Book Distribution Program*, 482.

<sup>298</sup> Reisch, Alfred A. *Hot Books in the Cold War: The CIA-funded Secret Western Book Distribution Program*, 484.

Furthermore, the Karl Marx Institute of Economics and the Institute for Foreign Trade Researches were also allowed to request and receive publications such as *Worldwide International Economic Institutions* sent by the British Society for Understanding.<sup>299</sup> Such publications would have not been able to bypass the censor for public consumption but were clearly allowed and accessible by academics for purposes of research.

In the realm of history and philosophy, Sofia University had requested and received *Reflections on Modern History* by Hans Kohn, among another 28 books on Russian history and culture and on Western civilization, more generally.<sup>300</sup> As well, Gaston Sergheraert's series, *La presence de la Bulgarie dans les lettres francaises* (The Bulgarian presence in French literature), and his work *Symeon le Grand* (Simeon the Great) were also of interest to historians. As well, philosophers at the Cyril and Methodius Library had also acknowledged receipt of Jozef Maria Bochenski's *La philosophie contemporaine en Europe* (Contemporary philosophy in Europe).<sup>301</sup>

Outside of the more sensitive social sciences and liberal arts, foreign literature was among the most sought after by professors and students alike, though not the most widely available to them. According to some notes obtained from correspondence:

A student at the Sofia State University (who) stressed the serious lack of books on English literature. He wrote that he had to take an examination on English writers from the eighteenth century onwards, 'but the trouble with us is that the books we have to read are not available in Bulgaria...We can't find any books which give us a general idea of the whole period. The only source of literary knowledge of this period are

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<sup>299</sup> Reisch, Alfred A. *Hot Books in the Cold War: The CIA-funded Secret Western Book Distribution Program*, 501.

<sup>300</sup> Reisch, Alfred A. *Hot Books in the Cold War: The CIA-funded Secret Western Book Distribution Program*, 492-93

<sup>301</sup> Reisch, Alfred A. *Hot Books in the Cold War: The CIA-funded Secret Western Book Distribution Program*, 492-93

the lectures of our professor. The only thing one could find in our library are a few copies of a book on 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century English literature written by some Russian literary critics. I do not find them very useful. All the more [as] they are published in Russian.’<sup>302</sup>

On this topic, Reisch identifies the private letters sent to institutions involved in the book program, including several professional educators and academics, such as a “a well-known educator and linguist in Sofia (who) thanked (us) for *The Teaching of Modern Languages* (book).”<sup>303</sup> This individual apparently also worked at the Ministry of Education and was involved in developing a national curriculum on learning the English language. In the same section, Reisch cites a librarian and lecturer from Cyril and Methodius Higher Institute of Pedagogy in Veliko Turnovo who indicates the lack of English language and linguistic textbooks as well as an English language lecturer at Varna University who writes a letter thanking and acknowledging receipt of four English language textbooks.<sup>304</sup> In addition to English, French language and literature material was equally sought after, the University of Sofia Library made a statement singling out French as the most popular foreign language, explaining that while Russian which is a similar Slavic language to Bulgarian is in fact mandatory for all students, a second language is also required and that out of all languages studied “70% choose French, about 20% German, and less than 10% English.”<sup>305</sup>

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<sup>302</sup> Reisch, Alfred A. *Hot Books in the Cold War: The CIA-funded Secret Western Book Distribution Program*, 487.

<sup>303</sup> Reisch, Alfred A. *Hot Books in the Cold War: The CIA-funded Secret Western Book Distribution Program*, 487.

<sup>304</sup> Reisch, Alfred A. *Hot Books in the Cold War: The CIA-funded Secret Western Book Distribution Program*, 487.

<sup>305</sup> Reisch, Alfred A. *Hot Books in the Cold War: The CIA-funded Secret Western Book Distribution Program*, 491.

There were also several German language publications requested by various institutions in the fields of medicine such as subscriptions to the *Münchener Medizinische Wochenschrift* (Munich medical weekly) and *Medizinische Wochenschrift* (Medical weekly) plus in the fields of engineering and architecture such as *Münchener Bauzeitung* (Munich construction journal) and *Raum, Architektur und Wohnform, and Innendekoration* (Architecture and Interior decoration).<sup>306</sup> Finally, literature on the arts and museums did also arouse a limited level of interest, though it is noted that although interest in abstract or surrealist art was low, some 68 acknowledgments were received for 100 sets of 5 paperback biographies on artists such Degas, Boccioni and Bonnard.<sup>307</sup>

In addition to all the above institutional requests, there were requests made in letters from private individuals and received by the program that indicated attempts to acquire much more forbidden literature such as works written by famous Western and/or American famous political writers praising Capitalism such as Ayn Rand or even more controversially, Bulgarian émigrés abroad who wrote critically about Communism in Bulgaria, such as Georgi Markov.

### **Communist Censorship in Bulgaria: Countering Forbidden Foreign Books and Jamming Threatening Foreign Radio Broadcasters, 1940s-1970s**

The rise of Communism in Eastern Europe in the aftermath of World War II, resulted in a so-called symbolic “Iron Curtain” dividing Europe between the American sphere of influence in Western Europe from Soviet sphere in Eastern Europe, setting the stage for the Cold War. As addressed in the first chapter, the People’s Republic of Bulgaria

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<sup>306</sup> Reisch, Alfred A. *Hot Books in the Cold War: The CIA-funded Secret Western Book Distribution Program*, 497.

<sup>307</sup> Reisch, Alfred A. *Hot Books in the Cold War: The CIA-funded Secret Western Book Distribution Program*, 497.

was formed between 1944-1946, and emerged as the most loyal satellite state of the Soviet Union. As such, the dynamic dissident movements that developed in other Eastern bloc satellite states never gained ground in Bulgaria, although there were certainly individual dissidents that were surveilled by the secret police and at times imprisoned. Furthermore, the Bulgarian government's secret security services shared intelligence with their Soviet counterparts and adopted effective methods for countering foreign communication efforts while maintaining domestic control over society through censorship.

As addressed earlier in the previous section of this chapter, the Bulgarian government had in 1952, established an official censorship bureau based on the Soviet Union's Main Directorate for the Protection of State Secrets in the Press also known as *GlavLit*, which by 1956, was moved to the Propaganda office of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.<sup>308</sup> From 1949 to 1956, this *Glavlit* had even censored official government statistical reports to correlate with the ideological narrative.<sup>309</sup>

By employing so-called *politredaktori* or political editors on a regional and national level, the Propaganda office could have constant supervision over all types of public information that political, economic and military matters in all printed publications as well as being able to monitor content produced or maintained at libraries, museums, theaters, television or radio broadcasts.<sup>310</sup>

The state held monopoly over printing, publishing and book distribution which in theory enabled the government's totalitarian censorship, although a black market for forbidden goods alongside a gradual relaxation of restrictions by the 1960s onward,

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<sup>308</sup> Dimitrova, Alekseniia. *The Iron Fist: Inside the Archives of the Bulgarian Secret Police*, 141-148.

<sup>309</sup> Znepolski, Ivailo. *Bulgaria under Communism*, 197.

<sup>310</sup> Znepolski, Ivailo. *Bulgaria under Communism*, 197.

enabled people to create creative ways to bypass the censorship machine on information. The most famous being the self-publication method called *samizdat*, which involved copying a written text either by hand, by typewriter or by various ways of carbon copying, and distributing that self-published material underground.

Initially, the nationalization of culture was revolutionary and shocking in nature, however with time, the public as well as those working for the state adjusted to the realities of totalitarianism and developed unofficial ways of bypassing the ideological rules of censorship in daily life. The monopoly on information in mass culture, was expressed through the formation of a single organization within each field, such as the Union of Bulgarian Writers in literature, the Union of Artists in Bulgaria in the arts or the Union of Composers and Musicologists in music.<sup>311</sup> The goal of the union was beyond that of a labor union, its purpose was to have professionals work together with the state in implementing ideological goals in society.<sup>312</sup> In that way, a union's members must also affirm their loyalty to the Communist party regardless if their work was of any political nature, and in doing so, professionals learn to self-censor in order to protect themselves and also in a way, go after in censoring others who might hold opposing views by reporting them, and advancing themselves as ideologically loyal to the party. In that context, enforcing general public censorship through self-censorship could be quite effective.

Throughout the 1940s up until the late 1960s, Bulgarian society had become used to being in a constant state of censorship, so when restrictions were relaxed in the spirit of détente going into the 1970s, people appreciated even gradual changes, although allowing for more freedom of speech created its own set of issues on display in the late 1980s,

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<sup>311</sup> Znepolski, Ivailo. *Bulgaria under Communism*, 199.

<sup>312</sup> Znepolski, Ivailo. *Bulgaria under Communism*, 200.

leading to the regime's downfall. However, from 1956 to 1968 and afterward, a domestic rollback of the most repressive measures ended, including the political show trials and mass imprisonment in labor camps. <sup>313</sup> In that context, efforts such as the secret book program as well as the radio broadcasting stations could bypass the censor.

Although the Bulgarian government always had control over the flow of information, and enforced censorship over the reporting of news on the radio and television, essentially outlawing any form of independent journalism from shaping public opinion according to party ideology. <sup>314</sup>

Though there were moments when in reaction to domestic developments or a worldwide relaxation of the tensions caused by the Cold War, censorship was partially ceased briefly and temporarily. Most notably, the Soviet Union and its satellite states sometimes stopped censoring the radio news broadcasts of the Voice of America (VOA) after President Kennedy's famous American University speech in June 1963 up until the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968. <sup>315</sup> Then again gradually after 1973 and more so after the Helsinki Accords in August 1975 up until the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979. <sup>316</sup> Finally, jamming ceased in 1987 with Gorbachev's glasnost policies of openness but prior to that, jamming would often calm down during an international diplomatic conference or when the US or USSR hosted cultural exhibitions on their soil and encouraged the foreign press to cover the event, in the most positive way as possible. VOA's English broadcasts, however were never jammed,

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<sup>313</sup> Znepolski, Ivailo. *Bulgaria under Communism*, 350.

<sup>314</sup> Boll, John. "US Plans for a Postwar Pro-Western Bulgaria," 117.

<sup>315</sup> Heil, Alan L. *The Voice of America: A Brief Cold War History*, in Johnson, Ross A. *Cold War Broadcasting: Impact on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*. 27-28

<sup>316</sup> Heil, Alan L. *Chapter 3: The Voice of America: A Brief Cold War History*, 27-28

only the local language programming was targeted.<sup>317</sup> So while the (VOA) was at times, exempt from jamming due to its attempt to align its news operations to public diplomacy, Radio Free Europe (RFE) never did operate without an attempt by the regime to censor its contents, due to its more serious and subversive nature.

However, while jamming was the best attempt to censor radio broadcasting, it was not always an effective one and moreover, quite an expensive effort. The Soviets had to spend more than \$900 million annually to cover their vast territory, in jamming the Western broadcasters of the VOA, RFE/RL, and the BBC, which in spending basically equaled the total budgets of all these broadcasting station combined.<sup>318</sup> In effect, to neutralize Western broadcasting, was a challenge on itself for the Communist censorship machine.

This topic of jamming which was briefly introduced earlier in the chapter, discussed how jamming is actually performed and how it can either be skywave, which is long distance or groundwave, which is short distance. But basically, to disrupt the radio waves, the jammer would have to create some sort of artificial noise by means of a machine in front of a microphone, which itself would be broadcasted at the same frequency and direction intended for the target broadcasts, resulting in the recorded content being drowned out by loud military music blasting.<sup>319</sup> Although this was a primitive type of jamming, more improved techniques were developed later on.<sup>320</sup>

This jamming is defined as the intentional interference with electronic communication, including television and radio broadcasting.<sup>321</sup> A jamming station inside

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<sup>317</sup> Heil, Alan L. *Chapter 3: The Voice of America: A Brief Cold War History*, 27-28

<sup>318</sup> Heil, Alan L. *Chapter 3: The Voice of America: A Brief Cold War History*, 27.

<sup>319</sup> Holt, Robert R. *Radio Free Europe*, 112.

<sup>320</sup> *Appendix A: Types of Jamming* in Johnson, Ross A. *Cold War Broadcasting*, 54.

<sup>321</sup> Woodard, George W. *Chapter 4: Cold War Radio Jamming*, 52.



the USSR or Eastern bloc would be setup properly in order to interfere with the radio signals of the Western broadcaster, which itself would be setup strategically to transmit directly to the target territory.<sup>322</sup> This technology would also have to include high power transmitters and large antennas, which could be setup alongside their existing radio transmitters to not have to construct new stations, however there was always the risk that the interference signals might unintentionally jam the local radio stations that were run by their own government. All Soviet bloc built technology for radio interference had been using nearly twenty times the amount of transmitters of the Western broadcasters they were trying to jam.<sup>323</sup> The VOA which was worldwide, had built a total of 30 transmitters aimed at the Soviet bloc (USSR plus Eastern Europe) whereas RFE/RL operated a total of 57 transmitters in total.<sup>324</sup> Therefore, the Western broadcasters had an advantage in transmitter technology, as they determined the radio frequency for transmission, and the jammer had to adjust to that frequency, resulting in a period between 1-5 hours early in the morning and also late at night each day, when broadcasts could be heard without much interference while the jammer successfully adjusted.<sup>325</sup> According to the data available, Bulgaria had operated 3-4 sky-wave radio stations together with a total of 30-35 transmitters beaming a combined 1,500-2,000 kilowatts toward the USSR, Poland and Czechoslovakia alongside a network of local jamming transmitters on its territory.<sup>326</sup>

*Cold War Broadcasting: Impact on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, a collection of studies and documents* (2010), contains cited academic articles and archival

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<sup>322</sup> Woodard, George W. *Chapter 4: Cold War Radio Jamming*, 56-57.

<sup>323</sup> Woodard, George W. *Chapter 4: Cold War Radio Jamming*, 58-59.

<sup>324</sup> Woodard, George W. *Chapter 4: Cold War Radio Jamming*, 57.

<sup>325</sup> Woodard, George W. *Chapter 4: Cold War Radio Jamming*, 58-59.

<sup>326</sup> *Appendix A: Types of Jamming* in Johnson, Ross A. *Cold War Broadcasting*, 54.

sources, including a chapter by Jordan Baev (professor at Sofia University and New Bulgarian University) titled *Bulgarian regime countermeasures against Radio Free Europe*, which is perhaps the leading English-language publication with a definitive comprehensive analysis on Bulgarian censorship by means of jamming RFE broadcasting.

Radio Free Europe as formed by the CIA, played an essential part in orchestrating the information warfare against the Soviet Union and its satellite states, including Bulgaria. Though RFE as a news broadcaster attempting to substitute home service radio stations like Radio Sofia, became a source of information to some Bulgarians, providing an alternative ideological perspective that would have been otherwise forbidden. As RFE's Bulgarian Broadcasting department began regular broadcasting in the 1950s, it was operated by émigrés who had escaped to Western Europe between 1944 and 1948 during the post-war revolutionary transition from the Third Bulgarian Kingdom to the People's Republic of Bulgaria. These émigrés were often associated with the wartime Axis-allied regime lasting between 1941 and 1944, and during the 1950s did not apparently have full understanding of the controversial changing circumstances on the ground.<sup>327</sup>

During this difficult time in early Communist Bulgaria, the most effective and listened to Western broadcasts were from the BBC and VOA, not RFE.<sup>328</sup> Nevertheless, the regime initiated its own Soviet-style jamming of BBC, VOA as well as RFE broadcasts in order to interfere with the radio transmission, disrupt the signal's clarity and make it more difficult to be able to tune in. Western broadcasting stations were recognized as "enemy radio propaganda" which posed a direct challenge to the ideological narrative

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<sup>327</sup> Baev, Jordan. *Chapter 13: Bulgarian regime countermeasures against Radio Free Europe* in Johnson and Eugene, *Cold War Broadcasting: Impact on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*, 259.

<sup>328</sup> Baev, Jordan. *Chapter 13: Bulgarian regime countermeasures against Radio Free Europe*, 259.

promoted by the totalitarian system that the regime rested on. Bulgarian state declassified documents reveal that despite not being the top broadcaster, RFE/RL alongside the VOA and BBC were deemed a major threat ever since its formation. <sup>329</sup>

The Bulgarian State Security Services or the Committee for State Security (KDS) was established in 1947 and then restructured in 1952 based on the structure of the Soviet KGB, with a total of 7 separate directorates; the first directorate dealing with espionage and foreign intelligence, the second with counterintelligence, the third with military counterintelligence, the fourth with domestic surveillance, the fifth as the security protection police, the sixth as the secret political police and the seventh concerning disinformation active measures. <sup>330</sup> Such active measures against the so-called “hostile political emigration” in Western Europe were assigned to a combination of directorates, as well as in countering “imperialist ideological subversive propaganda.” <sup>331</sup>

In addition, a special “Radio Intelligence and Radio Counterintelligence” unit was formed to “locate and monitor the traffic of origin official and clandestine broadcasts.” <sup>332</sup> This unit was codenamed “Rositsa” and throughout the 1950s would regularly report on the activities of the “enemy radio propaganda” broadcasters including Radio Free Europe. All of RFE’s Bulgarian Broadcasting Department broadcasts were to be monitored and recorded by special agents inside the Ministry of Transportation and Communications, and the Bulgarian Telegraph Agency (BTA). <sup>333</sup>

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<sup>329</sup> Baev, Jordan. *Chapter 13: Bulgarian regime countermeasures against Radio Free Europe*, 260.

<sup>330</sup> Dimitrova, Alekseniia. *The Iron Fist: Inside the Archives of the Bulgarian Secret Police*, 141-148.

<sup>331</sup> Baev, Jordan. *Chapter 13: Bulgarian regime countermeasures against Radio Free Europe*, 260.

<sup>332</sup> Baev, Jordan. *Chapter 13: Bulgarian regime countermeasures against Radio Free Europe*, 260.

<sup>333</sup> Baev, Jordan. *Chapter 13: Bulgarian regime countermeasures against Radio Free Europe*, 260.

On the other hand, the American Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA)'s Office of Policy Coordination (OPC) formed in 1947, developed its own offensive strategy targeting Bulgaria. In January 1950, the "Plan of Operation for Bulgaria" under the cryptonym QKSTAIR was approved by the CIA and in February 1950 by the State Department, to be executed starting April, 1950 with the intent "to undertake a large scale clandestine propaganda and psychological warfare campaign against Bulgaria" with one station to be broadcasting "nationalist-communist propaganda" and the other "propaganda aimed at increasing the discontent and resistance of the masses of people."<sup>334</sup>

The project would involve setting up clandestine radio transmitters along with the Bulgarian border with Greece especially throughout the region of East Macedonia near Kavala. The Greek government in the aftermath of the Greek Civil War which ended in 1949 with the defeat of the Yugoslav and Bulgarian-backed Greek Communists, openly granted the US approval for the construction of a permanent CIA communications center near Athens for the purpose of psychological warfare broadcasting, aimed at Bulgaria, Romania, Albania, as well as Soviet Ukraine.<sup>335</sup> Before the Soviet Red Army had entered Bulgaria in September 1944, the Communist "partizani" had fought alongside the Nationalist "goryani" (mountaineers) who had also fought against the Axis-allied war-time government. In the aftermath of the war, the US would help set up Radio Goryanin, which would be separate from Radio Free Europe would operate based on mobile transmitter units based along the Greek-Bulgarian border. In fact, the FEC originally envisioned a hub based

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<sup>334</sup> Outline Plan for Project Code Name QKSTAIR, OPC Form No. 1103, CIA.  
[https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/BGCONVOY\\_0001.pdf](https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/BGCONVOY_0001.pdf)

<sup>335</sup> Cummings, Richard. *Cold War Frequencies*,  
*CIA Clandestine Radio Broadcasting to Eastern Europe*, 67

out of Istanbul similar to the one it built in Athens, targeting Communists across the Balkans.<sup>336</sup> The project name was changed to BGCONVOY in 1952, after a report stated: The difficulties encountered in maintaining the radio voice of a resistance movement are considerable... but Radio Goryanin has at least partly succeeded in... giving hope and encouragement to the Bulgarian people, to keep them constantly angry and resentful at the injustice of the Communist regime (and) to prepare the whole country psychologically for corporation with the resistance forces in the event of either war or revolution.<sup>337</sup>

Then between 1953 and 1954, a new project METAPHOR was launched in order to “create the illusion of a clandestine shortwave broadcasting station operating within Bulgaria” alongside project MENTHOL which worked with FEP to print and distribute printed leaflets and pamphlets.<sup>338</sup> METAPHOR would broadcast under the name of “Hristo Botev” on purpose to imitate the already existing an identical Bulgarian Radio Hristo Botev, which had been operating since 1941 under the Bulgarian National Radio (BNR) formed as early as 1930. Both, Hristo Botev Radio and Radio Gorianin both ended all broadcasting in the summer of 1962 and merged with the rest of RFE.<sup>339</sup>

The Bulgarian Committee of State security (KDS) was investigating these CIA operations and in May 1951, its report stated that “there is still not accurate data of (its) whereabouts, and who has created and manages it. Intelligence suggests that it is located somewhere in the country, near the Greek border, or on a ship in the waters of the

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<sup>336</sup> Johnson, Ross A. *Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty: the CIA years and beyond*. 202-203.

<sup>337</sup> Project BGCONVOY Report for January 1952, Status Report, SC/PC/2, Bulgaria, BGCONVOY\_0015, CIA. <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/document/5197c269993294098d50edb0>

<sup>338</sup> Project BGCONVOY Report for January 1954, Status Report, SC/PC/2, Bulgaria, BGCONVOY\_0035, CIA. <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/document/5197c269993294098d50edac>

<sup>339</sup> *State Security and the Hostile Radio Stations*,

The Committee for Disclosing the Documents and Announcing Affiliation of Bulgarian Citizens to the State Security and the Intelligence Services of the Bulgarian National Armed Forces, COMDOS. Sofia, Bulgaria. 2014, 236-341. <https://comdos.bg/media/DVD14.pdf>

Mediterranean.”<sup>340</sup> Later in May 1954, Bulgarian counter intelligence created a special unit called “Radioko” (*radiokontrarazuznavane*) which would identify focus on identifying the employees of “enemy radio stations” as traitors while simultaneously setting up jamming stations to disrupt their broadcasting into Bulgaria.<sup>341</sup>

The KDS investigation report in 1956 had concluded in their own terms, that:

The radio station Goryanin was created by US intelligence in 1951 assist its subversion of our country. For the purpose enemy propaganda is made through which they deny all the achievements of the people’s power, blood and fire and brimstone are poured against the party, the government and our friendship with the Soviet Union...this radio station is headed by American agents on our territory.<sup>342</sup>

Throughout the 1950s, intelligence information coordination between the KGB and KDS increased as joint counterintelligence investigations of CIA-backed operations in Eastern Europe were formed. In September 1955, at a multilateral meeting in Prague attended by each Warsaw Pact nations’ security services “radio counterintelligence” divisions and a “Coordination Group” was established.<sup>343</sup> The following year, this group was on heightened alert as the Hungarian uprising of October 1956, exposed RFE’s particularly powerful subversive role at that time, seeking to inspire an uprising.<sup>344</sup>

Furthermore, the archival documents show that a covert coordination meeting between the Bulgarian Broadcasting departments of VOA and RFE in Munich, was issued by KDS in March 1957.<sup>345</sup> Also in January 1959, the KGB had requested that the KDS collect more intelligence on US clandestine operations against Bulgaria, and later that year,

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<sup>340</sup> Project Status Report, SC/PC/2, Bulgaria, BGCONVOY\_0006, CIA.  
<https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/document/5197c269993294098d50eda1>

<sup>341</sup> *State Security and the Hostile Radio Stations*, COMDOS.

<sup>342</sup> *State Security and the Hostile Radio Stations*, COMDOS.

<sup>343</sup> Bulgarian Ministry of Internal Affairs Archive, Fond 4, Record 3, File 11, 1–9. COMDOS.

<sup>344</sup> Baev, Jordan. *Chapter 13: Bulgarian regime countermeasures against Radio Free Europe*, 262.

<sup>345</sup> Bulgarian Ministry of Internal Affairs Archive, Fond 4, Record 3, File 799, 2-3.

a secret discussion involving the Bulgarian Politburo on “the impact of the hostile broadcasting amongst the reactionary elements inside the country” had happened.<sup>346</sup>

### **Soviet, Western/Eastern European and Bulgarian Radio Broadcasting Background**

Although the Bulgarian language service departments of the Western radio broadcasters, including the Voice of America and specifically Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty as part of American foreign policy are the main topic examined foremost in this dissertation, as previously noted in this chapter, the pioneer in radio broadcasting in foreign languages for political purposes, was in fact, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) World Service, then known as the Empire Service since 1932 although Vatican Radio was established in 1931 and even before that, Radio Netherlands Worldwide, may have been the very first station one to have broadcast for a foreign audience, as early as 1927.<sup>347</sup>

However, domestic home service radio stations had appeared throughout Europe as the early 1920s, and most being developed and established throughout the 1930s, as mainstream news outlets. The Marconi Company based in Britain also worked alongside the Italian government as early as 1924, in setting up the Italian Radiophonic Union, which in 1944 morphed into the Radio Audizioni Italine (RAI).<sup>348</sup> The Voice of Greece and the Voice of Turkey<sup>349</sup> were formed respectively in 1938 and 1937 as regional foreign language broadcasters.<sup>350</sup> In other parts of Eastern Europe, the Polish Radio was formed

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<sup>346</sup> Bulgarian Ministry of Internal Affairs Archive, Fond 4, Record 1, File 1359, 77, 78.

<sup>347</sup> Simic, Bojan. *Radio in service of the State Propaganda during the 1930s: Cases of Poland, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria*. 38.

<sup>348</sup> Balbi, Gabriele. “Radio before Radio: Araldo Telefonico and the Invention of Italian Broadcasting.” *Technology and Culture* 51, no. 4 (2010): 786–808. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40928025>.

<sup>349</sup> “TRT: Radio.” [www.trt.net.tr/kurumsal/radyo/](http://www.trt.net.tr/kurumsal/radyo/)

<sup>350</sup> “Greece suspends state broadcaster ERT to save money.” June, 12, 2013. BBC. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-22861577>

in 1926 had created in 1936, an external service called Radio Polonia.<sup>351</sup> The Czechoslovak Radio Prague was formed in 1936<sup>352</sup> and in 1933, Radio Romania International was formed.<sup>353</sup> The Bulgarian National Radio was formed in 1935 and its external broadcaster, called Radio Bulgaria was formed the following year in 1936.<sup>354</sup> From its onset, the Bulgarian Radio was controlled by the Ministry for Information and employees of the station were state employees. Thus, the state-controlled infrastructure for radio broadcasting setup even before the Communist time period, remained relatively unchanged until the 1990s, according to an academic study on this topic.<sup>355</sup>

While, a tradition of public intellectuals involvement with the press even by means of radio existed during the Interwar era, that of a business class owning privately operated radio networks as in America, seems to have been less prominent across most of Europe, where the government owned the main radio networks. Although most radio receptor sets were not manufactured within Bulgaria itself during the 1930s and 1940s, by the 1950s and 1960s they would be, although notably these radio sets were made so that short wave international broadcasts would be more difficult to be received.<sup>356</sup>

Also, it is important to note that while the political structures and ideological foundations of the societies did indeed change in Eastern Europe after WWII, in regards to structures of government controlling information, such as radio broadcasters, they were not

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<sup>351</sup> Simic, Bojan. *Radio in service of the State Propaganda during the 1930s: Cases of Poland, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria*. 39.

<sup>352</sup> "About Czech Radio." <https://www.czech.radio/history-czech-radio-8582317>

<sup>353</sup> "The History of RRI." <https://www.rri.ro/en/the-history-of-rri>

<sup>354</sup> Strijlev, Hristin. *Development of Bulgarian National Radio as Public Media: Opportunities and Perspectives*. 53.

<sup>355</sup> Simic, Bojan. *Radio in service of the State Propaganda during the 1930s: Cases of Poland, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria*. 40.

<sup>356</sup> Angelova, Vyara. "Bulgarian Radio during Socialism." July, 2019.



recreated structurally but simply repurposed as to what type of information would be broadcast to support the agenda of the state.<sup>357</sup>

On the other hand, unlike radio broadcasters in what would later be the Soviet satellite states, the Soviet Union's Radio Moscow which was formed with the explicit goal of promoting revolutionary Communism by means of foreign language services, throughout the world. Radio Moscow's very first broadcast was delivered in German on October 29, 1929<sup>358</sup> – which happened to be Black Tuesday during the Wall Street Crash that precipitated the Great Depression in the Western world. Under the All-Union Radio state agency, Radio Moscow by 1931 was broadcasting in eight major languages, expanding that number to 29 by the 1940s and nearly 70, at the height of its operations during the 1970s.<sup>359</sup> Unlike the decade prior to WWII when Radio Moscow's main mission was to critique and combat the rise of Fascism in Europe by means of its renowned Communist propaganda, during the Cold War, Radio Moscow did not particularly target the First World Capitalist audiences where leftists generally did not tune into its broadcasts despite maintaining a favorable view of the USSR, nor did it particularly target the Second World Communist audiences which had its own regime-run radio networks. Rather, Radio Moscow's top target was the Third World of Non-Aligned nations, where its foreign language programming was considered to be most effective.<sup>360</sup> Radio Moscow in a way performed the role of the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, in gargantuan one combination although, by most accounts nowhere near as effective.

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<sup>357</sup> Angelova, Vyara. "Bulgarian Radio during Socialism." July, 2019.

<sup>358</sup> Roth-Ey, Kristin. "How Do You Listen to Radio Moscow?"

Moscow's Broadcasters, 'Third World' Listeners, and the Space of the Airwaves in the Cold War." *The Slavonic and East European Review* 98, no. 4 (2020): 712–41. <https://doi.org/10.5699/slaveasteurorev2.98.4.0712>. 720

<sup>359</sup> Winek, Mark D. *Radio as a Tool of the State: Radio Moscow and the Early Cold War*. 100-102.

<sup>360</sup> Winek, Mark D. *Radio as a Tool of the State: Radio Moscow and the Early Cold War*. 100-102.

Western broadcasters, such as Radio Berlin International founded by East Germany in 1959 in particular to combat the West German Deutsche Welle which itself was formed in 1953 <sup>361</sup> alongside the US-run Radio in the American Sector (RIAS), were excluded from RFE/RL even though it was itself based in West Germany, as a divided Germany was very much at the heart of both American and Soviet ideological information operations especially in the early part of the Cold War time period.

### **Chapter Conclusion**

During the mid-1970s, countermeasures against Radio Free Europe intensified, as the KDS attempted to restart its struggle against the so-called “imperialist ideological anticommunist propaganda” as during that time, internal intelligence reports suggest that RFE was being singled out as the most subversive threat propagating anti-Soviet sentiment in pro-Soviet Bulgaria. <sup>362</sup>

This might have been in part due to changes in US foreign policy in the midst of the détente era, when an active US “human rights” agenda was promoted to support dissident movements. <sup>363</sup>

However, Baev also suggests that an underlying reason had a lot to do with Markov’s *In Absentia Memoirs for Bulgaria* which were being broadcast through RFE and the BBC starting in 1975 until his death in 1978, and then published as the 1984 English version compilation, *The Truth That Killed*. These claims along with the sources will be examined in the upcoming chapter.

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<sup>361</sup> “DW Milestones.” <https://corporate.dw.com/en/dw-milestones/a-56502832>

<sup>362</sup> Baev, Jordan. *Chapter 13: Bulgarian regime countermeasures against Radio Free Europe*, 263.

<sup>363</sup> Baev, Jordan. *Chapter 13: Bulgarian regime countermeasures against Radio Free Europe*, 263.

At the start of the Cold War during the 1950s and early 1960s, RFE's Bulgarian Broadcasting Department was deemed to be rather ineffective, as the messaging was considered basic propaganda, but by the 1970s with new figures such as Georgi Markov, RFE in particular became a bigger threat than ever to Todor Zhivkov's leadership over Communist Bulgaria.

Nevertheless, the Bulgarian regime had always considered it a threat since its inception and coordinated to counter its messaging by investigating and surveilling the émigrés who worked for RFE as well as disrupting its broadcasting by jamming. Bulgarian authorities had built multiple jamming stations equipped to bring maximum interference to RFE transmissions, early on.

These jamming stations operated clandestinely, as their locations were unknown but clandestine jamming still could not prevent those individuals determined to tune in at various times when jamming was not possible as RFE frequently changed its frequencies and transmission times.

Although jamming made listening to RFE difficult for those in more remote rural areas or heavily jammed urban areas, the interference made it difficult to clearly hear the audible sound so some people just gave up. As more advanced techniques in signal manipulation were deployed to distort broadcasts, the FEC acknowledged the importance of engaging in a multifaceted manner with its target audience and utilized its FEP to coordinate with RFE on producing printed material that informed the public of the "captive nations" about in on-air messaging.

However, even as jamming interrupted the flow of information, RFE broadcasts provided those Bulgarians who tuned in with access to alternative ideological narratives

and news information that was otherwise unavailable. Ultimately, an important factor in the effectiveness of radio broadcasting in general was that aside from jamming, the regime could not really control this externally produced messaging nor could the regime ever record or track who had tuned into listening to these “enemy propaganda radio” stations, unless someone else reported on the listener to the authorities or the listener was actually caught in the act of listening to that illegal station.

At the height of the Cold War during the late 1960s and 1970s, especially in the aftermath of the failed Prague Spring and subsequent Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, it seemed that many Communists and non-believers alike began losing faith in the notion that the totalitarian Eastern bloc regimes could eventually evolve into a sort of Eurocommunism “with a human face” as the Czechoslovak Communists tried so hard leading up to that fateful summer of 1968.<sup>364</sup>

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<sup>364</sup> Baev, Jordan. *Chapter 13: Bulgarian regime countermeasures against Radio Free Europe*, 259.

**CHAPTER 3:**  
**THE BULGARIAN “DISSIDENT DEFECTORS” AND THE CASE OF GEORGI  
MARKOV IN BULGARIA AND GREAT BRITAIN IN RELATION TO  
WESTERN RADIO BROADCASTING, 1960s-1970s**

**Chapter Introduction**

In order to fully investigate the overall effectiveness and essence of American public diplomacy and propaganda efforts directed toward the Soviet satellite state of Bulgaria during the Cold War as examined in chapters two and three, the following four chapter narrows into a much more specific subject matter and time frame, where the content of all the previous chapters converge and the core of this research begins to be explored.

This dissertation chapter serves as the pinnacle of the research case study and sets the stage for the archival research-based assessment of Western broadcasting to Bulgaria during the late 1970s and 1980s, a time period coinciding with Bulgaria’s cultural diplomacy outreach to the non-aligned nations of the Third World, as well as the series of events involving the Soviet Union that ultimately led to the end of the Cold War. Ironically, the peak of Soviet-Bulgarian relations during the 1970s era of détente also coincided with a drastic increase of American broadcasting in Bulgarian aimed at Bulgaria.

In the aftermath of the failed Prague Spring uprisings and subsequent Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, it seemed that many Communists and non-believers alike began losing faith in the notion that the totalitarian Eastern bloc regimes could eventually evolve into a sort of Eurocommunism “with a human face” as the Czechoslovak

Communists tried so hard to do, leading up to that fateful summer.<sup>365</sup> During the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia during which Bulgarian forces participated in along with the Polish, Hungarian and Soviet militaries, a small but significant backlash began among some in the Bulgarian *intelligentsia*, who had initially been supported by the *nomenklatura* class of bureaucrats and Communist Party members, but over time found personal, professional and political reasons to turn against the totalitarian regime.

Among those public intellectuals-turned, dissident defectors was Georgi Markov, the well-known novelist, screenwriter and playwright who had gained inside knowledge of the *nomenklatura* class he became part of, and at one point, over several meetings was personally acquainted with Todor Zhivkov, the Bulgarian Prime Minister and Party General Secretary from 1956 to 1989.

Markov's writing career in Bulgaria developed from 1957 to 1969 after which he left Bulgaria for Britain, broadcasting for the BBC and RFE until his legendary assassination by means of the infamous "Bulgarian umbrella" used against him in central London on September 7, 1978.

This chapter will address the murder case which after 45 years now, has never been officially resolved, and about which much has been written, at that time and long after. The chapter will also introduce Georgi Markov's life story, his initial literary works in Bulgaria and those abroad with a focus on his activities while in London with the BBC and with particular attention to RFE. This will be done by examining and citing Markov's RFE broadcasts from 1975 to 1978, organized as the *In Absentia Memoirs for Bulgaria* as well

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<sup>365</sup> Baev, Jordan. *Chapter 13: Bulgarian regime countermeasures against Radio Free Europe*, in Johnson, Ross A. and Parta, Eugene R. *Cold War Broadcasting: Impact on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*, Central European University Press, 2010. 259.

as the post-humous publication by his wife Annabel Markov, of *The Truth That Killed* (1984). In particular, emphasis will be on the *Personal Meetings with Todor Zhivkov*, which are considered to constitute among the main reasons for the death of Georgi Markov.

Additionally, this chapter will also introduce the other six new émigrés alongside Georgi Markov, including Atanas Slavov, Petar Semerdzhiev, Dimitar Inkiow, Assen Ignatov, Dimitar Bochev and Vladimir Kostov – all of whom defected and contributed in some capacity to RFE or other Western broadcasters during this time period, but were not assassinated. Also, allegations that Markov might have served as a double agent of the Bulgarian and British secret services, the coordination between the Bulgarian and Soviet secret services in his 1978 assassination in London, the murky circumstances behind the 1981 Soviet plot to assassinate the Polish Pope John Paul II in Rome, as well as the Romanian connection to the 1981 bombing of the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty headquarters in Munich are briefly touched upon. Finally, the stage is set for a detailed demonstration of dissident defectors advancing US public diplomacy into the 1980s.

Western radio broadcasting as a form of public diplomacy and propaganda, as previously examined in addition to regular news reporting, indeed contributed to the broader information warfare against the target regimes of the Communist world. In relation to Soviet-allied Bulgaria, where unlike the other satellite states, an organized domestic dissident movement did not develop, the role of this new generation of émigrés embodied by Georgi Markov, is important to explore in this chapter.

The shifting global and domestic political terrain brought about by the détente era of the 1970s allowed for a more stable relationship between the USSR and US, an American diplomatic recognition of the Eastern bloc through the 1975 Helsinki accords in

exchange for the Western emphasis on human rights, which led to some limited but increased relaxation of restrictions and censorship in Bulgaria. Of course, the original dissident émigrés who worked for the West had left Bulgaria right before the consolidation of the Stalinist regime in the late 1940s and early 1950s, but the émigrés did not emerge during the de-Stalinization reforms of the 1960s, when Bulgaria experienced an internal thaw in constraints on literature, but rather it was after the Prague Spring into the 1970s, that these public intellectuals-turned dissidents defected to the West, where they began broadcasting. This was around the same time as the pro-Soviet regime in Bulgaria was reaching the peak of its cultural diplomacy and was preparing to embark on an organized celebration at home and abroad in 1981. However, the ideological threat posed by the so-called “hostile émigré, enemy radio propaganda” broadcasting supported as part of US public diplomacy, something that the Soviet bloc had always attempted to censor by means of jamming, was intensifying, once again.

To Todor Zhivkov and the Communist regime, Georgi Markov and the small group of dissident defectors, embodied more than the traditional threat of traitors defecting for the West. Markov’s ability to formulate a critical narrative about Zhivkov based on his personal experience within the “inner circle” of the regime, and then broadcast that information as a form of political warfare during the 1970s, escalated the threat for the Communist party’s long-standing domestic ideological legitimacy at home as well as Bulgaria’s successful cultural diplomacy abroad, which occurred at the same time.



## Markov's Life Story back in Communist Bulgaria, 1929-1969

Georgi Markov had become the symbolic embodiment of a dissident in a country that had never developed an organized dissident movement, and his life was ended in an effort by his government to make an example of him for what it viewed as a form of politically treasonous activity and personal betrayal. The last ten years of Markov's life would be marked by his dissident defector public image working for the West, and he would become famous worldwide after his assassination, but like any person, his earlier private life circumstances shaped his later public life.

Georgi Markov was born in the midst of the Inter War Era on March 1, 1929 in the outskirts of Sofia.<sup>366</sup> His early life experience coincided with the late 1940s consolidation of Communism. During the early 1950s, he had graduated as an engineer, worked at the Pobeda metal factory and as a teacher in a technical high school in Sofia.<sup>367</sup> However, at the age of 29 he retired from the workforce due to a tuberculosis diagnosis, and this would mark the start of his literary career, which began with *The Whisky Recorder*, a short story published in the *Narodna Kultura* newspaper and his first novels; *The Night of Caesium* (1957), *The Winners of Ajax* (1959), and a series of short stories and novellas called *Inquiry* and *Between Day and Night*.<sup>368</sup> However, it was his third novel titled simply, *Men* (1961), which won the best book award in 1962, was turned into a motion picture, while also elevating Markov for a fast-tracked membership into the elite, Bulgarian Writers' Union.

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<sup>366</sup> Moser, Charles A. "Georgi Markov in the 1960s." SEER, Vol. 67, No. 3, July 1989. 354.

<sup>367</sup> Moser, Charles A. "Georgi Markov in the 1960s." SEER, Vol. 67, No. 3, July 1989. 354.

<sup>368</sup> Nikolova, Gergana. "Georgi Markov Taught Us that There Is No Greater Value than Freedom." September 11, 2023. BTA.bg. <https://www.bta.bg/en/news/culture/520621-georgi-markov-taught-us-that-there-is-no-greater-value-than-freedom-writer-zah>

<sup>369</sup> Markov, Georgi. *I Was Him: Letters and Documents on the fate and work of Georgi Markov.* 14-17.

As among the most widely-read writers of his time, Markov's best read novels included *The Portrait of My Double* (1966) and *The Women of Warsaw* (1968) as well as his staged play; *Communists* (1969) along with his participation in the writing the scripts for the popular 1960s television series *Every Kilometer*,<sup>370</sup> which dramatized the struggle of the underground partizans from 1923 to 1944, portraying in the public imagination, the September Socialist Revolution as a popular uprising, thus legitimizing the regime.

Georgi Markov as part of the Bulgarian Writers Union was contributing his creative talents to effectively supporting the domestic propaganda machine and this role by 1964 earned him attention from the very top of the Politburo, Todor Zhivkov himself. Markov was invited to the "inner circle" of the party's cultural elite, going to hunting lodges in the Balkan mountains and beachside villas on the Black Sea, experiences he describes as part of his later reporting. Markov would characterize his initial meeting with Zhivkov, as:

...far removed from the intellectual world...not read many books and his education was rather limited; even his vocabulary frequently showed the uneasy combination of simple peasant language and pompous phrases...but nonetheless he had undoubted natural intelligence, quick wit and a magnificent memory and well developed intuition.<sup>371</sup>

While Markov's participation as a propagandist within the *nomenklatura* class from 1961 to 1969 allowed him exclusive social privileges and advanced his literary career, he reflected that "these luxuries were put at the disposal of writers for one reason only – to prevent them from writing."<sup>372</sup> Evidently, he had harbored resentment early on after

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<sup>370</sup> Dimitrov, Martin. "Dissident's Assassination Haunts Bulgaria After 40 Years." September 7, 2018. Balkan Insight. <https://balkaninsight.com/2018/09/07/legacy-of-a-dissident-s-assassination-lingers-in-bulgaria-forty-years-later-09-07-2018/>

<sup>371</sup> Markov, Georgi. *The Truth That Killed*. "Personal Meetings with Todor Zhivkov." 231.

<sup>372</sup> Karkov, Nikolay. "Against the Double Erasure: Georgi Markov's Contribution to the Communist Hypothesis." *Slavic Review*, Vol. 77, No. 1, Spring 2018. 155.

clashing with the censorship authorities who banned his *The Great Roof* (1962) book, which presented the story of a factory's collapsing roof, through which he tried allegorically to point out some obvious shortcomings of the planned economy, he lived in.<sup>373</sup> Even the award winning *Men* (1961), about the lives of a group of comrades, had parts edited out, altered, added on, and then republished again in revised editions.<sup>374</sup>

As a frustrated playwright, nine of his scripts were censored and could not appear in their original form, including: *Let's Go Under the Rainbow* and *The Assassination Attempt*.<sup>375</sup> The last straw for Markov was when his now-famous *The Man Who Was Me* (1969) was performed on June 15 in a Sofia theatre, whereas the public responded positively, party officials viewing it, did not, denouncing it as a "Czech play."<sup>376</sup> That moment alongside the events of 1968 in Prague, motivated Markov to leave Bulgaria.

### **Markov's Life Story away from Bulgaria in Great Britain, 1970-1978**

Markov left Bulgaria in 1969, with a travel visa that had been granted earlier to go to visit his brother Nikola in Bologna, Italy who was there since 1963 (he somehow eventually managed moved to the US).<sup>377</sup> Markov had at that point, planned to leave Bulgaria permanently, as later noted that he had burned all his journals for the past 15 years, and while crossing to the border into Yugoslavia on the way to Italy, he had written: As I looked back toward Bulgaria...it seemed to me that even its natural beauty sharpened the feeling of how unbearable it was to live the ugly life, which I and many others like me were forced to endure. The very act

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<sup>373</sup> Moser, Charles A. "Georgi Markov in the 1960s." SEER, Vol. 67, No. 3, July 1989. 363.

<sup>374</sup> Moser, Charles A. "Georgi Markov in the 1960s." SEER, Vol. 67, No. 3, July 1989. 358-59.

<sup>375</sup> Nikolova, Gergana. "Georgi Markov Taught Us that There Is No Greater Value than Freedom." 9/11/2023. BTA.bg

<sup>376</sup> Warner, Vessela. "Global Dissident: Georgi Markov" *Studia Historica Gedanensia*, 2014. 84.

<sup>377</sup> Moser, Charles A. "Georgi Markov in the 1960s." SEER, Vol. 67, No. 3, July 1989. 354.

of living in the country represented an endless chain of compromise. Even the struggle against compromise was not without compromise.<sup>378</sup>

However, it should be noted here that Markov for the most part lived a privileged life of professional success and even his departure from Bulgaria was done without the need to illegally escape crossing the border, as some had attempted to do so, only to be caught and shot on the spot. Additionally, when he left the country, he was not under any pressure except for his own personal frustration with the censorship machine and perhaps his conscious objection to the way that things had transpired in the aftermath of the failed attempts at reforming Communism leading up to and after the Prague Spring. Maybe Markov himself was simply an idealist determined to show his frustration with the flaws in how the socialist system had so brutally manifested itself in Bulgaria.

Markov seemingly ended up cynically just as critical of the West, as he experienced during his professional life in Britain, based on a later account written nearly eight years after he left Bulgaria. This is a February 22, 1977 letter to fellow defector Dimitar Bochev: When I arrived here, in the West, I was very surprised to find that almost all the people I met, both local and immigrants, were struggling and dreaming to get in life something that I had thrown away in Bulgaria – money, guaranteed work, fame. Almost everyone, both English and German, thought I was crazy and that it was absolutely moral to lie on the backs of an entire nation and live like a privileged bastard. This morality struck me so much that I realized that the Western public conscience is either a dirty political game of the day or a bunch of s\*\*\*t, and that it is not a sincere response to anything, because the few really honest and sincere “Don Quixotes” who care about human dignity have no access (to impact) on radio, television, or newspapers...It seems that between me and all these radio stations, there is a similar relationship, that existed between me and all the party organizations, for a long time now, I no longer believe in the freedom of speech,

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<sup>378</sup> Markov, Georgi. *The Truth That Killed*. “Epilogue: The Sense of the Unbearable.” 267.

which in practice, is equivalent to being able to talk about at home or with friends about what you are interested in, but try to voice a real opinion in the *The Times* newspaper or the “independent” BBC!

You will have lots of luck in a democracy. Here just like with *Rabotnichesko Delo*, you have to take into consideration the official position of the newspaper or the radio stations. The principles are exactly the same... Everything, I write to you, you already know...so I plan myself to write about this in a novel, because neither the people who work at Radio Sofia or the radio stations here really care about Bulgaria or the well-being of the Bulgarians... (but) if Communism ever comes to the West, I assure you – their dictatorships will be far more disgusting than ours in the East. <sup>379</sup>

Throughout Markov’s commentary while living exiled in Great Britain from 1970 to 1978, there are to be found sometimes subtly indirect and at times openly direct critiques, which are embedded in his personal and professional writings. This means that Markov might have had an idealistic ideological outlook which caused him to be disillusioned and frustrated by the reality of the situations he experienced, or it might be that he was able and willing to voice his critique after picking up and pointing out various societal flaws and hypocritical situations, he encountered. <sup>380</sup>

Markov probably prided himself with being an intellectually honest individual who valued the freedom of expression above all, and certainly would not have preferred to see himself as an agent of propaganda production. Although, in truth, Markov participated effectively in propaganda production for both sides, working for Western information warfare operations in Britain after leaving Bulgaria, where the Communist regime which simultaneously promoted and censored his work, had initially welcomed him into its “inner

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<sup>379</sup> Markov, Georgi. *I Was Him: 121 Documents from and about Georgi Markov*. 1999. 222-227.

This text is significant since it reveals Markov’s private feelings about his life in the West, as he conveyed them to a trusted colleague and friend, and which were not meant to be made public.

<sup>380</sup> Warner, Vessela. “Global Dissident: Georgi Markov” *Studia Historica Gedanensia*, 2014. 91-94.

circle” and then ultimately demanded his death for what he saw as treason. In a way he acted as a “double agent”, although not an actual double agent, as will be addressed later.

Markov’s critiques of both Communism and Capitalism are always quite nuanced, as he does not ultimately condemn the community-oriented egalitarian ideal in all its forms nor does he fully embrace the profit-seeking individualistic free market ideal, either, rather he foremost rejects rigid totalitarian censorship and instead embraces the freedom of speech found in democracy.

Markov had once remarked that for him, chasing material wealth, in either economic system would have ultimately transformed him into an empty shell without a soul.<sup>381</sup> Through his BBC commentaries on these matters, such as *The Legend of the West* and *Bowing Before King Dollar*,<sup>382</sup> he often used hyperbolic satirist styles of communication to critique and expose from an alternative angle certain aspects of the consumerism, materialism, and social class inequalities he saw in Britain during the 1970s, which was a time of general economic malaise for the Western world.

Markov moved to Britain in 1970, requested political asylum and settled in London. But by 1971, the Bulgarian government requested his immediate return and refused to extend his passport and the following year, Markov was tried in absentia by a panel of three judges at a court in Sofia, he was charged with defecting and offering himself at the service of a foreign, hostile nation; the UK.<sup>383</sup> Markov was found guilty and sentenced to six and a half years in prison, and had all his property confiscated.<sup>384</sup> Although that judgement

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<sup>381</sup> Karkov, Nikolay. “Against the Double Erasure: Georgi Markov’s Contribution to the Communist Hypothesis.” 141.

<sup>382</sup> Markov, Georgi. “Poklon pred Tsar Dollar,” *Zadochni Reportazhi za Zadochna Bulgaria*, 403.

<sup>383</sup> Salisbury, Daniel “Murder on Waterloo Bridge.” *Contemporary British History* 2023, Vol. 37, No. 1. 131.

<sup>384</sup> Salisbury, Daniel “Murder on Waterloo Bridge.” *Contemporary British History* 2023, Vol. 37, No. 1. 131.

could be considered to be a lenient punishment since according to Bulgarian law, any one who overstayed their leave of absence for more than three months was automatically indicted and served ten years of prison time. In fact, all Communist countries maintained a strict exit visa procedure and did not allow for the free movement of people.

Despite occasional disillusionment, Markov's new life allowed for creative expression, as his old play *Let's Go Under the Rainbow* was in 1974 staged and performed in London, while in Edinburgh, his new play *Archangel Michael*, had won a prize.<sup>385</sup> Markov met an Englishwoman, Annabel Dilke and married her in 1975, having one daughter by the name of Alexandria-Raina.<sup>386</sup> Markov also attempted to make a movie of one of his novels, together with the film director Petar Uvaliev (the most influential Bulgarian emigrant in the world, who was also living in Britain) he had changed his name to Pierre Rouve after leaving Bulgaria early on in 1947.<sup>387</sup> Markov also was working with the English author David Philips on a comedic satire about the British political establishment titled *The Right Honorable Chimpanzee*, published post-houmously.

By 1977, Markov had applied for British citizenship<sup>388</sup> and had well adopted to his career in London, contributing his intellectual talents full-time to the Bulgarian section of the BBC's World Service after working initially part-time for the West German broadcaster

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<sup>385</sup> Chernev, Chavdar. *How Was Markov Born?* *New Material for the Writer's Biography*. Библиотека, 2007. 38-50.

<sup>386</sup> Chernev, Chavdar. *How Was Markov Born?* *New Material for the Writer's Biography*. Библиотека, 2007. 38-50.

<sup>387</sup> Atanasova, Nevenva. "The Patriot and Bulgarian Novelist Peter Uvaliev". *Bulgarka Magazine*, June 25, 2016.

<https://www.bulgarkamagazine.com/en/родолюбеца-и-българоман-петър-увалие/>

<sup>388</sup> Salisbury, Daniel "Murder on Waterloo Bridge." *Contemporary British History* 2023, Vol. 37, No. 1. 145.

Deutsche Welle (DW) for whom he broadcast a total of 17 programs between December 1971 and June 1972.<sup>389</sup>

### **Radio Free Europe's Bulgarian Broadcasting from Great Britain:**

#### **Markov's "In Absentia: Reports about Bulgaria", 1975-1978**

Between 1975 and 1978, Markov worked with the 10 person staff at RFE's Bulgarian department, with his first freelance contribution being broadcast on June 8, 1975, called *The Debts of Contemporary Bulgarian Literature*.<sup>390</sup> This report was the first of 80 broadcasts in over 137 separate emissions as Sunday-evening programs, over the span of 32 months.<sup>391</sup> During this time, a survey tracking transmissions, shows a 10% increase of radio listeners, from 20% to 30%.<sup>392</sup>

These would be collectively called in Bulgarian "задочни репортажи за задочна България" translated literarily in two ways as: "in absentia reports about an absent Bulgaria" or as "remote reports remotely reported on Bulgaria." In English, they were simply called *Reports* or *In Absentia: Reports about Bulgaria*, implying he was reporting from abroad about Bulgaria. Although, like his BBC commentaries and unlike the other RFE Bulgarian service reports, Markov's essays are not structured as news reports focusing on contemporary breaking news, but rather as a type of autobiographical dramatized story telling designed to lure the listener to tune in.

Markov's *Reports* especially after his dissident martyr's death were called by some the "Bulgarian Bible; a modern encyclopedia of Bulgarian life – a future textbook in

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<sup>389</sup> Markov, Georgi. *I Was Him: 121 Documents from and about Georgi Markov*. 1999. 105

<sup>390</sup> Box 416, June, 1975. 1-2. Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records, Hoover Library and Archives.

<sup>391</sup> Dimitrov, Martin. "Dissident's Assassination Haunts Bulgaria After 40 Years." September 7, 2018. Balkan Insight.

<sup>392</sup> "Appendix C: Weekly Listening Rates for Major Western Broadcasters to Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Bulgaria and the USSR During the Cold War" in *Cold War Broadcasting*. 144.



history, political science, and knowledge of the people.”<sup>393</sup> Most of the original Bulgarian reports were published in two volumes in Zurich in 1980-1981 under the title *задочни репортажи за България* or “in absentia reports about Bulgaria.” Some of those *Reports* were abridged and translated into English for publication as *The Truth That Killed* (London, 1983; New York, 1984), an initiative organized by widow wife, Annabel Markov. Both texts are cited as primary sources, throughout the remainder of this chapter.

These *Reports* are emotionally charged, and sharply critiqued what Markov called “life *under the lid* of the party”<sup>394</sup>, perhaps using that phrase to echo the title of *Under the Yoke* (1893) by Ivan Vazov, Bulgaria’s greatest writer, who lived exiled in the Ukraine during the Russian Empire, writing about the tyrannical oppression of Bulgarians living under the Ottoman Empire as it was collapsing before the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

Markov shares his own critical opinion through commentaries, and his own experiences, explores Bulgarian politics, history, culture and how it has been impacted by the Soviet imposition of what he calls “a foreign system” in Bulgaria. In a series of reports titled *The Soviet Feudal System*, *The Ravages of the Personality Cult*, *A Biography of the Regime* and *Love for Big Brother*, Markov honestly addresses the historical complexities behind the Bulgarian-Russian “special relationship” and the particular choice of words that he chooses to describe his version of that aspect of history, is quite significant:

I read in various Bulgarian or Western newspapers of the great traditional love which the Bulgarians supposedly feel for the USSR... to begin with, in the West people do not differentiate properly between the concepts of Russia and the Soviet Union....Whereas for many Western citizens the word ‘Russian’ is a near synonym for ‘Soviet’, the Bulgarians are among the few inhabitants of the world who really know the

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<sup>393</sup> Karkov, Nikolay. “Against the Double Erasure: Georgi Markov’s Contribution to the Communist Hypothesis.” 156.

<sup>394</sup> Phillips, Tom. “Writing in Absentia: Nostalgia and Anti-Nostalgia in the Essays of Georgi Markov.” 56.

difference. Certain historical links exist because of their common Slav origin, Orthodox Christianity and the similarity of the language. But links of this nature do not in any way imply love. From a historical point of view, Russia owes its linguistic and cultural development to medieval Bulgaria. However hard Soviet historians try, they cannot suppress the fact that the Cyrillic alphabet which they use originated in Bulgaria...Indeed, the eyes of many Bulgarians under Ottoman domination were turned hopefully towards Russia. This hope was founded mainly on the idea of the Christian faith acting as a bulwark against the Muslim conquer. Of course, many young Bulgarians were educated in Russia at that time and later became a living link between the two countries...Feelings of compassion, sympathy and commiseration toward the Bulgarians were expressed by representatives of the Russian intelligentsia, especially in Pan-Slavist circles, but they were certainly not shared by the Russian masses, who lived in wretched poverty and ignorance, deprived of human rights, and indifferent to what was happening beyond the Danube. Bulgaria's liberation by the Russian army in 1878 is a significant historical fact. But let us not be blind to its real meaning. Love is the most neglected feeling the world of politics. The liberation was not the result of a Russian outburst of humanity, compassion and love for the unhappy Bulgarians, but the fruit of a rational imperialist policy... The essential relationship between Bulgarians and Russians is not some mythological love between citizens of two countries unknown to each other, but instead reflects the influence of Russia's creative genius at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The emancipation of Bulgaria coincided with a remarkable flowering of Russian literature, music and painting (and) it is easy to trace many fertile Russian influences in Bulgarian culture. These continued to exist decades later, despite the different political course of the two countries. Thus one cannot talk of any special relationship between Bulgarians and the Russians. Perhaps there was (such) a special relationship among politicians or pro-Russian officers of Russophile circles...<sup>395</sup>

Today, the text above summarizes the world view held by most of mainstream Bulgarian society concerning its history with Russia. But during that time period, when he was writing this commentary, the Soviet-Bulgarian alliance held such a sacred status in the

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<sup>395</sup> Markov, Georgi. *The Truth That Killed*. "Love for Big Brother." 162-165.

collective memory of the country and in the interests of its government, that any critical thinking about its implications was not ever discussed publicly, the way Markov did.

However, this history is only the beginning, the tip of the iceberg, as he then goes on to critique the Communist party's legitimacy based on the Bulgarian-Soviet ideological connection, speculating that had the Soviet model of development, been not imposed, Bulgaria would have "have found the way to a Bulgarian socialism most suited to our circumstances."<sup>396</sup> Markov then argues effectively that because Bulgarian pre-war society was marked by an absence of a "powerful Capitalism and exploitation" and "the inherent Socialism of our strongly developed co-operative movement", thus he states that "Bulgaria, without any Communist help, was already successfully practicing its own form of Democratic Socialism."<sup>397</sup> Markov ponders why the Bulgarian government with its intent on building a socialist society, did not simply follow the "natural development of these native tendencies" and why the peasants had to be coerced to join the co-operative farms, "when before the war there had been massive support for the idea of village co-operatives, the expression of a most democratic and meaningful form of socialism."<sup>398</sup> Again, the argument against imposing the foreign Soviet system on Bulgaria, results in what he calls an "utterly alien and completely unsuitable social scheme."<sup>399</sup>

Markov also directs direct criticism against the ruling Communist party in Bulgaria, which of course was of the same generation that seized power from the mid-1940s to the mid-1970s. In critiquing the Communist party, he particularly points out the "cult of personality" in what he considers "not a Bulgarian weakness" but rather a Russian problem,

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<sup>396</sup> Markov, Georgi. *The Truth That Killed*. "The Soviet Feudal System." 154-156.

<sup>397</sup> Markov, Georgi. *The Truth That Killed*. "The Soviet Feudal System." 154-156.

<sup>398</sup> Markov, Georgi. *The Truth That Killed*. "The Soviet Feudal System." 154-156.

<sup>399</sup> Markov, Georgi. *The Truth That Killed*. "The Soviet Feudal System." 154-156.

as he goes on to claim that “the Russians seem to have idolatry in their blood”<sup>400</sup> Markov then points out the personalities of those in power, and although some of what he says was already well-known in society, having him criticizing the regime so directly after the privilege he enjoyed within it, all the more, being supported in doing so by the US in order to turn public opinion against the regime and its support in Moscow, was indeed a dangerous undertaking. Markov claims that “our regime, a perfect copy of the Soviet system. Thus the power at the disposal of our comrade leaders has been delegated to them by a foreign state, a world power, the USSR... In this context, I fully agree with the Party claim: that the determining factor in the life of every Bulgarian Communist is his loyalty to the Soviet Union.”<sup>401</sup>

These particularly selected quotations from his multiple radio reports on these topics, in a nutshell illustrate the contemporary problems facing Bulgarian society from within, and draw a direct historical line from the formation of the modern Bulgarian state to its present-day status. Even as Communism has collapsed since the 1980s, much of the power structures who controlled society during that time still hold generational influence over present-day Bulgaria, even thirty to forty years later. Markov himself and much of the dissident defector class were themselves at some point, on some level associated in supporting the Communist power structure, few if any actual dissidents could operate completely outside of the system and hope to have any impact on society, in that way.

In his more personally motivated report titled *The Justification*, Markov attempts to tell an autobiographical story mixed in with a warning about a fictional “Comrade M”:

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<sup>400</sup> Markov, Georgi. *The Truth That Killed*. “The Ravages of the Personality Cult.” 149-150.

<sup>401</sup> Markov, Georgi. *The Truth That Killed*. “A Biography of the Regime.” 135-139.

Somewhere during the 1950s, M was a student at Sofia University. By origin and convictions his family were well placed in the new social order. But, out of pure idealism, in response to the Stalinist terror and outrages of the Bulgarian dictators, M took part in a conspiracy of university students.. who planned to publish an illegal dissident bulletin. Ironically, most of the participants in this conspiracy came from the natural middle class or from Communist families. There were no ‘class enemies’ among them...Of course, the Stalinist State Security rounded them up mercilessly and...they all found themselves in the left wing of the Central Prison, where detainees were questioned... A few mornings later, M was brought to the captain’s office. His inquisitor received him in a very kindly way and said: ‘Today is 9<sup>th</sup> of September Day, and in order to show you and others like you that, in spite of everything, we believe in behaving properly, we have decided to let you go home for the holiday. But the day after tomorrow, the 1<sup>th</sup> of September, at 9 am exactly, I want you back here at the gate.... The shock of this walk on 9 September Day was so profound... However, on 11<sup>th</sup> of September at 9 am, at the Central Prison, the captain met him with a long searching look. ‘I think you now understand a few important things’ he said. ‘I was following you and I saw everything’. M remained dully silent. He felt indifferent. That was his justification. Because he knew that he was one of those who conveniently justify their own sins by the sins of others.’<sup>402</sup>

Markov as “Comrade M” warns of what would have happened if he, had been the character in the story, being detained by the secret police, who later let him free just so they could watch his every move and see that he has proven himself, to return by his own will to the prison. In a way, this story has Orwellian overtones, but in the opposite sense, as if the character Winston after fleeing the surveillance of Big Brother, hating him for his control, and after being captured and tortured, eventually is re-educated and brainwashed to actually love Big Brother. In this case, “Comrade M” decides he will serve Big Brother preemptively without resisting, as the security state caught him for a thought crime but then

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<sup>402</sup> Markov, Georgi. *The Truth That Killed*. “The Justification.” 167-172.

trusted him with his own freedom while under surveillance. Even though this is an esoteric tale, it is also a warning of how the security state effectively recruits its agents.

Georgi Markov often times portrayed himself as the Bulgarian version of George Orwell. In fact, George Orwell was admittedly Markov's favorite author,<sup>403</sup> and Orwellian themes clearly show up in much of his writing.<sup>404</sup> This is especially once he could explicitly write and speak on these themes, as when he found himself in 1970s London, the 1930s-40s home of his hero, Orwell. Markov writes openly that "precisely as George Orwell described in his novel *1984* (1949), the thoughts and acts of everyone in our country (Bulgaria) are constantly watched and controlled by the regime and its organs. In its unlimited power, this control exceeds all dictatorships known to history."<sup>405</sup>

Markov in his commentary titled *A Member of the Writers Union* among the others, also shares his life's story, admitting subtly how he became a volunteering agent of a dictatorship's propaganda machine, he also spells out how the Writers Union was at the core of the propaganda machine, he was part of, and he even goes on to confess the sins of his political career, admitting dramatically his complicity in the system, here:

The Party believed and still believes that literature is a vital propaganda instrument; hence the Writers' Union is considered the most important of all the unions of artists. Its staff included ten members of the Party's Central Committee and even a Politburo member, and where importance and influence in the country's ideological life were concerned, the Union was crucial...We saw countless cases when the Party machine produced not merely one or two of its pseudo-creatures, but a whole chain that would strengthen them...Unfortunately, however, because of the needs of the regime, (I) was a writer, a Writers' Union existed

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<sup>403</sup> Karkov, Nikolay. "Against the Double Erasure: Georgi Markov's Contribution to the Communist Hypothesis." 156.

<sup>404</sup> Phillips, Tom. "Writing in Absentia: Nostalgia and Anti-Nostalgia in the Essays of Georgi Markov." January 2020. *Folia Linguistica et Litteraria* XI (31): 55-68. 56.

<sup>405</sup> Markov, Georgi. *The Truth That Killed*. "Love for Big Bother." 161.

and I... was its member! <sup>406</sup> The party critics found in my novel exactly what they needed. From there on, a wide avenue with its traffic lights permanently green opened before me. When the Party machine starts working for someone, everything goes smoothly...The official union membership card had the value of a university language degree, so that every member was entitled to occupy a teaching post at the university, but the main advantage was the opportunity it offered to mingle with powerful literary collogues and use their connection and influence. In short...entering the magic circle. <sup>407</sup>

Interestingly enough, in the original Bulgarian first volume published, there are two reports titled *The Literary Swamp* as well as *Divide and Rule* following this collection of essays, however these reports detailing the interpersonal conflicts and specific connections to political power, amongst all the *intelligentsia* in Bulgaria, were purposefully not translated into the English version, as perhaps Markov did not want to single out his colleagues for direct criticism in front of the world, but surely having it broadcast solely in Bulgarian would have attracted many listeners to his voice. Markov's satirical streak is also ever present alongside his dystopian tone, as he invites listeners to his caricatured absurd case of censorship involving propaganda over the radio waves:

Radio Sofia's music then consisted mainly of Bulgarian and Soviet party songs and folk music. Classical music was played comparatively rarely. Nevertheless, at a lecture on music, a vigilant comrade asked: 'Why does Radio Sofia play Beethoven when it is well known that he wrote music at the bidding of Austrian aristocrats and consequently has nothing in common with the working class and struggles of the Party?' The lecturer gave the following replay: 'Although Beethoven's music was commissioned by the aristocracy, it reflects the revolutionary progressive spirit of his time and therefore we accept it;' and here the lecture raised his voice to deliver the clinching argument: 'Comrades! Comrade Lenin liked to listen to the *Appassionata!*'

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<sup>406</sup> Markov, Georgi. *The Truth That Killed*. "A Member of the Writers' Union." 177-80.

<sup>407</sup> Markov, Georgi. *The Truth That Killed*. "We Made You A Writer." 182.

<sup>408</sup> Markov, Georgi. *The Truth That Killed*. "The Dialectic of Censorship." 194.

In the spirit of mocking the contradictions of the Communist censor and demonstrating the role of double-speak as censorship in the political discourse of journalism, Markov again satirically writes the following commentary:

‘In Socialist Bulgaria, there is no censorship!’ the regime’s representatives often repeat this in answer to questions from foreign journalists. Bulgarian journalists do not ask such questions. They have no time; for the main concern of everyone who attempts to write on a serious theme is how to get his material accepted, how to safeguard it from the cavalier encroachments of hundreds of censors...The official duty of the old censor has been successfully transformed into an active personal interest, and even a passion, for censoring life and the world. ‘Why should we censor journalists writers, critics and artists, when they can censor each other far more effectively!’ is the maxim underlying the Party’s great innovation on the path towards the ‘all-round development of man.’ In this way, censorship has been established on a general, or, to use the newspaper cliché, ‘nation-wide’ basis. Of course, we are talking here about political censorship. But what in the Communist world is not political? Whether the problems are ethnical, religious, commercial, scientific, military or pediatric, they are all reduced essentially to political issues.<sup>409</sup>

Whereas, most of the above sociological and political problems are the quite prevalent in Markov’s radio reporting, and thus considered to be the most sensitive themes to the Communist regime. Over the course of nearly 3 years, the *Reports* covered all types of topics, including his own life but also other everyday life experiences and observation that he and people he knew, could relate to but could not openly speak about, concerning how life operated under Communism, constructing an entirely negative portrayal of every single problematic aspect with the society he used to live in, and at the core of his criticisms was calling out the hypocrisy of utopianism, comparing the reality of the situation in contrast to the ideological dream about how it should be. Thus, the style was one of exclusively humoristic and satirical or dark and dystopian undertones.

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<sup>409</sup> Markov, Georgi. *The Truth That Killed*. “Where are you, dear Censor?” 199-200.



Also, there are themes in his *Reports*, that are rather mundane and expose some of the situations he had witnessed while travelling throughout Bulgaria as a part of the *nomenklatura* and *intelligentsia* during the 1960s, things that he kept to himself and did not write about until given the chance to do so, as part of the radio broadcasting position he later in life, found himself being able to utilize. <sup>410</sup>

In a series of disconnected and randomly selected reports ranging from titles such as: *Easter Outside Alexander Nevsky*, *The Endless Parade*, *The Workers' Republic*, *The Great Roof*, *The Saving Grace of Laughter*, *The Sting and Honey of Tourism* and *Prostitution*. Markov shares stories, commentaries and analyses on various symbolic and real life scenarios during his life. For instance, he tells the tale of what starts off as an average Easter Day, when he goes with friends to Alexander Nevsky Square in Sofia to see if anything will happen after a false flag incident occurred inside the cathedral, whereby the secret police, had wanted to control the youth population attending church services: no permits at all were to be issued to young people, as if the Christian religion was the exclusive preserve of the over-seventies...it was strange indeed to hear that the militia had classified the attackers of the Easter service as politically intermediate 'hooligan youths', when they were its own agent-provocateurs. <sup>411</sup>

But he then says that later, students at Sofia University confessed to him that they were carefully trained to participate in that operation on Alexander Nevsky Square. Markov then illustrates this as a "boomerang" situation that backfires on the authorities, since: The very next day people started to flock en masse to all the churches in Sofia. The rumor of what had happened in the cathedral roused general indignation and even awoke long extinguished religious feelings. From the point of view of religion, it seems to me that there could have been no more effective way of

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<sup>410</sup> Phillips, Tom. "Writing in Absentia: Nostalgia and Anti-Nostalgia in the Essays of Georgi Markov." 55-67.

<sup>411</sup> Markov, Georgi. *The Truth That Killed*. "Easter Outside Alexander Nevsky." 126-127.

directing people's attention back to the Church.... The (Orthodox) Church's struggles in Bulgaria's past can be seen not so much as the aspiration towards closer communion with God but as an expression of the national struggle for independence. I believe the same holds of Bulgaria, a century later.<sup>412</sup>

Based on a notion that he does not advance here but which is a historical observation, that in within the framework of the Russian-Bulgarian connection, the importance of Eastern Orthodox religion from 1878-1914 had been replaced by ideological Marxism-Leninism from 1944-1989 and Pan-Slavism with Socialist Internationalism, Markov addresses how Communism as a pseudo-religion would demand rituals that were to be exercised routinely as a sign of social conformity.

Markov talks about the "Communist saints" of Lenin, Stalin and Dimitrov appearing as busts, in every public institution or even some party members homes. Then, he goes on to discuss the role of public parades, saying that "the traditional military parade on Saint George's Day or the religious procession and service for the Epiphany were a thousand times more modest events than the Communist celebration of the 1<sup>st</sup> of May." He then adds: "I have questioned the point of these pompous Party carnivals. Are they not well-organized rituals, aimed at suppressing, defacing and destroying the natural instinct of every person to be himself? Perhaps there is some similarity with religious rituals."<sup>413</sup>

The public participation in propagandized parades was of course in part a strategy to remind the public that they are not only commemorating an event, such as the International Workers Day on May 1<sup>st</sup> but in fact, they are working toward a goal that, year by year they're progressing towards, collectively. These parades were in practice, a staged visual manifestation of collectiveness, a palpable expression of the utopian ideological

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<sup>412</sup> Markov, Georgi. *The Truth That Killed*. "Easter Outside Alexander Nevsky." 126-127.

<sup>413</sup> Markov, Georgi. *The Truth That Killed*. "The Ravages of the Personality Cult." 151.

force behind Communism. In the above excerpts, Markov does not clarify this socio-political context of their propaganda purpose but does demonstrate how the city-dweller would have felt about these semi-annual obligations, to participate in such parades.

In Markov's commentary, he tells the story of some one that he supposedly knows, some whose job it was to mobilize the neighborhood for such a parade, exclaiming that "it's terrible that we live only for parades!" also commenting about how he does not know of any festivals on a similar scale in the West, stating in a comparative context that:

English, American, Italian or West German celebrations and anniversaries take place much more modestly and much less nosily. They are also comparatively rare. Even the celebrations for the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the independence of the United States was much less ambitious than any Bulgarian or Soviet parade...The habitual pomposity of such propaganda has here reached the climax of an mighty crescendo. <sup>414</sup>

Markov describes his professional experience as a worker in a "*Worker's Republic*" prior to his legal retirement and the start of his literary career, before he associated with the Communists. He writes about how his tenure at the Pobeda (Victory) factory in 1952, and says that before nationalization, it was called 'Iskovich-Levy' and was famous throughout Bulgaria. Markov then goes on to explain the conflict between two groups within the party, the director who as fanatical as she was, did not use her public position for private gain, and he writes about his impressions of the director at the factory:

An year later, amidst the general corruption of the Party aristocracy, I would remember (her) as a lonely island of old-fashioned honesty... walking up and down her office, she gave me my first lecture on industrial life... (she said): 'the best workers in this factory are not our people, but the enemies. They know that they are enemies and the only way they can make us forget their record is to work hard. Try to take advantage of us.' The 'enemies' were specialists whom she had extracted, with the help of her husband from concentration camps and police stations, where they had found themselves thanks to the senseless actions of the (people's)

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<sup>414</sup> Markov, Georgi. *The Truth That Killed*. "The Endless Parade." 113-117.

militia....<sup>415</sup>...with the passage of time, the factory grew, its capacity expanded, new machines and new technology were imported, but I think that the workers' fundamental attitude towards labor has not changed significantly. Later I had the same experience in other factories... It was the same in agriculture, in trade, in educational establishments, in administration, and even in literature and art.<sup>416</sup> Alas, the Communist Party, which ideologically is opposed to the ordinary person and aims to transform him from a many-sided, independent and proud creature into a puppet, created an atmosphere of brutal disregard and contempt for the individual human support. In all its policies since coming to power, the Communist Party has unerringly followed its basic principle: 'Man is only a means in the struggle, but has no value whatsoever in himself.' Until the Communists came to power, we never knew cruel exploitation on a massive scale, whether of peasants or of workers, nor did we have capitalist or working classes. All Bulgarians are more or less peasants or direct descendants of peasants, and perhaps it is the character of our peasant, molded by his closeness to nature and his traditional sociability, which has given Bulgarians their conscious tolerance and respect for man... another's suffering, misfortune or death has always roused deep emotion and sympathy in a true Bulgarian.<sup>417</sup>

The above excerpts in which Markov describes, from his first hand impressions of working at his very first job at the factory are quite telling, for one, his observation portrays the problematic dichotomy behind the central planning of socialist nationalization and collectivization, concerning a workers' and planners' incentive to labor, and the institutionalization of "class struggle" within the workforce.

As well, the historical reality for Bulgaria, that Markov also mentions in other reports concerning Bulgaria's political-economy in relation to the USSR; is that despite the linguistic, cultural, religious and other strategic similarities with Russia, the Bulgarian society never experienced the same level of extreme socio-economic inequality and by

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<sup>415</sup> Markov, Georgi. *The Truth That Killed*. "The Workers Republic." 21.

<sup>416</sup> Markov, Georgi. *The Truth That Killed*. "The Workers Republic." 29.

<sup>417</sup> Markov, Georgi. *The Truth That Killed*. "The Workers Republic." 24.

extension, class warfare, rooted in the nobility-aristocratic dominance over the majority of the population confined to serfdom, that characterized pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary Russian society. In a way, the concept of “class warfare” could be considered an “alien” socio-political practice which was imported from Soviet Russia into Bulgaria after the war. In a similar way is how Nazi Germany exported its brand of Social Darwinism which promoted extreme economic and racial antisemitism, during the Interwar era into Axis-allied Bulgaria, and which the Nazis in the midst of the Holocaust, had surprisingly determined that the proper conditions against the Jews simply did not exist in Bulgaria. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Bulgaria had emerged from half a millennium of Ottoman rule into the modern industrialized world. Ottoman Bulgaria could be characterized as militantly feudal society primarily based on divisions of a socio-religious nature, particularly between an oppressed Eastern Orthodox Christian majority connected with its Serbian and Greek neighbors and those Bulgarians of the ‘chorbadzhii’ merchant class, mostly converts to Islam, who reinforced the social structure supporting the centuries-old Ottoman millet system of governance prior to the Bulgarian liberation.<sup>418</sup>

Of course, Bulgaria for the first thirty to sixty years of its existence as an independent nation-state did experiment with some sort of mix between Balkan agrarian socialism and militant nationalism during WWI and WWII prior to the rise of Soviet-style Communism after WWII. Also, there was indeed in existence a small land-owning bourgeois class that developed in league with the German-Austrian Saksokorburggotski royal family, which was critical in attracting European investment. Surely, there was a rising urban proletarian working class emerging but for the most part, prior to the

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<sup>418</sup> Crompton, Richard. *A Concise History of Bulgaria*. 30-86.

1920-30s, most of society was largely agriculturally and peasant-based, and also rather quite socially egalitarian.<sup>419</sup> Here, the above report is an excellent example of a commentary that would have resonated well with the average Bulgarian listener, pointing out a significant argument. Nevertheless, by the time period of the 1950s-1960s, which is what Markov is referencing based on his own experience and understanding of Bulgarian society, Bulgaria had indeed been remolded according to Soviet society, this seems to be a leading resentment he holds throughout. In fact, Markov unlike others at RFE seems less critical of the international socialist idea itself, and rather more critical of the Sovietization over Bulgaria, and particularly, he is keen to point out that much of it is due to the power of the Soviet-Bulgarian alliance, which creates a situation, whereby the Bulgarian society and state do not even attempt to resist or alter any policy originating from the USSR.

This is notable, because other Communist countries during the time, most notably the People's Republic of China after the Sino-Soviet Split, as well as other regional neighboring Balkan nations such as Yugoslavia, Albania and Romania often turned to the Chinese on certain issues, as a counterbalance to the Russians. Across the Eastern bloc; East Germany, Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia while careful not to push back too much against Moscow (especially after the events of 1953, 1956, 1968 and 1981), nevertheless projected their own national self-interests, whereas the People's Republic of Bulgaria, which under Zhivkov had proposed three times to join the USSR, was in practice functioning as the most loyal "16<sup>th</sup> Soviet Republic."<sup>420</sup>

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<sup>419</sup> Crompton, Richard. *A Concise History of Bulgaria*. 87-184.

<sup>420</sup> Crompton, Richard. *A Concise History of Bulgaria*. 195-203.

Markov, who was once a popular member of the Bulgarian *nomenklatura* class and had known Zhivkov personally during the 1960s, claimed that “(Zhivkov) served the Soviet Union more ardently than the Soviet leaders themselves did.”<sup>421</sup> Of course, while a lot of what Markov argues about the state of Soviet Bulgaria’s society, its historic relations with Imperial Russia and then with Soviet Russia, are a legitimate argument that could have persuaded at least part of the population, nevertheless, it is interesting to consider that prior to leaving Bulgaria for Britain during the 1970s, Markov’s main grievance with the regime seemed to be primarily professional and personal based on censorship of his work, and also to an extent, a conscious disagreement over Bulgaria’s participation in the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia that crushed the Prague Spring’s momentum in attempting to reform Communism as it existed in Eastern Europe, by the spring and summer of 1968.

However, in Markov’s new capacity at RFE, through which these *Reports* were broadcast, he takes a particularly refined position on the Soviet-Bulgarian relationship which is argued and articulated in what can be considered, a very effective approach. Perhaps, these were his own personal opinions all along, and most likely they were just not voiced until he actually had a platform by which to voice them. Still, it suited Markov well that his own agenda against Zhivkov, matched perfectly well with the mission of his new employer, RFE and its function as part of US-supported public diplomacy and propaganda to counter the Soviet influence in the Eastern bloc, by engaging in the most effective information warfare against a targeted population. In both cases, it worked well for Markov in broadcasting his *Reports* through Radio Free Europe from 1975-1978 like it did when his books and plays were promoted as part of the Bulgarian Writers Union from 1962-

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<sup>421</sup> Dragostinova, Theodora. *The Cold War from the Margins: A Small Socialist State on the Global Cultural Scene*. 57.

1969, until he felt stifled by the censorship in intellectual discourse that caused him ultimately to leave his homeland.

To be clear, Markov's main political argument throughout his broadcasting is directed at criticizing the essence of the Soviet-Bulgarian "special" relationship and the negative consequences that he believes it has caused Bulgaria for the previous 30 years, at the time of his writing. However, Markov also addresses in an artistic way, the domestic every-day issues of encountering ideological censorship and basically, the sense of mind-blowing hypocrisy that he experienced on a regular basis during this life.

For instance, in addressing a problem such as *Prostitution*, he tells the story of how he witnessed members of the people's militia tasked with "cleaning up the streets from prostitutes" by "persuading street prostitutes to rehabilitate themselves by taking up proper jobs and moving into appropriate accommodations."<sup>422</sup> Markov is then invited to interview these prostitutes along with a pool of journalists at the Lavov Most in Sofia, when he learns that these women are being faced with a dilemma, as the pay that they receive for servicing party member clients and foreign tourists would be much better than the payment that they would receive in joining the utopian equally-paid workforce. In this situation, he hints of the incredibly important role of the "black market" underground economy that existed and inevitably complimented the official socialist society, they all lived in. In a similar fashion, Markov is disturbed by how the pursuit of hard currency such as dollars and pounds to purchase all sorts of Western products, by both party members with access to that hard currency and regular people alike was among the most dynamic driving forces present in the supposedly perfectly equal planned economy. A hypocrisy that he tends to point out.

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<sup>422</sup> Phillips, Tom. "Writing in Absentia: Nostalgia and Anti-Nostalgia in the Essays of Georgi Markov." 58-59.



In *The Sting and the Honey of Tourism*, Markov shares a personal experience of traveling throughout Bulgaria first on a boat cruise down the Danube river along the Romanian border and after that for a summer vacation on the Black Sea coast resort town of Sunny Beach.<sup>423</sup> However, Markov purposefully takes this trip incognito without being accompanied by his fellow colleagues from the Union, elite club he was part of. He does so in need of inspiration for his writing fueled by curiosity of what would happen but perhaps also as a form of confirmation of his already existing suspicions of the hidden privileges which were awarded to the party-supporting *intelligentsia*, some of which also overlapped with the *nomenklatura* class, which dominated the supposedly classless society.

Markov then discovers while traveling that the state-owned agency that operates the nation's tourist industry, called BalkanTourist in fact was organized to serve a two-tier system, one for the *nomenklatura* class and for foreign tourists but a completely different one for everyone else in the country. Since almost all Bulgarians were entitled to an extensive summer vacation as per the rules of the socialist society they lived in, most families travelled for month long trips to the mountains or the seaside. However, the hotels they stayed in or the restaurants they visited were in fact not the same ones as those visited by foreign tourists and the party membership. One of the main reasons was that the ecosystem designed to operate on hard international currencies, had to exclude most of the population who paid with the national currency for their cheap domestically manufactured and often not very high quality products and services. Whereas, party people and foreign tourists could have access to the more expensive, high quality products and services.

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<sup>423</sup> Markov, Georgi. *The Truth That Killed*. "The Sting and the Honey of Tourism." 87-88.

When attempting to book a hotel room not as a party person, Markov is told by the hotel that they are not allowing “real” Bulgarians to stay there, as a foreign group of French tourists will be visiting. The staff then explain that “You understand, comrade... We cannot leave Western tourists stranded, they’re paying with hard currency... This is a case of helping our economy!”<sup>424</sup> Furthermore, Markov goes into detail about this experience:

‘The Bulgarians must manage as best they can’ declared the manager, pronouncing the word, ‘Bulgarians’ without any embarrassment as if he himself belonged to another nation... I must have heard hundreds of tales of disgraceful behavior in the hotels and restaurants along the Black Sea coast, but I never expected to experience such human and national humiliation....<sup>425</sup>

The Bulgarian Press often commented on the unforgivable humiliation of Bulgarian citizens at the hands of BalkanTourist...gradually I was beginning to learn the rules of the game; all this reminded me of a barber in Moscow, who hung a big slogan over the mirror in his shop: ‘The tip is the humiliation of Soviet man’ but had written right under it: ‘do please humiliate me, comrades!’<sup>426</sup>

Markov is both amused and disturbed with his incognito experience, reporting on it but knowing that people while being aware of how things worked, went about their annual month-long holidays, anyways. Although he feels confronted with hypocrisy, knowing that his experience would have been different had he travelled as part of his Union entourage, a group that could own private property, could travel abroad and were actually the highest paid members of society.<sup>427</sup>

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<sup>424</sup> Markov, Georgi. *The Truth That Killed*. “The Sting and the Honey of Tourism.” 87.

<sup>425</sup> Markov, Georgi. *The Truth That Killed*. “The Sting and the Honey of Tourism.” 89.

<sup>426</sup> Markov, Georgi. *The Truth That Killed*. “The Sting and the Honey of Tourism.” 91.

<sup>427</sup> Warner, Vessela. “Global Dissident: Georgi Markov” *Studia Historica Gedanensia*, 2014. 76.

## **Radio Free Europe's Bulgarian Broadcasting from Great Britain: Markov's "Personal Meetings with Todor Zhivkov", 1964-1978**

Ultimately, throughout Markov's *Reports*, what he considers exposing hypocrisy in society and confronting censorship are constant themes, so are a series of sophisticated critiques of Bulgaria's foreign relations with the Soviet Union in contrast to the other Communist countries. Probably the most important factor that led to the Zhivkov regime's determination to silence Markov's broadcasting, is perhaps the infamous series of radio reports on his *Personal Meetings with Todor Zhivkov*, which were broadcast by RFE between November 1977 and January 1978 and reportedly reached an audience of nearly 5 million people (nearly half the Bulgarian population).<sup>428</sup> This radio report starts with Markov's first encounter with Zhivkov in October 1964, and describes the writer's first impressions of the politician, as previously cited earlier in this chapter. In fact, the initial description of the leader is fairly balanced, not negative in any way, actually quite positive: During the first few minutes, the atmosphere in the car was a little stiff, as if there was a clearly defined distance between our host and ourselves...and I am here bound to say that Zhivkov showed a surprising skill in handling the situation. Without undue preliminaries, he proactively asked who, in his opinion, was the greatest living Bulgarian poet...This was the first thing about him which impressed me, and which I was to see many more times. He knew how to listen. In comparison with almost all the other Politburo members... Zhivkov alone, I believe, was capable of listening without interpreting, without commenting, without showing what he was thinking or feeling. In my opinion, Zhivkov's talent for listening was of the more inviting kind and perhaps because of this it was the more misleading...I noticed that Zhivkov liked to throw out self-mocking and self-depreciating comments; this was obviously a well-rehearsed technique for putting

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<sup>428</sup> Markov, Georgi. *The Truth That Killed*. "Introduction." X.

people at ease... Somehow I hoped that I might be able to detect some difference between Zhivkov the man and Zhivkov the First Secretary of the Party and Prime Minister...but I detected nothing.<sup>429</sup>

Then, the dynamic of the personal conversation between Zhivkov and Markov on the topic of freedom of travel is discussed, and he shares the details which he recounts:

Now, somebody asked Zhivkov about the country's economic situation. He replied that after the reorganization of agriculture, things were going in the right direction...Someone else asked him about whether there was any point in the development of international tourism, which was beginning to grow in the country. Zhivkov replied that tourism brought great economic advantages and even quoted a rather impressive sum in foreign currency which Bulgaria had apparently earned from tourism the preceding year. Precisely in connection with tourism, I asked him what he thought of the free travel of Bulgarian citizens abroad, and, more generally, whether he approved of the restrictions then in force. Without any hesitation, he replied: "I personally am for the free travel of all Bulgarian citizens, with the exception of highly-qualified experts." Next I asked him why, then, travel was difficult for ordinary citizens too. Zhivkov replied that the difficulty lay with currency regulations and formalities rather than in anything else. Then he turned suddenly toward us: 'and why should our writers be pining to go to the West? Their work is here, let them tour our own country, learn to know life here and describe it. Writers have no business going to the West!' <sup>430</sup> (Zhivkov) said all this very categorically, leaving no doubt about his intention. Even so, one of us mumbled that writers need to travel to the West to broaden their cultural horizons and to familiarize themselves with world literature. Zhivkov shook his head in disagreement and repeated: 'our writers must travel in our own country!'. <sup>431</sup>

Markov's emphasis on Zhivkov's categorical objections on freedom of travel for Bulgarian writers to Western Europe on one hand seems credible, due to the assumption that, Markov having established rapport with Zhivkov, and being invited to question him, would inquire about that. On the other hand, Zhivkov does make it clear that he is

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<sup>429</sup> Markov, Georgi. *The Truth That Killed*. "Personal Meetings with Todor Zhivkov." 218.

<sup>430</sup> Markov, Georgi. *The Truth That Killed*. "Personal Meetings with Todor Zhivkov." 223.

<sup>431</sup> Markov, Georgi. *The Truth That Killed*. "Personal Meetings with Todor Zhivkov." 223.

personally very much against allowing for writers such as Markov to freely go on adventures abroad, implying that he should use his ability to travel within Bulgaria as a member of the *nomenklatura*. Finally, Zhivkov changes the subject in a provocative way, so to subtly remind Markov of his dominant position within the conversation:

Zhivkov knew that we would like to have asked more questions, but that we hesitated...could we question everything? It seemed to me that he managed quickly and very skillfully to establish the proper limits of the conversation, which could not be transgressed. These limits excluded the large and dangerous issues of the day, while leaving plenty of room for personal, private talk. It was more clear that Zhivkov's invitation to this excursion was motivated by his desire to form his own direct impressions of us, not so much as representatives of the so-called 'creative intelligentsia' but as individuals.<sup>432</sup> We continued on our walk...with obvious pride, he told me that he had twice had serious disagreements with the Soviet leadership. The first time was over the most recent reorganization of Bulgarian agriculture, when the Soviet model had been discarded; the second time was over the improvement of our relationship with Greece...

The picture of Zhivkov's utter subordination was further completed by the undoubted pride he felt at having dared to do something on his own initiative. Moreover, that something had turned out to have been the right thing: Zhivkov was proud of that, in the whole of his career, he had managed to act twice in accordance with Bulgarian interests, which were different from Soviet ones. What more can be said? At the start of our walk I had intended to ask Zhivkov about our relations with the Soviet Union, particularly about the claim of some of our ministers that without Soviet aid our economy would quickly become bankrupt. After what he said about Khrushchev giving him a dressing down, I sensed that my question was superfluous. Since one could not talk of Bulgaria's political sovereignty, it was absurd to enquire into its economic independence. Nor did I question whether Zhivkov really improved relations with Greece on his initiative or had embarked of his own accord on such an important measure as the reorganization of agriculture.<sup>433</sup>

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<sup>432</sup> Markov, Georgi. *The Truth That Killed*. "Personal Meetings with Todor Zhivkov." 226.

<sup>433</sup> Markov, Georgi. *The Truth That Killed*. "Personal Meetings with Todor Zhivkov." 224.

This is an interesting moment, when Markov picks up on some comments made by Zhivkov on the way he perceives his position in Bulgaria's relationship with the Soviet Union. He interprets these comments negatively, pondering about Zhivkov's interpersonal and political dependence on Khrushchev. Markov is disappointed that Zhivkov believes that by defying Moscow's position on two peripheral issues, Zhivkov has somehow stood up for Bulgaria's national interests. Markov speculates that Zhivkov might have inadvertently revealed his own personal insecurities to him and continues to contemplate. In all fairness, I must say that during the same conversation Zhivkov repeatedly referred with unmistakable irony to the Soviet example. Thus, for instance, I fiercely attack the institution of Dimitrov prizes of literature and the arts, giving examples of how the distribution of these prizes had led to veritable wars between Bulgarian writers...<sup>434</sup> 'All of this is very alien to our national character' I said. 'It has never been our tradition to display our titles like peacocks or to lavish magnificent awards on each other. What is the point of these Dimitrov prizes? Zhivkov looked at me, laughed and said: 'We only have them because they exist in the Soviet Union!' I may be mistaken, but at that moment I had the feeling that my skepticism about the so-called Soviet experience had made him like me better. For after that he started saying that the mechanical aping of Soviet models in the past had caused great damage to Bulgaria.

Markov then seems to speculate that Zhivkov is indirectly admitting that the Bulgarian government under his authority has been totally subordinated itself to the Soviet government. However, Markov sees some positive aspects when he feels that Zhivkov agrees with him, that completely copying the Soviet example, has not always been in Bulgaria's national interests.

'We have our own, very valuable experience' he said with the fervor of a genuine patriot. A little later in our conversation, he suddenly complained of the inertia of the Politburo, which he clearly despised. He said: 'We have Politburo members who are there for no good reasons. Nobody knows of anything useful they've done.'

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<sup>434</sup> Markov, Georgi. *The Truth That Killed*. "Personal Meetings with Todor Zhivkov." 226.

They just sit there being members of the Politburo!’ Later some of my acquaintances explained to that the Politburo had scuttled many of Zhivkov’s important initiatives and that he could not stand the older members he had inherited from Chervenkov’s era.. he went on to say that many of the offspring of the Politburo were dissipated, capricious, and changed their various privileged post as often as they liked. ‘My children’, he said proudly, ‘are not like that! Lyudmila works seriously at their specialty!’ He also said categorically that he would never push his children into a public career. Zhivkov seemed completely sincere when he envisaged his daughter’s future as a research worker. What later impelled him to make her into a Minister for Culture? So that she too followed the path of other children of Politburo members, is still not clear to me. From all that was said or alluded to concerning life and relationships in the Party elite, I formed the impression that Todor Zhivkov did not enjoy wide support, that the very core of the Party powerful forces were at work against him. Perhaps that is why he was trying to distance himself from the other Politburo members and suggest that he was quite different.<sup>435</sup> When we parted, Zhivkov said that he would like us to have many more such meetings. He added nothing further, and refrained from any official phrases about the need to maintain contact between the Party and the intelligentsia; he simply said that he would like to see us again.

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Up until this point, Markov presents a positive and humane picture of Zhivkov, illustrating his difficult political position. As well, he perceives Zhivkov revealing to him that the relationship with Khrushchev, is his own personal way of hedging against his domestic opponents within the Politburo. Additionally, he does make a critical comment about Zhivkov’s daughter Lyudmila, an ambitious woman who by 1975 becomes the Minister of Culture. At the height of Markov’s popularity, he was viewed as “a close friend of Zhivkov and his family...it was even rumored that his relationship with (Lyudmila) brought him even closer to her father (Todor)” is among several speculations made by an independent investigator of interactions between Markov and Zhivkov.<sup>437</sup>

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<sup>435</sup> Markov, Georgi. *The Truth That Killed*. “*Personal Meetings with Todor Zhivkov*.” 227.

<sup>436</sup> Markov, Georgi. *The Truth That Killed*. “*Personal Meetings with Todor Zhivkov*.” 233.

<sup>437</sup> Vaksberg, Arkadii. *Toxic Politics: The Secret History of the Kremlin’s Poison Laboratory*. 133.

When, soon after our excursion, Khrushchev fell from power, it was rumored everywhere that Zhivkov's days as Party Secretary were numbered. But every time the question "who will replace him?" was asked it was left hanging in the air. It transpired that in the whole of the Politburo and the Central Committee there was no serious contender for succession... Thus, after Khrushchev's fall, while the dust was settling in the Kremlin, Todor Zhivkov had already taken the necessary measures to survive, whatever the upheavals. He was the most loyal. One can say he served the Soviet Union more zealously than did the Soviet leaders themselves; as a reward for his loyalty, he was permitted to say that when the Soviet Communist Party made mistakes, the Bulgarian Communist Party did not.<sup>438</sup>

Here, a turning point was reached after Khrushchev's retirement in October 1964, and soon after Brezhnev consolidates political power which he holds on for the next 2 decades. Zhivkov demonstrates his political skills, which have impressed not only Markov, but nearly everyone else both in Sofia and Moscow. Zhivkov has proven himself in front of everyone as being more adept and loyal to the KGB and the Soviet Politburo, than the Soviet premier himself. Khrushchev is deposed, meanwhile Zhivkov who is close to Khrushchev appears to be faced with an existential political challenge but he successfully survives it, and goes on to establish an even closer connection to the new hardline Soviet premier, Brezhnev, bringing Bulgarian-Soviet relations to a new height.

In the years following our meeting Todor Zhivkov made considerable efforts to establish direct contact with almost every important social group in Bulgaria, and especially the intelligentsia... his unerring instinct told him that the only people who could seriously disturb his quiet reign were precisely the members of the creative intelligentsia. Every one of the Communist Party's troubles – in Poland, in Czechoslovakia, in Hungary and in East Germany – had been stirred up by the intellectuals, artists and writers, or had occurred with their significant participation. In Bulgaria, attempts at military coups were condemned to failure in advance, not so much because they lacked support of the masses but because they were not supported by the creative intelligentsia. That is why Zhivkov took this intelligentsia under his personal protection and entrusted

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<sup>438</sup> Markov, Georgi. *The Truth That Killed*. "Personal Meetings with Todor Zhivkov." 234-235.



its management to his closest associates. When Zhivkov's cronies claim that they would never allow a Solzhenitsyn to merge in Bulgaria (implying a criticism of mistakes made by the Soviet leadership)... as soon as the name of a Bulgarian Solzhenitsyn rose above the permissible height, instead of creating an outcry and attracting general attention, all sorts of pressure would quietly be applied to persuade him to climb down of his own will. Zhivkov would send him an invitation to lunch or an excursion like ours; that he would listen to him carefully, promise him many things and concede many except the most important – the right to publish his works in their original form... <sup>439</sup>

Zhivkov's political playbook for preventing any opposition within society is exposed by Markov, who starts portraying Zhivkov in an increasingly negative way. Markov demonstrates how Zhivkov in their interpersonal relations, in fact, has masterfully been able to secure support of an exclusive sort with the Soviet state and party while also consolidating total control over the Bulgarian state and party by assuring that the *intelligentsia* is kept satisfied from ever protesting publicly against the regime. Markov realizes that he is complicit in the whole arrangement, and admits to feeling tricked by the clever approach employed by Zhivkov. Markov as an intellectual had initially perceived Zhivkov as a non-threatening and rather simple uneducated peasant with a sharpened instinct for survival, but who ultimately served as a puppet of the Soviet Union.

Though, from the mid-1960s to mid-1970s, Markov experiences Zhivkov's presence and personality from near and far, and starts to view Zhivkov as puppet master in his own right, manipulating not only the Bulgarian state and society to his will, but rather suggesting his ability to manipulate the Soviet Union itself in regards to Bulgaria, yielding political power unimaginable for an Eastern bloc leader.

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<sup>439</sup> Markov, Georgi. *The Truth That Killed*. "Personal Meetings with Todor Zhivkov." 234-235.

It is precisely in Zhivkov's complex and rather widespread relations with Bulgarian writers and artists that one can see the special qualities which helped him retain power for so many years. In my opinion, no one else in Bulgaria has had a more disastrous and destructive influence on literature and the arts... I have stressed over and over again that the principal evil in the life and work of Bulgarian writers, painters, composers, actors and so on was interference by the Party...and behind the Party's interference stood its chief organizer and executive – Todor Zhivkov.<sup>440</sup> The Party was Todor Zhivkov! But here I emphasize one of the most striking features of the Todor Zhivkov cult, or rather the motives of his admirers. The difference between them and the admirers of Stalin and Dimitrov was considerable, while the cult of Stalin had its roots in Party fanaticism to a great extent, the cult of Zhivkov was based exclusively on careful calculation of the benefits to be gained from it...and so, the cult for Todor Zhivkov was built upon purely mercenary foundations.<sup>441</sup>

Markov as a result, wants to warn against the dangers of the regime, which he feels has brilliantly co-opted his own freedom of expression through subtle censorship, something that he has tolerated but is no longer willing nor able to participate in. Markov explains why he defected, both viewing himself and presenting himself as an opponent of Zhivkov at one point, and blaming the politician's ability to infiltrate and censor the *intelligentsia*, that he is effectively part of, and thereby silencing his work.

Markov accuses Zhivkov of recreating the cult of personality that Zhivkov had denounced as part of Khrushchev's efforts at de-Stalinization after the 1956 secret speech in front of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. It was then when Zhivkov ousted his Stalinist predecessor, Cherenkov from power. However, since 1964, the situation in Sofia and Moscow had changed and by 1967, Zhivkov and Brezhnev had forged a new relationship. Zhivkov had consolidated control, and unlike Chervenkov or Dimitrov which followed Stalin's rigid cult of personality, Zhivkov's model is on Brezhnev, who had

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<sup>440</sup> Markov, Georgi. *The Truth That Killed*. "Personal Meetings with Todor Zhivkov." 236

<sup>441</sup> Markov, Georgi. *The Truth That Killed*. "Personal Meetings with Todor Zhivkov." 239

elevated the personal and professional rewards of economic corruption rather than ideological conformity, as a primary motivational principle within the Party.

Markov demonstrates this gradual process taking place from 1964 to 1968 as an inside member of the *nomenklatura* class that is now being rewarded not based on ideology-based conformity but rather based on the incentive to profit through corruption. Markov is disappointed and disturbed by these developments within Bulgaria.

In the years which followed our first meeting, I saw Zhivkov several times on official occasions. He continued to invite people from the world of culture and the arts to grand dinners or banquets in honor of various occasions. During the four years which divided my first meeting with Todor Zhivkov from my last but one, many things have become clear to me so that I have no more illusions. The naïve, unfounded but vitally necessary faith that internal changes in the Party where possible had perished with the invasion of Czechoslovakia. My disillusionment with the career of Todor Zhivkov had started long before August 1968, but the invasion of the Warsaw Pact forces was the watershed, the moment when all the masks were torn off. I understood then that all the actions of the First Secretary and his entire social behavior strictly conformed to the part he was expected to take in the Soviet play entitled “the People’s Republic of Bulgaria.”<sup>442</sup>

Their final meeting is described in a report when during a banquet, Zhivkov is portrayed as a new type of Communist dictator, who rules not only through fear of repression but primarily through rewarding loyalty by means of corruption. However, Zhivkov’s ability to influence the *intelligentsia* in that way, is something that he had been able to live with. The point of no return for Markov occurs when he observes Zhivkov’s enthusiastic support for Brezhnev’s crackdown of Dubcek’s reforms within Czechoslovakia during the Prague Spring of 1968. Bulgaria’s leading participation in the Warsaw Pact invasion on August 20, 1968, the subsequent formation of the

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<sup>442</sup> Markov, Georgi. *The Truth That Killed*. “*Personal Meetings with Todor Zhivkov*.” 241.

“Brezhnev Doctrine” as a threat hanging over the satellite states not to diverge from Moscow, in a sense ends all hope that Communism could be reformed with a “human face” for a lot of people, including Georgi Markov.

Georgi Markov was often referred to as the “Bulgarian Solzhenitsyn” such as on the front cover of *The Truth That Killed*, however in examining his personal life story as well as his literary style, Markov’s style resembles somewhat a mixture between Solzhenitsyn’s *Gulag Archipelago* (1973) but a lot more from the Yugoslav, Milovan Djilas. Djilas was actually involved in politics, serving as President and Prime Minister of Yugoslavia during the 1950s, had criticized both Stalin and Soviet Stalinism as well as his own colleague and friend, Tito and Yugoslav Titoism, for which he would be imprisoned for several years. More notably, Djilas wrote an important critique of Communists, where he was among the first to make use of the term *nomenklatura* as a “new political class” in his controversial book on *The New Class: An Analysis of the Communist System* (1957). Additionally, Djilas’ *Conversations with Stalin* (1961), an account of the meetings held in Moscow between Stalin, Tito and Dimitrov from 1943 to 1948 which document the Tito-Stalin split and Soviet-Yugoslav crisis, in its style and overall tone seems to have served as perhaps an inspiration for Markov’s “conversations with Zhivkov.” The *Personal Meetings with Todor Zhivkov*, remains the most politically provocative and personally sensitive part of his *Reports* from 1975 to 1978.

Georgi Markov’s inner frustrations and disillusionment as a writer who was censored by the Communist regime while being promoted in part due to his relationship with Todor Zhivkov during the 1960s also resembles somewhat the situation during the 1930s, between Jozef Stalin and Mikhail Bulgakov, wherein the Soviet writer was tortured

by the threat of his literary masterpiece *The Master and Margarita* (written in 1940 but not published until 1966) being censored, while his other books were published, and his play *The Days of the Turbins* (1932) was actually quite adored by Stalin.

In another context, Georgi Markov who was so inspired by the Prague Spring to defect, shared some commonality with his Czech contemporaries; Milan Kundera who in 1975 left for France, where he wrote his *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1982) account of the Prague Spring, and Vaclav Havel who as a public intellectual also criticized the regime, was able to survive despite being arrested, and later actually play a role in bringing it down and becoming his nation's first democratic political leader.

On the eve of Markov's death, he had attempted to vocally support via RFE, a new Bulgarian dissident movement to be called "Declaration 78" which was to be modelled on the Czechoslovak Charter 77, and which openly demanded "an end to violations of human and civil rights" and "the abolishing of privilege in all spheres of public life."<sup>443</sup>

Indeed, Markov's life has a mixed record in regards to his political activity; as initially during the decade (1961-69) he had participated in propaganda production as a public intellectual in Bulgaria despite his personal objections, and then for another decade (1971-78) in Britain, he did the same for the Americans as an RFE reporter. But it was Markov's uncensored reports attacking Zhivkov on a personal level, as if he was his equal and exposing inside information about his ability to influence the Soviets, that were deemed as an act of ultimate betrayal, being politically threatening to the regime.

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<sup>443</sup> Panoff, Kyril. "Murder on Waterloo Bridge." *Encounter Magazine*, Vol. L-II, No. 5, November 1979.

## **Markov's Murder in the heart of London, September 1978**

Georgi Markov was indicted on criminal charges as early as July 1971 by the Bulgarian courts for defecting and then offering his work as a dissident to three “enemy radio propaganda” stations; including Radio Free Europe, the British Broadcasting Corporation and Deutsche Welle. However, it was not until April 9, 1976 that the Bulgarian State Security Service’s 6<sup>th</sup> KDS directorate opened a top secret dossier on Markov, with the code name “The Wanderer”, and identified him as “a politically unstable, writer from an enemy family” against whom “extreme measures” were to be undertaken for his “neutralization.”<sup>444</sup> At that moment, Markov was marked off for his assassination. Under orders from the Bulgarian Prime Minister and General Secretary of the Communist Party, Todor Zhivkov, the Bulgarian State Security and Intelligence Services formed a “directorate for the struggle against the ideological subversion” to routinely update him on the status of Markov’s radio reporting which was personally attacking him and revealing insider information, that Markov was privileged to, by nature of his association with the Bulgarian Writers’ Union.

In June 1977, Markov’s transcripts show that his father in Bulgaria was dying of cancer and on two occasions, Georgi’s requests to return to Bulgaria, were denied due his work in the UK.<sup>445</sup> Additionally, around that time, the Bulgarian embassy in Britain began issuing warnings to British authorities about Markov’s critical commentaries made on

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<sup>444</sup> The Markov dossier being allegedly destroyed between 1989-1991, this copy of a 1976 top secret KDS report not part of his dossier, is among the only remaining documents cited in the appendix of this Bulgarian-language book:

Hristov, Hristo. *Kill the Tramp: Bulgarian and British state politics concerning the Markov case*. 2005.

<sup>445</sup> Markov, Georgi. *I Was Him: 121 Documents from and about Georgi Markov*. 1999. 553-60.

RFE, blaming them for allowing him to openly speak state secrets on the air, and putting pressure on the BBC to limit his speech.<sup>446</sup>

Then in January 1978, according to the Director of Security for RFE in Munich, they had received their first warnings against one of their top broadcasters.<sup>447</sup> Soon thereafter, Georgi's brother had received a warning that "Markov's days are numbered" in July.<sup>448</sup> During Markov's visit to RFE headquarters in Munich that May, the first attempted assassination with poison pill was made, but it seems that the plan failed for unknown reasons.<sup>449</sup> Then second attempt was made during that summer, when Markov and his family vacationed on the Italian island of Sardinia, however that attempt was cancelled when it risked also poisoning Markov's wife and daughter, since the assassination had to appear that that it was an accident.<sup>450</sup> On July 3, Georgi Markov returned to London and began broadcasting a new RFE program called *Markov Speaks* with his first report called *The Mind Under House Arrest*.<sup>451</sup> Then in August 1978, Markov visited RFE/RL headquarters in Munich for the very last time, and received his last death threat through the phone, before flying from London to Munich, with the warning that: "Not this time...this time you not become a martyr, this time you will die of natural causes... You will be killed by a poison that the West cannot detect nor treat."<sup>452</sup> According to testimony, this threat

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<sup>446</sup> Hristov, Hristo. *Kill the Tramp:*

*Bulgarian and British state politics concerning the Markov case.* 2005. 384-87.

<sup>447</sup> Cummings, Richard H. *Chapter 3: Piccadilly versus the Tramp* in *Cold War Radio: The Dangerous History of American Broadcasting in Europe*, 68.

<sup>448</sup> Cummings, Richard H. *Chapter 3: Piccadilly versus the Tramp* in *Cold War Radio*, 68.

<sup>449</sup> Cummings, Richard H. "Bulgaria: Georgi Markov, Victim Of An Unknown Cold War Assassin."

<sup>450</sup> Cummings, Richard H. "Bulgaria: Georgi Markov, Victim Of An Unknown Cold War Assassin." RFE. September 9, 1996. <https://www.rferl.org/a/1081550.html>

<sup>451</sup> Cummings, Richard H. *Chapter 3: Piccadilly versus the Tramp* in *Cold War Radio*, 68.

<sup>452</sup> Cummings, Richard H. *Chapter 3: Piccadilly versus the Tramp* in *Cold War Radio*, 68.

had scared Markov, but in final phone call to his brother, he had responded definitely that: “If they want to kill me, they can do it.”<sup>453</sup>

Markov’s fate was discussed during a meeting at KGB headquarters in Moscow in 1978, where in attendance, was KGB director Yuri Andropov as well as the director of intelligence, Vladimir Kryuchkov, and Oleg Kalugin, director of foreign counterintelligence.<sup>454</sup> They were addressing a request by the KGB resident in Sofia, requesting authorization for an extrajudicial targeting of a Bulgarian dissident on the territory of Britain, according to later testimony by Kalugin, Andropov approved the assassination but wanted to make sure that the Bulgarians take responsibility for the murder and not involve the Soviets since after all, the KGB provided the KDS with a poison-based gadget weapon, which would be known as the “Bulgarian Umbrella.”<sup>455</sup> Top KGB officials, including Oleg Kalugin as well as Oleg Gordievsky, the famous Soviet-British double agent between 1974 to 1985, who eventually defected to the UK, have all have publicly admitted that from their memories, the directorate of the KGB was involved.

The main concern that the KGB received from the KDS, was supposed speculation based on timing, that Georgi Markov was involved in the defection of one of Bulgaria’s top agents, Vladimir Kostov in Paris.<sup>456</sup> On August 28, 1978 at around 2 PM near the Paris metro station for Arc de Triomphe, the double agent-turned defector Vladimir Kostov was

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<sup>453</sup> Cummings, Richard H. *Chapter 3: Piccadilly versus the Tramp in Cold War Radio*, 68.

<sup>454</sup> Kalugin, Oleg. *My 32 Years in Intelligence and Espionage Against the West*. 1994 in addition to public statements.

<sup>455</sup> Kalugin, Oleg. *My 32 Years in Intelligence and Espionage Against the West*. 1994 in addition to public statements.

<sup>456</sup> Salisbury, Daniel “Murder on Waterloo Bridge.” *Contemporary British History* 2023, Vol. 37, No. 1. 133.



the first target by means of this umbrella, however the poison had failed to kill him due to the nature of the clothes he wore that day (and he is still alive although inaccessible.)<sup>457</sup>

Nearly a week later, on September 7, 1978 at the Waterloo Bridge bus station in Central London, Georgi Markov was about to commute to work at BBC headquarters in the Bush House across the River Thames.<sup>458</sup> Markov parked his car, climbed up the stairs to the bus stop, and as he neared the queue of people, he experienced a sudden stinging pain, he turned around and saw a man bending up to pick up a dropped umbrella, this according to the testimony given to his wife, and doctor, the next day.<sup>459</sup> September 7 was Todor Zhivkov's 67<sup>th</sup> birthday and only 2 days before the 34<sup>th</sup> celebration of the Bulgarian Socialist Revolution Day commemorated every year since September 9, 1944.<sup>460</sup> By September 10, Markov lay poisoned at St. James hospital, as his last RFE broadcast, the 11<sup>th</sup> in the *Markov Speaks* series was broadcast; *Day of Freedom and Day of Militia*.<sup>461</sup>

The next day, on September 11, 1978 at 10:05 AM, Georgi Markov officially died at the age of 49.<sup>462</sup> Soon after, KDS police agents reported to his family that Markov had been sentenced to death as an "enemy of the state" for his treasonous work in particular for Radio Free Europe.<sup>463</sup>

By September 12, the Home Office conducted a post-mortem on the subject as a defector, they discovered the tiny poison-filled pellet injected by the umbrella, and it was

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<sup>457</sup> Salisbury, Daniel "Murder on Waterloo Bridge."

*Contemporary British History* 2023, Vol. 37, No. 1. 133.

<sup>458</sup> Panoff, Kyril. "Murder on Waterloo Bridge." *Encounter Magazine*, Vol. L-II, No. 5, November 1979.

<sup>459</sup> Panoff, Kyril. "Murder on Waterloo Bridge." *Encounter Magazine*, Vol. L-II, No. 5, November 1979.

<sup>460</sup> Panoff, Kyril. "Murder on Waterloo Bridge." *Encounter Magazine*, Vol. L-II, No. 5, November 1979.

<sup>461</sup> Cummings, Richard H. *Chapter 3: Piccadilly versus the Tramp in Cold War Radio*, 70.

<sup>462</sup> Salisbury, Daniel "Murder on Waterloo Bridge."

*Contemporary British History* 2023, Vol. 37, No. 1. 132.

<sup>463</sup> Panoff, Kyril. "Murder on Waterloo Bridge." *Encounter Magazine*, Vol. L-II, No. 5, November 1979.

clear there was a crime.<sup>464</sup> Scotland Yard began its detective work, together with the Chemical and Micro-Biological Warfare Establishment at Porton Down, and after weeks of research and press conferences, the investigation eventually determined that Markov had been murdered.<sup>465</sup> Thus, the KGB-KDS mission was not completely successful, as the original plan was to make sure it was believed that Markov died of natural causes. The investigation which discovered the ricin poison was done with MI5-MI6 coordination between the CIA, and together determined that this was a Soviet operation.<sup>466</sup>

Throughout the 1970s, the CIA's Special Activities Division (SAD) and the US Army at Fort Detrick had also developed the use of ricin as a toxic chemical weapon as part of Project MK-NAOMI.<sup>467</sup> However, the KGB could have accessed public records that indicate that the patent was issued to the US Army filed on July 3, 1952 and approved on October 23, 1963.<sup>468</sup> This formula could have been applied purposefully to an American-manufactured umbrella which would be modified as an internal pistol to inject a small pellet containing the biotoxin ricin, among the most lethal poisons that exists, and all this work would have been performed at top secret laboratory known as the "Chamber."<sup>469</sup> This was operated by the KGB's Operational Technical Support Directorate, Laboratory 12.<sup>470</sup> Previously, such poisonous weapons were used to assassinate two notable Ukrainian

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<sup>464</sup> Salisbury, Daniel "Murder on Waterloo Bridge."

*Contemporary British History* 2023, Vol. 37, No. 1. 134.

<sup>465</sup> Salisbury, Daniel "Murder on Waterloo Bridge."

*Contemporary British History* 2023, Vol. 37, No. 1. 135.

<sup>466</sup> Umbrella Assassin: "Interview with Christopher C. Green". PBS, June 3, 2014.

<https://www.pbs.org/wnet/secrets/umbrella-assassin-interview-christopher-c-green/1557/>

<sup>467</sup> "MKNAOMI." CIA: <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP01-01773R000100170001-5.pdf>

<sup>468</sup> "US Patent Office: 3,060,165." October 23, 1962.

[https://archive.org/details/Ricin\\_Preparation\\_of\\_-\\_US\\_Patent\\_3060165](https://archive.org/details/Ricin_Preparation_of_-_US_Patent_3060165)

<sup>469</sup> Vaksberg, Arkadii. *Toxic Politics: The Secret History of the Kremlin's Poison Laboratory*.

<sup>470</sup> Harding, Luke. Lab X: poison factory that helped silence Soviets' critics. *The Guardian*, March 9, 2018.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/09/russia-lab-x-poison-factory-that-helped-silence-soviets-critics>

nationalists: Ivan Rebet and Stefan Bandera for their pro-Nazi and anti-Soviet activities; in Munich during the 1950s.<sup>471</sup> So while, the British correctly suspected that the Bulgarians with Soviet support were responsible for the assassination, nothing could be officially proven throughout the 1980s, as the Bulgarians denied the accusation of the assassination as a “James Bond spy fantasy.” Interestingly enough, Ian Fleming’s *James Bond* character was not at all English but rather based on an actual British-German-Yugoslav triple agent, the Serbian Dushko Popov, so there is even a Balkan connection to the fictional figure.<sup>472</sup>

To make things even more complicated with the Markov case, it is important to add that after Markov’s murder, on October 1, another person was found dead in his home in East London, by the name of Vladimir Simeonov, who had defected an year after Markov, and also worked at the BBC Foreign Service.<sup>473</sup> While, both cases are clearly interconnected, some have speculated that Simeonov might have been assigned as an informer for the KDS, assisting in the surveillance against Markov and as a result, had to be silenced, in case he was forced or chose to cooperate with the British.<sup>474</sup>

After the fall of Communism in 1989, the Markov case was re-opened and then in February 1991, not representing the new socialist but democratic government, President Zhelyu Zhelev apologized personally to Markov’s family while visiting Britain.<sup>475</sup> However, at some point between 1989 and 1991, two KDS generals, one of whom had visited Moscow, Vladimir Todorov (ended up serving 10 months in prison after visiting

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<sup>471</sup> “Secret: Assassination of Stefan Bandera.” Memorandum for the Record, April 22, 1976. CIA: [https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/BANDERA%2C%20STEFAN\\_0081.pdf](https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/BANDERA%2C%20STEFAN_0081.pdf)

<sup>472</sup> Loftis, Larry. *Into the Lion's Mouth: The True Story of Dusko Popov: World War II Spy, Patriot, and the Real-Life Inspiration for James Bond.*

<sup>473</sup> Salisbury, Daniel “Murder on Waterloo Bridge.” *Contemporary British History* 2023, Vol. 37, No. 1. 136-37.

<sup>474</sup> FF0063, Box 2034. Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Archives.

<sup>475</sup> FF0093, Box 2034. Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Archives.

Moscow, where he allegedly transported the dossier)<sup>476</sup> whereas Stoyan Savov (who committed suicide) allegedly destroyed the other copy of the dossier.<sup>477</sup>

45 years later, this murder case remains legally unsolved, although private investigations by lawyers and journalists as well as an archivist who worked in the Bulgarian state archives, have found evidence that demonstrates the KDS agent who utilized the Bulgarian umbrella against Markov worked under the code name “Piccadilly”, was an Italian by the name of Francesco Gullino, who was arrested in Bulgaria on drug tracking charges and was later recruited to work for the KDS.<sup>478</sup> He was interviewed once in 1993 by British, Bulgarian, Italian and Danish police and was allowed to live the rest of his life in Denmark, unharassed until his recent death in August, 2021.

Finally, a study by a Bulgarian academic found that between 1978 to 2001, there have been over 136 articles published in newspapers around the world<sup>479</sup> on the topic of the “Bulgarian umbrella” which has been covered by many multimedia and historical accounts of the Cold War time period that coincided with the end of détente in the late 1970s. Ultimately, this case permanently damaged Bulgaria’s modern public diplomacy, making it perhaps the single most discussed event involving Bulgaria, perhaps surpassing in regards to general public discourse, the 1981 national jubilee celebrations at the peak of Bulgaria’s cultural diplomacy and even the historical background behind the heroic rescue of over 48,000 Jewish citizens of Bulgaria in the midst of the Holocaust in March and May of 1943; a story that has only until recently, been explored in its full totality. Overall, the death of one man in Markov, one dissident from a nation without a legacy of any organized

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<sup>476</sup> FF0054, Box 2034. Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Archives.

<sup>477</sup> Hristov, Hristo. *Kill the Tramp: Bulgarian and British state politics concerning the Markov case*. 2005.

<sup>478</sup> FF0176, Box 2034. Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Archives.

<sup>479</sup> Warner, Vessela. “Global Dissident: Georgi Markov” *Studia Historica Gedanensia*, 2014. 74.

dissident movement is quite ironically symbolic, and encapsulates the drama associated with the very dark and deadly aspects of the Soviet-Bulgarian “special relationship.”

### **The Generation of Bulgarian Dissident Defectors, 1960s-1980s**

I don't want to say that I am that braver or more honest than other people, perhaps if I were more honest, I should have been there. If you're more honest, perhaps you should stay and fight the battle there and not here. I think I was kind of, as you say in England, 'I'm fed up' and you just go away – Georgi Markov, 1975.

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That generation of Bulgarian intellectuals who flourished during the 1960s and at one point, one by one turned against the regime as dissident defectors during the 1970s, working for Western organizations such as the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe into the 1980s, were part of a rather small but influential movement embodied in Markov. Among these public intellectuals, there are six prominent defectors who stand out in particular, and their relevance will be explored throughout the remainder of the chapter:

Aside from Georgi Markov, Atanas Slavov is often considered to be the most influential. Slavov was a novelist, screenwriter, and poet deemed by Bulgarian National Television in 2016 as *The Man Who Put Bulgaria on the World Map* due to his cultural activities in the West. He died of natural causes in Plovdiv, Bulgaria back in 2010.<sup>481</sup> During his lifetime, Slavov was an academic who from 1966 to 1976 was part of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. Slavov was permitted to work in the United States as part of a scholarly exchange program hosted by the International Research and Exchanges

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<sup>480</sup> Interview with Georgi Markov, “Your Kind of Music” BBC, 1975.

<sup>481</sup> Kovachevska, Ralitsa. “Atanas Slavov: The Man Who Put Bulgaria on the World Map” February 3, 2016. <https://web.archive.org/web/20160204090401/http://www.bitelevision.com/atanas-slavov-chovekat-kojto-postavi-balgariya-na-svetovnata-karta/>

Board (IREX), established in 1968 by the American Council of Learned Societies, the Social Science Research Council, Ford Foundation and the US State Department.<sup>482</sup>

However, Slavov remained in New York and by 1976 had overstayed his exit visa, and being branded as a defector.<sup>483</sup> Later, he would be employed as a Bulgarian language instructor at the State Department's Foreign Service Institute from 1980 to 1983 and from 1980 to 1990, he worked as a writer, editor and broadcaster for the Bulgarian service of the Voice of America.<sup>484</sup>

Slavov began working with the BBC and RFE/RL in 1978, broadcasting 52 weekly emissions under the program titled *Paths Under the Highways*.<sup>485</sup> Then in 1979, he contributed to research at the Kennan Institute, which is part of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, DC.<sup>486</sup>

Out of Slavov's over 30 publications, his most notable is *The "Thaw" in Bulgarian Literature* (1981) which reviews the trends in Bulgarian literature that he and Markov were inspired by in the 1950s and 1960s. However, it is interesting to investigate further if they were influenced by any world literature during that time. So far, no concrete connection can be established to the role of the CIA's secret book program in impacting these public intellectuals, although it certainly did have an impact on society at large, as Bulgarians were able to access some of the particular book titles mentioned as part of the program in the previous chapter, as early as the 1950s.

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<sup>482</sup> International Research and Exchanges Board Records, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, 2011. [https://findingaids.loc.gov/exist\\_collections/ead3pdf/mss/2016/ms016004.appx.pdf](https://findingaids.loc.gov/exist_collections/ead3pdf/mss/2016/ms016004.appx.pdf), 221

<sup>483</sup> Slavov's Memoirs in Bulgarian: *To the West and to the West*, 2006.

<sup>484</sup> Slavov's Memoirs in Bulgarian: *To the West and to the West*, 2006.

<sup>485</sup> "Atanas Slavov, Notes 1935-1976, New York October 1975, Washington D.C., August 1977" Box 2, Atanas Slavov Papers, 1975-1982, Collection Number 82041. RFE/RL Corporate Records, Hoover Library and Archives.

<sup>486</sup> "Atanas Slavov". 1979. Wilson Center: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/person/atanas-slavov>

After the fall of Communism in 1989, Slavov returned to Bulgaria and lived the rest of his life there, working with his local community and donating some of his personal writings to a fund at the New Bulgarian University in 2004. However, the Hoover Institute's collections contain some of his earlier writings as well as materials related to his work at the VOA and RFE/RL.<sup>487</sup> Additionally, at the Hoover Archives, as part of the Dora Gabensky papers, there are three boxes of rather irrelevant records from the work materials of another well-known dissident defector by the name of Petar Semerdzhiev.<sup>488</sup>

Petar Semerdzhiev like Georgi Markov worked for both the Bulgarian broadcasting departments of the BBC and RFE during the 1970s and 1980s<sup>489</sup>, unlike Markov, though his life story was quite different. Semerdzhiev was of an older generation who fought during World War II against the Axis-allied regime on the side of the resistance movement of Communist partisans. By 1948, he was admitted into the Central Committee of the Communist Party as its youngest candidate however, two years later was expelled, tortured and imprisoned for six years due to his connection to the high ranking Traicho Kostov who was executed as a Titoist agent as part a deadly internal power struggle within the party after the death of Georgi Dimitrov in 1949.<sup>490</sup>

As part of the de-Stalinization process in 1957, Semerdzhiev would be rehabilitated and acquitted despite already having served time. He worked together with

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<sup>487</sup> "Atanas Slavov, Notes 1935-1976, New York October 1975, Washington D.C., August 1977"  
Box 2, Atanas Slavov Papers, 1975-1982, Collection Number 82041. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover.

<sup>488</sup> Gabensky (Dora) Papers, Collection Number 88028.  
Box 5 (1977-1978), Box 3 (1981-1987), Box 2, (1981-1985)

<sup>489</sup> VI-L-680, 343. The Committee for Disclosing the Documents and Announcing Affiliation of Bulgarian Citizens to the State Security and the Intelligence Services of the Bulgarian National Armed Forces, COMDOS. Sofia, Bulgaria.

<sup>490</sup> "The Memoirs of Petar Semerdzhiev reveal some uncomfortable truths about the history of the Bulgarian Communist Party." Dnevnik.bg, February 26, 2010.  
[https://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2010/02/26/864996\\_spomenite\\_na\\_petur\\_semerdjiev\\_razkrivat\\_neudobni](https://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2010/02/26/864996_spomenite_na_petur_semerdjiev_razkrivat_neudobni)

his wife, a psychologist who in 1973 was elected to a leading post within the International Union of Sports Psychology.<sup>491</sup> Together, they were allowed to travel to Spain but from there they defected to Israel, where he remained with his wife until his death in Jerusalem in 2008.<sup>492</sup> Semerdzhiev had published his books on *Georgi Dimitrov and the Comintern: Myth and Reality* (1976) around the time that he was given a ten year prison sentence in absentia, although he continued to broadcast for RFE and the BBC, into the 1980s. Later on in life, he wrote *The People's Court in Bulgaria, 1944-1945: Why Was it Necessary?* (1998) and *The Russian Empire and Soviet Union in Bulgaria, 1918-1948* (2005).

Unlike Semerdzhiev and more like Georgi Markov, Dimitar Inkyov or Inkiow (in German) was not involved in politics at any point, and graduated as an engineer before going on to work as a drama director in a theater in Sofia while contributing to leading literary newspapers and journals.<sup>493</sup> The constant threat of censorship led him to leave Bulgaria as early as 1965, when he somehow successfully managed to make it to West Germany and was immediately recruited to work for RFE in Munich from 1966 to 1991, where he was employed as a script writer and did not develop a public persona as a broadcaster, thus there are no records at the Hoover Institute of any of his work. Inkiow would live a low profile life in Munich until his death in 2006, publishing over 100 novels, short stories including high school textbooks in German, over the course of his life.<sup>494</sup>

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<sup>491</sup> "The Voice that (K)DS was not able to silence." Dnevnik.bg, March 14, 2008.

[https://www.dnevnik.bg/razvlechenie/2008/03/14/471099\\_glasut\\_koito\\_ds\\_ne\\_uspia\\_da\\_zaglushi/](https://www.dnevnik.bg/razvlechenie/2008/03/14/471099_glasut_koito_ds_ne_uspia_da_zaglushi/)

<sup>492</sup> "The Voice that (K)DS was not able to silence."

<sup>493</sup> VI-L-680. The Committee for Disclosing the Documents and Announcing Affiliation of Bulgarian Citizens to the State Security and the Intelligence Services of the Bulgarian National Armed Forces, COMDOS. Sofia, Bulgaria.

<sup>494</sup> "In Memory of the Writer and Journalist Dimitar Inkyov." Dnes.bg, September 24, 2006.

<https://www.dnes.bg/bulgaria/2006/09/24/pochina-pisateliat-i-jurnalist-dimityr-inkiov.27776>



While generationally part of the new émigrés, his life story actually fits in more in the pattern of the old émigrés.

Similar to Dimitar Inkiow, Assen Ignatov ended up in Germany, living there until his death in 2003, in a small town in Baden-Württemberg. However, unlike the others, Ignatov was primarily interested in philosophy and theology. Ignatov began his academic career as a professor at the Sofia University where he taught philosophy and anthropology until he was fired after publishing a collection of his papers in the form of a book, titled *Sadness and Urge of the Age* (1968).<sup>495</sup> The work was non-political in nature, but given the political climate of that exact year, he was accused of revisionism against the ideological foundations of the regime, and had his book banned.<sup>496</sup>

Ignatov was able to somehow travel to Brussels in 1972 for a scientific conference, and left Bulgaria for West Germany, where he worked as an editor in the Bulgarian section of Deutsche Welle Radio while lecturing and writing for the Federal Institute for East European Studies in Cologne as well as other universities, publishing in total 150 articles and 9 books in German.<sup>497</sup> What makes Ignatov and Inkiow different from the other intellectuals, is their active disinterest in political activism even while working for Western radio broadcasting. Ignatov in particular has been characterized by his interest in religion, according to a Bulgarian philosopher Nina Dimitrova, Ignatov shifted from being a Marxist philosopher to a Christian philosopher.<sup>498</sup> Early on in 1964, he wrote an article challenging the theory that Communism constituted a pseudo-religion, and mockingly accepting

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<sup>495</sup> Dimitrova, Nina. "Assen Ignatov: The theomachist and the God-seeker". *Slavia Meridionalis*, 2020, Article 2138. <https://doi.org/10.11649/sm.2138>. 1-2

<sup>496</sup> Dimitrova, Nina. "Assen Ignatov: The theomachist and the God-seeker". 1-2.

<sup>497</sup> VI-L-680. The Committee for Disclosing the Documents and Announcing Affiliation of Bulgarian Citizens to the State Security and the Intelligence Services of the Bulgarian National Armed Forces, COMDOS. Sofia, Bulgaria.

<sup>498</sup> Dimitrova, Nina. "Assen Ignatov: The theomachist and the God-seeker". 4-8.

accusations that in in a theological context, it was a form of Satanism.<sup>499</sup> Later in *Psychology of Communism* (1985), he presented his views on the matter, writing that “Communism (which) appear(ed) at a time of deep crisis of Christianity...has strived to fill the spiritual void left by this crisis and to satisfy the human need for a higher value and ideal.<sup>500</sup> In in a statement about Ignatov from a fellow defector, Dimitar Bochev writes: Disappointed, albeit in different ways, both by the cynical attitude of the East and the heartlessness of the West, he moved on towards the intellectual roots of our Christian civilization: with the years and decades, Assen evermore definitely, ever more unambiguously, ever more radically, saw himself as an Orthodox Christian – his last and unfinished work was a comprehensive study of the Russian fundamentalists of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, whose conceptions Assen loved passionately.<sup>501</sup>

In a way, this resembles the overall approach adopted by Alexander Solzhenitsyn, the Soviet dissident writer, who after *The Gulag Archipelago* (1973) was exiled to West Germany and later in 1976, moved to the United States where he lived and wrote until his death in 2008. As someone who understood both Ignatov and Markov, Dimitar Bochev who is still alive at 80, was born in 1944 and studied philosophy at Sofia University, later working as a journalist.<sup>502</sup> After being unable to resist the constant threat of censorship, Bochev defected to West Germany in 1972 and received political asylum, working for Deutsche Welle radio and after 1975, being elevated to program editor in the Bulgarian department of Radio Free Europe in Munich.<sup>503</sup> In that capacity, he was acquainted well

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<sup>499</sup> Dimitrova, Nina. “Assen Ignatov: The theomachist and the God-seeker”. 5.

<sup>500</sup> Dimitrova, Nina. “Assen Ignatov: The theomachist and the God-seeker”. 10.

<sup>501</sup> Dimitrova, Nina. “Assen Ignatov: The theomachist and the God-seeker”. 7.

<sup>502</sup> “Dimitar Bochev.” Kultura.bg: <http://kultura.bg/web/author/dimitar-bochev/>

<sup>503</sup> VI-L-680. The Committee for Disclosing the Documents and Announcing Affiliation of Bulgarian Citizens to the State Security and the Intelligence Services of the Bulgarian National Armed Forces, COMDOS. Sofia, Bulgaria.

with Georgi Markov (letter of correspondence mentioned earlier) and worked together with him on air, broadcasting every Monday of the week.<sup>504</sup> Bochev was sentenced in 1976 to ten years imprisonment in absentia, but unlike Markov was not targeted for assassination.<sup>505</sup> The courts overturned the sentence in 1992 and during the 1990s, he lived in Sofia, working as a correspondent for RFE among other newspapers such as *Demokratsia*, *Standard* and *Trud*, contributing in efforts to combat corruption during Bulgaria's long and troubled transition to liberal democracy in the past 30 years. Bochev also contributed to Solzhenitsyn's Russian language magazine *Kontinent*.<sup>506</sup> In 1999, upon winning the Jubilee Prize of the International Academy of Arts in Paris, for his journalistic work, he boldly warned that: "there is hardly anything more harmful to modern states than the widespread commodification of spiritual values."<sup>507</sup> Bochev's *The God-seeker between madness and blindness*, constitutes a collection of essays based on his relationships with Georgi Markov, Assen Ignatov, Atanas Slavov and the philosopher-turned first democratic President of Bulgaria, Zhelyu from 1992 to 1997 Zhelev (whom he knew at an early age).

Finally, the sixth persona that will be explored is that of Vladimir Kostov, which is probably the most complicated and controversial one. Kostov who is still alive at the age of 92 was born in 1932 in Sofia, and would go on to be perhaps the most politically active throughout his life. Between 1956 and 1969, he worked as a journalist for *Rabotnichesko*

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<sup>504</sup> VI-L-680. Dissident Dossier on Dimitar Bochev. COMDOS.

<sup>505</sup> "Dimitar Bochev: Georgi Markov, my friend was killed for the In Absentia Reports." Blitz.bg, March 1, 2019. [https://blitz.bg/pisatelyat-dimitr-bochev-moyat-priyatel-georgi-markov-be-ubit-zaradi-zadochni-reportazhi\\_news660166.html](https://blitz.bg/pisatelyat-dimitr-bochev-moyat-priyatel-georgi-markov-be-ubit-zaradi-zadochni-reportazhi_news660166.html)

<sup>506</sup> "Dimitar Bochev: Georgi Markov, my friend was killed for the In Absentia Reports." Blitz.bg, March 1, 2019. [https://blitz.bg/pisatelyat-dimitr-bochev-moyat-priyatel-georgi-markov-be-ubit-zaradi-zadochni-reportazhi\\_news660166.html](https://blitz.bg/pisatelyat-dimitr-bochev-moyat-priyatel-georgi-markov-be-ubit-zaradi-zadochni-reportazhi_news660166.html)

<sup>507</sup> "Disagreeable Words by Dimitar Bochev." October 30, 2017. <https://kafene.bg/несъгласни-думи-2-от-димитър-бочев/>

*Delo*, the main propaganda news outlet of the party.<sup>508</sup> Then from 1969 to 1972, he was promoted to director of the popular *Horizont* talk show program broadcast by the Bulgarian National Radio, as well during his media career, Kostov was assigned as a news correspondent in Paris from 1961 and in 1968 was recruited as an agent by the 10<sup>th</sup> department of the 1<sup>st</sup> national directorate of the Bulgarian secret service (KDS), under the code name “Krastev.”<sup>509</sup> It is speculated that this top secret program was designed to engage in counterintelligence measures against information warfare operations such as the CIA’s RFE but also to allow its agents to pose as fake defectors abroad in order to in effect engage in sabotage. Kostov or Krastev in 1971 was appointed in his own right as secretary general of a new KDS front organization called the Committee for Television and Radio, although in 1974 after supposedly confronting certain internal issues within his department, he was sent abroad back in Paris as a correspondent for the Bulgarian National Television, in order to gather intelligence on the West.<sup>510</sup> However, when Kostov or Krastev defected in June 1977, receiving political asylum in France, the KDS initially assumed that he was acting as a double agent in his assigned clandestine mission.<sup>511</sup>

Although, at some point, it seems that Kostov had not been acting on Krastev’s assignment and in fact actually defected to the West, thus in May 1978, he was sentenced to death in absentia. Kostov is the highest ranked member of Bulgarian intelligence to

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<sup>508</sup> Kostov, Vladimir and Reynolds, Ben Hemel. *The Bulgarian Umbrella: The Soviet direction and operations of the Bulgarian Secret Service in Europe*

<sup>509</sup> VI-L-1160. The Committee for Disclosing the Documents and Announcing Affiliation of Bulgarian Citizens to the State Security and the Intelligence Services of the Bulgarian National Armed Forces, COMDOS. Sofia, Bulgaria.

<sup>510</sup> VI-L-1160. “Krastev” Kostov Dossier. The Committee for Disclosing the Documents and Announcing Affiliation of Bulgarian Citizens to the State Security and the Intelligence Services of the Bulgarian National Armed Forces, COMDOS. Sofia, Bulgaria.

<sup>511</sup> Kostov, Vladimir. *The Bulgarian Umbrella: The Soviet direction and operations of the Bulgarian Secret Service in Europe*.

defect causing a massive failure for the KDS. On August 28, 1978 (9 days before Markov), Kostov was targeted for assassination in the Paris metro with the same umbrella containing ricin poison, though he somehow miraculously survived the poison attack and worked for RFE from 1978 until 1994.<sup>512</sup> However, these two, similar style assassinations occurring within a week or two, raised rumors which were disseminated that Markov was also a double agent traitor just like Kostov, and was thus not an actual dissident.<sup>513</sup>

However, around the time that Markov's dossier was probably destroyed, a 1990 internal investigation had concluded that: "the writer Georgi Markov did not belong to the Bulgarian foreign service's undercover apparatus and there were no contacts with him on an agent-operational or other basis."<sup>514</sup>

There have been a series of similar high-prolife political assassinations abroad including, most notably; Jozef Stalin's 1941 NKVD order against his arch ideological enemy, Leon Trotsky in Mexico City. Trotsky, as one of the main architects of the 1917 Russian Revolution was only one of those eliminated, among the numerous show trials conducted against suspected opponents during the 1930s.

More recent political assassinations against high-profile enemies of Russian President Vladimir Putin at home and abroad include two in London; Alexander Litvinenko, who was poisoned with polonium on November 1, 2006 and Boris Berezovsky who on March 23, 2013 died of an unexplained suicide in his home.<sup>515</sup> Later, Boris Nemtsov was

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<sup>512</sup> "Panorama, Recorded from transmission" BBC-1, 2110. 9 April 1979.

<sup>513</sup> Kostov, Vladimir. *The Bulgarian Umbrella: The Soviet direction and operations of the Bulgarian Secret Service in Europe.*

<sup>514</sup> Kenarov, Dimitar. "Letter From Bulgarian Intelligence Refutes Talk That 'Umbrella Murder' Victim Georgi Markov Was A Spy." RFE, February 15, 2019.

<https://www.rferl.org/a/no-agent-bulgarian-spies-letter-refutes-talk-of-umbrella-murder-victim-markov-as-spy/29772449.html>

<sup>515</sup> "20 Years of Ruthlessness: How Russia silenced Putin's opponents." August, 27, 2023.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/aug/27/history-killing-how-russia-has-silenced-putins-opponents>

shot in the heart, on February 27, 2015 in the very heart of Moscow, and not too long after that, Sergei Skripal was targeted in Salisbury, UK on March 4, 2018 but survived the novichok poison.<sup>516</sup> Alexei Navalny also initially survived his novichok poisoning on August 20, 2020, but decided to return to Russia anyways on January 17, 2021, and recently died in a penal colony prison located in the Arctic Circle, on February 16, 2024.<sup>517</sup>

What all of these above cases have in common, is that these political assassinations in one way or another were conducted not only to obviously make an example of and silence those who posed an effective threat to the regime, but also to demonstrate the regime's ability to target and remove a particular person, abroad on foreign soil. More insidiously, it is to demonstrate to domestic and foreign audiences, that the regime is able to eliminate any threat without facing any significant consequences, all while preemptively squashing any sort of popular demonstrations that express protest.

Some of these political assassinations were carried out by various methods such as covert poisoning with ricin, polonium or novichok against actual top spies and who turned and acted as double agents for Moscow and London, as with Litvinenko and Skripal. In other cases, the targets were neither oligarchs nor spies, but rather politicians as with Nemtsov or Navalny; who posed a personal and political threat to Putin. In the case of the oligarch Berezovsky (who yielded important influence in Russia during the 1990s and even helped select Putin to power) there is no conclusive evidence of who killed him, and Russia has maintained that it was in fact the British who were behind his death.

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<sup>516</sup> "RFE/RL joint investigation shows Russian scientists producing chemical weapons." USAGM, November 25, 2020.

<https://www.usagm.gov/2020/11/25/rfe-rl-joint-investigation-shows-russian-scientists-producing-chemical-weapons/>

<sup>517</sup> "Aleksei Navalny, Putin's Staunchest Critic, Found Dead In Prison, Russia Says." RFE/RL, February 16, 2024. <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-navalny-dead-prison/32822399.html>

Similarly, part of the reason why some parts of the Bulgarian society today still raise suspicion and promote the theory that Markov was a double agent working for the Bulgarian and British secret services, is partially due to his close personal connection to Zhivkov but also the similarity of circumstances to Kostov, who did not have a personal relationship with Zhivkov but would have been professionally trained by the KDS, as a journalist to appear as if he was defecting in order to become a double agent. Meanwhile, none of the other six dissident defectors, even if surveilled by Bulgarian intelligence, while working abroad were ever targeted for such a high-profile extrajudicial assassination on foreign territory, with Kostov in Paris and Markov in London.

#### **Soviet-Bulgarian State Security Services Coordination with other Eastern European regimes, 1970s-1980s**

During the mid-1970s, even in the midst of the *détente* era of coexistence, while the nuclear arms race subdued, ideological warfare continued and Communist world countermeasures against RFE intensified. This was evident in the as the KDS attempt to restart its struggle against the so-called “imperialist ideological anticommunist propaganda” as during that time, internal intelligence reports suggest that RFE was being singled out as the most subversive threat propagating anti-Soviet sentiment in pro-Soviet Bulgaria. Bulgarian security services deemed that RFE’s targeted its audience increasingly towards the younger generations well as the *intelligentsia*, employing a more balanced approach to news coverage, also focusing on issues of corruption and human rights.<sup>518</sup>

This strategy might have been in part due to changes at RFE/RL during the early 1970s as well as public diplomacy in the midst of the *détente*, when an active

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<sup>518</sup> Bulgarian Ministry of the Interior Archive, Fond 22, Record 51, File 19, 25. COMDOS.

“human rights” agenda under Ford and Carter was promoted as part of foreign policy, supporting dissident movements in the Eastern bloc.

However, the underlying reason for the wave of political assassinations in 1978, was clearly the role of Markov’s *In Absentia Memoirs for Bulgaria*, particularly the *Personal Meetings with Todor Zhivkov* which were broadcast regularly through RFE and the BBC since 1975, and continued to be re-broadcast after his death, and were then published as the 1984 English version compilation. Though it should also be noted that declassified documents on this subject matter, indicate that there was a Soviet-Bulgarian joint operation apparently making plans to organize an international tribunal investigation against the CIA’s role in the Free Europe Committee (FEC) which was to take place in Moscow at some point in August 1978.<sup>519</sup> Of course, it was in August, when an attempted assassination was made on the double agent Krastev or dissident Kostov, followed up by a successful assassination against Markov and then against the less well known, Simeonov.

That previous summer in July 1978, another event occurred that would have sent shockwaves across all Eastern bloc security services. Bulgaria’s satellite state neighbor to the north, Romania experienced a massive crisis of confidence, when the chief director of the foreign intelligence service of Romania, General Ion Mihai Pacepa, who was a close personal adviser to Romanian President Nicolae Ceausescu defected for the West, at the US Embassy in Bonn, West Germany.<sup>520</sup> This was perhaps the highest-level intelligence disaster for the Soviet Eastern bloc, on par with the KGB’s Oleg Gordievsky providing information to MI6 between 1974 and 1985 and then defecting to the UK.

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<sup>519</sup> Bulgarian Ministry of the Interior Archive, Fond 1, Record 12, File 110, 39, 41. COMDOS.

<sup>520</sup> Ion Mihai Pacepa, Highest-Ranking Soviet Bloc Defector To The West, Reported Dead At 92. “ RFE/RL. <https://www.rferl.org/a/ion-mihai-pacepa-highest-ranking-soviet-bloc-defector-to-the-west-dies-at-92/31105240.html>



These developments would have heightened the alert level in all Soviet satellite states, in the late 1970s going into the 1980s, when the tensions of the Cold War restarted for a number of other reasons. These reasons include the 1980 election of Ronald Reagan in the United States, following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan which began on December 25, 1979 and lasted until 1989, as well as the Soviet-styled martial law in Poland imposed on December 13, 1981, lasting until 1983. The popular uprisings in Poland led by Lech Walesa's Solidarity trade union, as well as the ascent of the Polish Pope, Karol Jozef Wojtyla as John Paul II in 1978 and his 1979 visit to Poland, were reasons for the alleged Soviet-sponsored attempted assassination against the Polish Pope in Rome on May 13, 1981.<sup>521</sup> There are various accounts based on rumors without any concrete evidence, that the Soviets had requested that the Bulgarians assist in arming and transporting the Turkish terrorist Mehmet Ali Agca to Italy.<sup>522</sup> Others claim that it was most likely, solely the work of the far-right Pan-Turkic terrorist group, the Grey Wolves, while others cite theories that it was an internal power struggle by mysterious forces within the Vatican itself, and that any Soviet actions against the Pope, was setup as a believable cover story. The "Bulgarian connection" was particularly advanced by RFE's Paul B. Henze's *The Plot to Kill the Pope* (1983) book which was picked up and promoted by CIA director William Casey, focusing on the Soviet-Bulgarian connection.<sup>523</sup> In relation to the attempted assassination against the Pope, there is no conclusive evidence as to its exact origin, to this day.

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<sup>521</sup> "The Plot to Murder the Pope." CIA.

<https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP90-00552R000505130056-8.pdf>

<sup>522</sup> Mladen K. Petkov. *Tracing the Bulgarian Connection:*

*Revisiting Ideology-Inspired News Coverage of Pope Assassination Attempt*, 2024.

<sup>523</sup> Mladen K. Petkov. *Tracing the Bulgarian Connection*, 2024.

As for the Soviets covertly assisting their rather unreliable satellite state in Romania, in its retribution against the collective West, there is in fact, evidence to show that the East German Stasi provided support to Romania's brutal domestic security service, the Securitate, which had recruited through the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1979, a professional terrorist for hire from Venezuela by the name of Ilyich Ramirez-Sanchez, who was living incognito in Budapest, Hungary under the pseudonym of "Carlos the Jackal."<sup>524</sup> A team of Romanians, organized and led by Carlos was then trained and equipped with the goal of setting off a series of bomb explosions at the headquarters of Radio Free Europe in Munich, West Germany, on February 21, 1981.<sup>525</sup>

Although, this terrorist attack was largely unsuccessful in inflicting maximum impact, mostly causing limited damage to the building and injuring several staff but no significant casualties. The fact that RFE/RL was designated as the main target for a Communist regime that had suffered the most serious intelligence defection in the history of Eastern Europe, onto itself, speaks loudly to how this so-called "imperialist ideological anticommunist propaganda" was indeed effective in challenging the ideological foundations upon which the Soviet satellite states found legitimacy, especially at a time when the tensions and rhetoric of the Cold War, were restarted.

In the upcoming chapter, a detailed examination of RFE Bulgarian department's internal research reports on public opinion from the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s will be addressed and assessed.

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<sup>524</sup> Cummings, Richard H. *Chapter 4: Carlos the Jackal and the Bombing of RFE/RL*, 97.

<sup>525</sup> 'RFE/RL Will Continue To Be Heard': Carlos the Jackal and The Bombing of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, February 21, 1981. RFE/RL. <https://pressroom.rferl.org/a/carlos-the-jackal-and-the-bombing-of-rfe-rl-munich-1981/30554421.html>

**CHAPTER 4:**  
**AMERICAN PUBLIC DIPLOMACY AND PROPAGANDA LEADING UP TO**  
**BULGARIA'S NATIONAL JUBILEE CELEBRATIONS (1981) AND**  
**GLOBAL CULTURAL DIPLOMACY, 1970s-1980s**

**Chapter Introduction**

The following chapter builds upon this dissertation's established historical narrative and framework, by examining the impact of US radio broadcasting as a primary form of public diplomacy and propaganda directed toward the Soviet satellite state of Bulgaria. The time frame focuses on the late 1970s and early 1980s, when this small Communist country having skillfully established its loyalty to state and party leadership in Moscow, boldly embarked on an independent course in foreign policy, by promoting a new type of national rebranding of its cultural identity on the world stage during the *détente* era.

This chapter analyzes and assesses all the raw quantitative and qualitative data contained in declassified documents from the Bulgarian Central State Archives, the secret police reports at the Commission for the Dossiers as well as audience research survey reports from the archives of the RFE/RL Research Institute's Media and Opinion Research Department plus transcripts and records from RFE's Bulgarian Broadcasting Department.

After introducing Bulgaria as case study for American public diplomacy and propaganda by means of radio broadcasting as part of an information initiative, the first chapter established the essence of the Soviet-Bulgarian special relationship and subsequent cultural diplomacy of the 1970s and 1980s. The second chapter explained the difference between public diplomacy and propaganda, with the emergence of Western radio

broadcasting, and the background history of VOA and RFE/RL, as well as the CIA's clandestine book program in Eastern Europe, and in regards to Bulgaria, from their inception in the late 1940s and early 1950s up until available documents are available in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The third chapter brought these aspects together by telling the dramatic story of the new generation of Bulgarian dissident defectors, embodied by Georgi Markov prior to and after his assassination in 1978. The content of his *Meetings with Todor Zhivkov* as part of the *In Absentia Reports* were examined in detail, as among the main causes for the political assassination in the broader backdrop of the Western human rights agenda, and the breakdown of the détente era of peaceful coexistence.

These public intellectuals introduced in the previous chapter, form the backbone of RFE's Bulgarian broadcasting service and the content of their programming is cited throughout this chapter, which looks at exactly what was happening immediately leading up to, during and right after the case of Georgi Markov in London and Vladimir Kostov in Paris, as well as between 1978 and 1981 – a time during which Bulgaria reaches the peak of its cultural diplomacy with the crescendo of the 1,300 year national jubilee celebrations, organized by Lyudmila Zhivkova. Additionally, what the Bulgarian state security services knew in terms of counterintelligence assessment reports on Western broadcasting in contrast to RFE/RL's audience research analysis reports from the late 1960s to early 1980s, is explored in detail throughout this chapter, which essentially raises the following broader questions: What types of topics did the broadcasts focus on foremost? How much did they change over time? To what extent did that correlate with changes in the state and society over a period of time? As well, the following specific questions in relation to the broader dissertation are posed: did American radio broadcasting through the commentary of

Bulgarian émigrés target the Soviet-Bulgarian special relationship and in what ways? In what ways did they continue or differ from Markov's perspective? Finally, this chapter explores where Bulgarian public attitudes within Eastern Europe stand concerning the US and the USSR over the course of the late Cold War time period as well as in demonstrating how the peak of Bulgarian cultural diplomacy was covered by RFE during the calendar year of 1981, with some selected excerpts based on the some notable Bulgarian holidays. This then sets the stage for the final chapter's analytical outlook on the time frame of the 1980s, Bulgaria's place within the Soviet-American led-events at the end of the Cold War.

### **Bulgarian State Security's Counterintelligence assessments of Western broadcasting: the BBC, VOA and RFE/RL, 1970s-1980s**

The Bulgarian State Security Services or the Committee for State Security (KDS) was established in 1947 and then restructured in 1952 based on the structure of the Soviet Committee for State Security (KGB). Ever since the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)'s Free Europe Committee (FEC) was formed in the 1950s, Radio Free Europe (RFE)'s Bulgarian Broadcasting Department was considered the main ideological threat to the Communist regime, which produced multiple internal reports monitoring broadcast content and gathering all sorts of information about broadcasting service. In a series of internal top secret reports from 1954 to 1975, that detail the "subversive activities of the political intelligence unit", it is evident that Bulgarians whether through Soviet sources or on their own, were not only aware of the CIA's clandestine coordination and covert funding for RFE but also about its organizational structure, including some of those in management and staff, as well as details about the various locations that made up the FEC's worldwide

operations by the late 1960s.<sup>526</sup> After covert coordination was discontinued and RFE/RL were reorganized between 1971 and 1976, internal reports seem to suggest that the Bulgarians still believed that the broadcasters functioned as front organizations for recruiting émigrés and continued to work together with US intelligence agencies, referring to their perception of alleged extensive contacts between RFE/RL in Munich with Western European covert contacts in Bonn, Rome, Paris and London.<sup>527</sup> 1975 was assessed in 1976 as a “difficult year” for RFE, according to the KDS First Directorate in charge of intelligence gathering, who apparently had accessed and re-printed for their own study, some of RFE/RL’s corporate records as well as internal audience research analysis reports which were always written in English, unlike the émigré broadcast transcripts which were generally written only in Bulgarian.<sup>528</sup>

How RFE’s classified (at that time) documents ended up being included in KDS internal reports is not specified and remains unknown, it is clear that the Bulgarian secret services were aware, writing that “one in three people listen at some point, and the more people listen, the more they tend to like it, even (Communist) party members under the age of forty” also, based on RFE’s own assessments, they assess that in the early 1970s the broadcasts were most tuned into by university students, scientific and literary scholars and in general, those politically opinionated youth whose views remained private.<sup>529</sup> Furthermore, in a series of detailed internal reports from 1973 to 1975, studying the activities and impact of RFE/RL, VOA, DW and the BBC, the KDS compares and contrasts the effects of each and offers suggestions as to how to counter the “hostile enemy radio”

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<sup>526</sup> M VI L 680 T 1 (1954-1975) - Commission for the Dossiers, COMDOS.

<sup>527</sup> M VI L 680 T 1 (1954-1975) - Commission for the Dossiers, COMDOS.

<sup>528</sup> M VI L 1160 T 1 (1976-1981) - Commission for the Dossiers, COMDOS.

<sup>529</sup> M VI L 680 T 1 (1954-1975) - Commission for the Dossiers, COMDOS.

broadcasting. A lot of analysis is done on the Voice of America, which has been broadcasting near the Greco-Bulgarian border in Kavala, in Bulgarian, Greek, Serbian, Romanian, Ukrainian and the standard special English. The study points out that each language service adopted a different approach to news coverage on a given day, with the Serbo-Croatian service emphasizing Yugoslavia as a Non-Aligned socialist nation independent from the USSR, which is assessed as an attempt to remind listeners of the Soviet-Yugoslav split of the 1950s.<sup>530</sup> Then the Ukrainian broadcasts focus on emphasizing the Ukrainian national identity as distinct and distant from that of the Russian, for instance, with a detailed news report on the Ukrainian-American Baptist Congress in Chicago and the Ukrainian-Canadian Evangelical Congress in Toronto as well as discussion about the situation of Soviet Jews in Ukraine, being refused to freely emigrate to Israel.<sup>531</sup>

The Arab-Israeli Yom Kippur War of 1973 is reported on much more in the Bulgarian and Romanian services, with the VOA emphasizing the US standing up for peace in the Middle East, with sayings such as “the White House seeks an end to the conflict” and that “Moscow followed Washington in admitting the need for an end to the conflict” and making out Kissinger to be world’s greatest peacemaker. The US is portrayed as being interested to bring peace to Vietnam, while the USSR is cast as the aggressor.<sup>532</sup> This raises questions about VOA’s self-promoted mission of news objectivity. However, a similar report from 1974 indicates that “lately BTA has noticed that VOA anti-Bulgarian tones have calmed down, and an attempt at neutrality on Bulgarian matters has occurred.”

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<sup>530</sup> “Intelligence/Information about the foreign radio stations (RFE, BBC, VOA), 1973-75.”  
Central State Archive of the Republic of Bulgaria.

<sup>531</sup> “Intelligence/Information about the foreign radio stations (RFE, BBC, VOA), 1973-75.”  
Central State Archive of the Republic of Bulgaria.

<sup>532</sup> “Intelligence/Information about the foreign radio stations (RFE, BBC, VOA), 1973-75.”  
Central State Archive of the Republic of Bulgaria.

<sup>533</sup> Therefore, this supports the overall trend in VOA's approach which adjusted according to the changing situation during détente, when American trade representatives travelled throughout the Eastern bloc with the intent of forging closer economic ties between Western and Eastern Europe. VOA promoted that US objective by encouraging Communist countries to engage in increased interactions with the West. <sup>534</sup>

The BBC and DW followed in the direction of the spirit of détente, however, the report notes that they are alarmed that those two radio broadcasters have hired, the "top traitor to his motherland" Georgi Markov and raise concerns about him as a dissident becoming of a symbol of the human rights agenda in Bulgaria. Markov's work for the BBC, DW and RFE was from 1975 to 1978 and after his death, RFE's Bulgarian service considered moving some staff to US for their own personal safety. <sup>535</sup> However, since some of the émigrés apparently refused, it was thought that the reason was that the average salary for an RFE manager in Munich was much higher than those based in Washington. <sup>536</sup>

In crude characterizations against each of the Bulgarian émigrés working for Western broadcasters, one Gospodin Gospodinov (transliterated as "Mister Mister-ov") a US citizen, is speculated to be the main operative connected to the CIA. Among the others introduced in the previous chapter, are Dimitar Inkiow (American and German) and Dimitar Bochev (American and Canadian citizen). <sup>537</sup> These public intellectuals-turned dissidents associated with Georgi Markov each developed their own Western broadcasting careers in different directions. A series of propagandistic dossier-like documents possibly

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<sup>533</sup> "Bourgeois Radio Stations of RFE/VOA/BBC/DW, April-June 1974."

<sup>534</sup> "Bourgeois Radio Stations of RFE/VOA/BBC/DW, April-June 1974."

<sup>535</sup> M VIL 1160 T 1 (1976-1981) - Commission for the Dossiers, COMDOS.

<sup>536</sup> M VIL 1160 T 1 (1976-1981) - Commission for the Dossiers, COMDOS.

<sup>537</sup> M VIL 1160 T 2 - Commission for the Dossiers, COMDOS.



intended for domestic Bulgarian radio broadcasting, builds one by one, a case for character assassination against Dimitar Bochev, Dimitar Inkiow but also Petar Semerdzhiev and Vladimir Kostov. Their broadcasting programs will be discussed in detail, in this chapter.

Bochev is described as “the author of the (RFE) Bulgarian youth programs from Silistra who was born to Communist party members but did not graduate as a student of philosophy in Sofia, and who has a weakness for poetry, with a weak intellectual understanding of culture, being politically illiterate with confused understandings of the world, a hippie in his inward psychological mentality.”<sup>538</sup> Bochev is attacked as a free thinker who was hired by RFE not for his professional abilities but rather for other nefarious reasons involving what is often referred to as “sabotage from abroad directed against the motherland” and as such, the commentary calls him “clever” since allegedly “he (sent) his wife, a German woman who was a medical student to work at the regional hospital of his home town, Silistra. Although it was known to them, the security services for the radio station does not follow up on the case, even though it is absolutely forbidden for the family members of the staff to visit any Communist countries.”<sup>539</sup> The commentary then raises the question: “Why was Dimitar Bochev possibly recruited to work for Radio ‘Free Europe’?” implying that émigrés like him are engaged in some sort of treason.

Dimitar Inkiow from Khaskovo, known as the “the political satirist of Radio ‘Free Europe’” operated apparently under the pseudonym of Velko Verin. “While he was in Bulgaria, Dimitar Inkiow had tried to make a career in anti-American theater. He was allowed to go to the West with a red passport under the pretense of buying auto parts – how could have this happened? There, he decided not to return and found himself a servant to

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<sup>538</sup> M VIL 1160 T 2 - Commission for the Dossiers, COMDOS.

<sup>539</sup> M VIL 1160 T 2 - Commission for the Dossiers, COMDOS.

his American master. Somehow it worked out for him, a world-famous children's book author, as he likes to portray himself. But here we are discussing his political satire programming which are broadcast every Sunday from Munich into Bulgaria. For the fairy tales of Velko Verin which are enjoyed only by leadership of the Bulgarian section... even Georgi Markov didn't see much use of their commentaries, but one need not be Georgi Markov to know that the stories of Dimitar Inkiow have no literary or political value.”<sup>540</sup>

Again, these commentaries remains fixed on the theme, that these émigrés' broadcasting work while significant is merely a façade, only part of their real function, and it is presumed that they were recruited and trained as Western secret agents that are engaged in some sort of subversive or treasonous activity against Communist Bulgaria:

How did it happen that, among the circles of the Bulgarian political émigrés in the West, the main commentator for Radio 'Free Europe' on questions of Bulgaria is the previous Communist correspondent from the Bulgarian Telegraph Agency and the Bulgarian Radio, Vladimir Kostov? How did it happen that a former Communist functionary, Peter Semerdzhiev explains to the Bulgarians with long lectures over the radio, how things were in the political party history of Bulgaria before September 9<sup>th</sup>?

Maybe both of them are simply just useful authors for their radio programming?

A warning for the Bulgarian immigration to pay attention to the political activities of RFE...among whom are Bulgarians who have never experienced our challenges with building Communism, nor who even speak the language fluently but nevertheless engage in slander against our Communists! This statement criticizes the Bulgarian émigrés working at RFE, raising the question about their journalistic credentials and asking why do they not work and publish among the Bulgarian diaspora abroad, but rather concern themselves with working for the interests of the US government!<sup>541</sup>

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<sup>540</sup> M VI L 1160 T 2 - Commission for the Dossiers, COMDOS.

<sup>541</sup> M VI L 1160 T 2 - Commission for the Dossiers, COMDOS.

The main argument advanced by this piece of propaganda produced for the Bulgarian domestic media and designed to delegitimize these dissents as traitors and saboteurs, is that once they defect, they do not merely seek to disappear among the Bulgarian diaspora abroad and avoid being targeted. Instead, this line of thinking goes; the trend among those deemed as traitors is that they then publicly engage in information warfare against their homeland by means of radio broadcasting. From the dissidents' perspective perhaps, if they were already famous at home or even if they were not, once they got abroad their initial instinct was not to go away, after all, if they defected because they believed in a bigger cause than themselves, then it would make sense that this cause, such as the exercising their freedom of speech would be their main priority, which would have been available by means of broadcasting their opinion back across the Iron Curtain.

Radio Free Europe was the best means to do so, because unlike the Voice of America which also engaged in American public diplomacy and propaganda efforts, RFE did not adjust according to short-term US foreign policy interests, but rather maintained an unwavering anti-Communist position. The start of Communism in Bulgaria was celebrated on its 30 year anniversary in 1974, based on the so-called September Socialist Revolution of 1944, which by most historical accounts was simply a Soviet-sponsored coup d'état.

Nevertheless, pro-Soviet propaganda in Bulgaria had been successful in portraying it as a popular uprising inspired and supported by the liberating Red Army, which in fact did not go on to occupy Bulgaria after 1947, as a testament to the trust Sofia enjoyed from Moscow. Bulgarian monitoring of RFE in 1974 increased in light of the anniversary celebrations, as counterintelligence reports indicate that the biggest threat from RFE, aside from the constant criticism of the party and its legitimacy, was the strategically articulated

arguments against the Soviet-Bulgarian relationship: “RFE’s anti-Soviet and anti-Slavic approach to Bulgarian identity, RFE’s constant revision of history to show Russians in a negative light to Bulgarians – it’s all an attack on the Bulgarian national identity and our connection with the USSR.”<sup>542</sup> RFE’s alleged “revisionist history” of the Communist Party is attributed to the commentaries made by the former-Communist, Peter Semerdzhiev who had actually participated in the events of 1944.<sup>543</sup>

Aside from the “anti-Soviet and anti-Bulgarian themes”, RFE broadcasting also highlighted several domestic topics that listeners would have been well aware of; issues with agricultural production and output, labor organization, and economic stagnation. The terms “instability” and “ineffectiveness” were used often and a sharp criticism of the centrally planned economy based on five year plans, was delivered.

However, internal reports acknowledge that RFE messaging combines “hostile confrontation” against their regime with a much softer tone of “constructive criticism” designed to express sympathy and build rapport with its listeners. These reports also note “the ideological critique is much more severe than the economic critique, in that RFE directly confronts Marxism-Leninism as an outdated ideology, also that the party is losing its legitimacy in advancing the popularity of Communism at home particularly among the younger generation.”<sup>544</sup> Thus, on the basis of these critiques, RFE’s selling point is summarized as being against so-called “ideological barriers”, for freedom to organize and exercise freedom of expression, discussion of philosophies, free access to Western music, and for the free movement and free contact between all nations of Europe with hope being

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<sup>542</sup> “Radio Free Europe: anti-Bulgarian propaganda.” Central State Archive of the Republic of Bulgaria.

<sup>543</sup> “Radio Free Europe: anti-Bulgarian propaganda.” Central State Archive of the Republic of Bulgaria.

<sup>544</sup> “Radio Free Europe: anti-Bulgarian propaganda.” Central State Archive of the Republic of Bulgaria.

in the young generation as “natural bearers of the positive perspective in a society frozen by old dogmas.”<sup>545</sup> In line with its clever and constructive approach, RFE programming recommended that Bulgarians adopt a pragmatic rather than ideological approach to working with the West. This was ironically something that the party was already doing in the context of Bulgaria’s independent foreign policy, the issue was that it was doing it while also maintaining an extremely deferential attitude to Soviet leadership, unlike others in the Eastern bloc. State security’s suggested solution was to increase domestic propaganda to counter critiques, promote the phrase “socialist economic achievement” and emphasize how people’s standard of life has increased despite the difficulties of previous decades, while also pointing out actual economic problems people care most about by offering an answer of how the party will solve these long-term problems and finally, by a hopeful ideological approach directed at the youth to counter RFE’s criticisms.<sup>546</sup>

### **Radio Free Europe’s Bulgarian Broadcasting Department:**

#### **Audience Research Analysis, 1960s-1970s**

RFE/RL’s audience research analysis surveys go back to its inception in the 1950s, similar to how the FEP and the PSPD’s clandestine book program also relied on feedback communication through the mail or through in-person meetings. Initially, these American initiatives toward Bulgaria were among the worst performing from all the other Eastern bloc countries. However, that began to change in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s for a number reasons that were demonstrated, in the previous chapter. The underlying question that this chapter will later go on to pursue, based on these documents, is if there was continuity or change going into the 1980s? In terms of the audience research analysis,

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<sup>545</sup> “Radio Free Europe: anti-Bulgarian propaganda.” Central State Archive of the Republic of Bulgaria.

<sup>546</sup> “Radio Free Europe: anti-Bulgarian propaganda.” Central State Archive of the Republic of Bulgaria.

there seems not to have been that much change in the structure of these survey questions, and that was perhaps purposefully so that a constant could be established to keep track of public attitudes over time. Of course, while the content of the questions themselves and the topics did indeed change even month to month, the structure of how these surveys were conducted maintain a similar set of common components, specifically designed that way.

By going back to the earliest surveys found from the Bulgarian Broadcasting Department, from the summer of 1954 to 1955, what is evident is that these surveys were initially based on a mere total of only 58 interviews over the course of an year; 27 of whom mentioned that they listened to RFE, whereas 20 listened to VOA and 19 to the BBC, with some as always, overlapping.<sup>547</sup> From the combined RFE, VOA and BBC listenership, and the question of the “American or Bulgarian character” of RFE did not seem to concern most of the listeners.<sup>548</sup> This was an important factor for RFE early on, as after all, that was the whole operation, of making RFE appear to be émigré-run home-based radio that was simply situated abroad. Overall, it seemed that even if there was American sponsorship of RFE, for those Bulgarians questioned, that would have been is considered to be an asset not an issue, as the Bulgarian émigrés engaged in broadcasting were not viewed as traitors but as patriots, working for the Western liberation of Bulgaria, nearly a decade after falling for Communism. The survey does note that, among the Bulgarians much lower emotional connection was felt toward what was then, the old generation of émigrés, than all the other nations, especially audiences in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia.<sup>549</sup>

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<sup>547</sup> “Bulgaria: audience response to Western broadcasts, August 1954-July 1955”. Open Society Archives, 300-20-1.

<sup>548</sup> “Bulgaria: audience response to Western broadcasts, August 1954-July 1955.” IRD/EEA Bulgarian Unit, Subject File, 1951-1995, 2605: Radio Propaganda (against RFE, 1952-1962) to 2605: Radio Propaganda (against RFE, 1979-1980). Open Society Archives, 300-20-1.

<sup>549</sup> “Bulgaria: audience response to Western broadcasts”, August 1954-July 1955. OSA, 300-20-1.

Western broadcasting in its inception was a way for Eastern Europeans to be reminded that the West has not forgotten them, maintaining that morale and sustaining hope of eventual liberation.<sup>550</sup> A Bulgarian respondent from early on, was quoted stating: Too many optimistic promises disillusion people who eventually become disgusted and stop listening...it is better to speak frankly even though news is unpleasant. The Bulgarians are a tenacious and patient people...(but) they must know the truth in order to mobilize that patience and their ability to resist. The most horrible and brutal reality would serve to give hope for a better future and raise morale.”<sup>551</sup>

All the others also responded that they wanted a purely informative type of news reporting, some had heard about RFE first through FEP leaflets, which were dropped by airplanes. When asked about specific radio stations, and if they had been able to tune into the CIA’s special mobile station Radio Gorianin, it seemed they were able to do a lot more, also having been able to reach and tune into the radio waves of Radio Belgrade but even some of Radio Paris and Radio Rome as well as the nearby domestic Greek broadcasters.

<sup>552</sup> In regards to radio preference for content, someone commented that “people may know that tomato juice (BBC) is good for them, but they prefer beer (VOA) or harder (RFE).”<sup>553</sup> Thus, the BBC was considered as the most objective, but RFE seemed to be the most popular. The report satisfied RFE research, which concluded that “evidence shows that (RFE) can influence the opinions and convictions of its audience” as long as their arguments and evidence for the Western case against Communism was based on truth, although that exact truth had to be presented only in the “strongest possible manner; i.e.

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<sup>550</sup> “Bulgaria: audience response to Western broadcasts”, August 1954-July 1955. OSA, 300-20-1.

<sup>551</sup> “Bulgaria: audience response to Western broadcasts”, August 1954-July 1955. OSA, 300-20-1.

<sup>552</sup> “Bulgaria: audience response to Western broadcasts”, August 1954-July 1955. OSA, 300-20-1.

<sup>553</sup> “Bulgaria: audience response to Western broadcasts”, August 1954-July 1955. OSA, 300-20-1.

IRD/EEA Bulgarian Unit, Subject File, 1951-1995, 2605: Radio Propaganda (against RFE, 1952-1962) to 2605: Radio Propaganda (against RFE, 1979-1980). Open Society Archives, 300-20-1.

propaganda in the truest sense of the word, the propagation of ideas. By no means is the idea of propaganda rejected.”<sup>554</sup> A decade later, in two sets of surveys from 1963 to 1965, reports noted that RFE emerged as the most tuned into broadcaster, among rural residents and somewhat less among urban residents.<sup>555</sup> During that time period, young listeners actually listened more to VOA than the BBC or RFE, and the average listener only tuned in for about 20-30 minutes on an average day. Those questioned, responded that their top interest in listening was primarily in hearing current events covered from an alternative perspective, second in receiving new information, and third to hear political commentary and last, to be entertained. For the most part, listeners preferred home radio for entertainment, although after VOA introducing “Music and Jazz”, started to slowly change that trend. In terms of public attitudes toward the West, it is difficult to determine as Bulgaria was looking least toward the West compared to the other Eastern Europeans. Although, based on a survey of listeners on attitudes toward Europe, most were especially interested in France (61%) and the educated elite also thought highly of West Germany (45%) and Great Britain (36%) but that not as highly of Italy (21%) and Austria (20%), probably because the Communists portrayed Rome and Vienna in relatively positive diplomatic terms, in contrast to Paris or London.<sup>556</sup> Unlike the rest of the Eastern bloc, Poland viewed Britain in much higher terms than any other, and Romania which identified as a Latin nation, was quite interested in Italy and Spain, much more than the others.

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<sup>554</sup> “Bulgaria: audience response to Western broadcasts”, August 1954-July 1955.

IRD/EEA Bulgarian Unit, Subject File, 1951-1995, 2605: Radio Propaganda (against RFE, 1952-1962) to 2605: Radio Propaganda (against RFE, 1979-1980). Open Society Archives, 300-20-1

<sup>555</sup> “Bulgarian Listening Patterns, 1963/1964 in December, 1964.” Box 2, OSA 300-6-2.

<sup>556</sup> “Bulgarian Listening Patterns, 1963/1964 in December, 1964.” Box 2, OSA 300-6-2.



For Bulgarians, during the outbreak of the June 1967 Arab-Israeli Six Day War, respondents had demonstrated that “there exists a high correlation between listening to RFE and a pro-Israeli attitude regarding the present conflict.”<sup>557</sup> In 1967, as RFE’s secret roots were getting exposed in domestic US reporting, a series of surveys had questioned Eastern Europeans on their opinion of RFE’s sponsorship. The multiple choice question quizzed: “How do people in your country regard RFE? A) As an American government station? B) As an American-supported exile-run station, or C) As a national station abroad?” Most of the 1,840 respondents (59%) considered RFE to be “American-supported, exile-run station” while only (22%) expressed the opinion that RFE is a “US government station.” The conclusion contained in the report is quite misleading as its conclusion is based on the assumption that the radio station was at this point independent from any funding or direction from the US government, when in fact it was:

The predominance of the correct definition of RFE, a station, though enjoying American support, is NOT a US government communications outlet, suggests that RFE’s special position in Western broadcasting is properly understood and appreciated...A clear majority CORRECTLY identified RFE as a radio station supported by Americans and largely operated by exiles from the respondents’ homelands... and about ¼ INCORRECTLY identified RFE with the US government... However, not all who look upon RFE as a “government station” are necessarily hostile to RFE... because government-run radio is the rule rather than the exception in Europe and not only under Communism, that being true, it is particularly significant that fully 59% refused to accept anti-RFE propaganda, that RFE’s exile staffs are the “servile executors of the will of their American masters.”<sup>558</sup>

The Hungarians, having experienced this particular question as a matter of life or death during their failed 1956 Revolution, responded most correctly with highest rate at

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<sup>557</sup> “The Arab-Israeli Conflict and Public Opinion in Eastern Europe”, July, 1967. East Europe Area and Opinion Research from January 1966 to December 1967. Box 2, OSA 300-6-2.

<sup>558</sup> “Central Europeans look at RFE’s Sponsorship in September, 1967” (pg. 4)

65% together with the Czechs and Slovaks, who were about to experience their own hard choice about being part of “Free Europe” soon thereafter in 1968. Polish respondents answered at the lowest rate of 45% while most of the Romanians and Bulgarians surveyed were not sure enough to give an answer, so there was not enough data on that question.

Soviet-style jamming was most prevalent in Bulgaria and listeners prior to 1968 were the smallest and weakest of all the others.<sup>559</sup> RFE’s Bulgarian audience and all audiences in general reached an all-time high in 1968, due to the political developments leading up to the crushed Prague Spring.<sup>560</sup> During the Prague Spring, a survey based on 248 interviews with Bulgarian respondents between May 1968 and February 1969, surprisingly shows that one in every two listeners questioned, considered that news coverage of Bulgaria should be RFE’s top priority, then followed by news about Western Europe, then about Eastern Europe (where the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia had just happened) and least about the US.<sup>561</sup> One half of the respondents did not know what to think of their Communist party leadership, although they responded that the sentiment was generally negative however, it is notable that 40% did not state an opinion on the matter, but on the question of Soviet influence over Bulgaria, 92% agreed and 8% had no opinion.<sup>562</sup> This possibly shows, that of the respondents who either corresponded by mail, or by being interviewed while travelling in the West, the effect of the crushed Prague Spring made them hesitate somewhat on coverage of the Eastern bloc or on

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<sup>559</sup> “Future Radio Free Europe listenership trends in the light of past findings, 1964-1972” in July, 1969, pg. 9

<sup>560</sup> “Radio Free Europe’s Listenership Trends, 1962-1968 in November, 1968.”

East European Area Research Analysis Department: Bulgaria, Box 14, Open Society Archives, 300-2-2

<sup>561</sup> “Bulgarian Attitudes to: RFE’s European and American coverage, Todor Zhivkov, and Soviet Influence in Bulgaria, December, 1969.” (pg. 8)

<sup>562</sup> “Bulgarian Attitudes to: RFE’s European and American coverage, Todor Zhivkov, and Soviet Influence in Bulgaria, December, 1969.” (pg. 4-7)

expressing a political opinion, but most had no issue acknowledging the obvious Soviet dominance over Bulgaria, despite the power dynamics and diplomatic intricacies of that “special relationship.” The following year in 1969, RFE issued a report on what it called the first “modern attack” by Bulgarian leadership against the radio broadcaster which had been in existence already for over fifteen years. Bulgaria worried about RFE, deeming it as “the most powerful and best means of political propaganda” which has long range power and can be listened to “illegally” and accordingly, is the greatest manifestation of the main aim of “imperialist propaganda” whose goal it is to achieve “internal demoralization” and “erosion in socialist society.”<sup>563</sup> The “attack” pointed out several reoccurring themes in RFE broadcasting which revolved around blasting Bulgaria’s “limitless devotion and loyalty” to the Soviet Union and “exposing” the truth about the “slave-like, brainwashed” Bulgarian population, being economically exploited by “big brother.”<sup>564</sup>

Furthermore, RFE was publicly labeled “blunt radio propaganda” that pretends to advance the national interest of the Bulgarian nation, endlessly criticizes the “inevitable progress and triumph of socialism” and its “temporary socio-economic struggles” as “organic defects.”<sup>565</sup> As well, RFE’s émigré broadcasters were called out for at times having argued for the overthrow of the regime and drafting a new Constitution. The Communist regime feeling threatened, embarked on a comprehensive campaign against Western radio broadcasting, which until that point was jammed and monitored but not

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<sup>563</sup> “A special report on the first ‘modern’ Bulgarian attack on RFE, March 14, 1969.”

<sup>564</sup> “A special report on the first ‘modern’ Bulgarian attack on RFE, March 14, 1969.”

<sup>565</sup> “A special report on the first ‘modern’ Bulgarian attack on RFE, March 14, 1969.”  
IRD/EEA Bulgarian Unit 1951-1995. 2605: Radio Propaganda (against RFE, 1952-1962)  
to 2605: Radio Propaganda (against RFE, 1979-1980). Open Society Archives, 300-20-1

addressed as vocally in such a political manner. This was around the time when the dissident-defectors followed by Markov started broadcasting on behalf of the West.

Between 1964 and 1975, a series of surveys on the question of youth public opinion on “socialist values” found that before the crushing of Czechoslovakia in line with the Brezhnev Doctrine, some of RFE’s younger respondents did hold pro-Western and pro-Soviet views simultaneously. However, after 1968, a definite zero-sum correlation between Western and Communist/Socialist values unfolded. <sup>566</sup> The survey states that a significant development of this turning point was the advent of “a new political-ideological force: Democratic Socialism” or the “Eurocommunism” of 1970s Western Europe. <sup>567</sup>

Between 1973 and 1978, a series of surveys on the question of general public opinion about “human rights” in the midst of the Helsinki Accords which also legitimized the Brezhnev Doctrine, pondered “if the agreements, were positive or negative development?” <sup>568</sup> From 1976 to 1977, the main question concerned whether “the situation had improved?” and finally, from 1977 to 1978, the question asked if respondents “felt like their country had won or lost?” <sup>569</sup> The findings show that the human rights issue embodied in the accords, provided an actual or potential leverage for freedom for those people. <sup>570</sup>

On human rights as a Western political agenda, a subject addressed in the next chapter, almost all of RFE’s Eastern European audience respondents had heard commentary about that topic, with 88% at most and 79% at least. Most (85%) of those who

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<sup>566</sup> “Youth Revolt and Socialist Values, November 1978.” (pg. 5)

<sup>567</sup> “Youth Revolt and Socialist Values, November 1978.” (pg. 5)

<sup>568</sup> “Three Measures of East European Attitudes to the Helsinki Conference (1973-1978) July 1979.”(pg. 11)

<sup>569</sup> “Three Measures of East European Attitudes to the Helsinki Conference (1973-1978) July 1979.” (pg. 11)

<sup>570</sup> “Three Measures of East European Attitudes to the Helsinki Conference (1973-1978) July 1979.” (pg. 11)

heard about it, were in agreement whereas only (11%) reserved judgement.<sup>571</sup> During the *In Absentia* broadcasts, between July 1977 and April 1978, a total of 1,540 respondents, 137 of whom were Bulgarian had been surveyed on jamming.<sup>572</sup> The Hungarians (94%) and Romanians (80%) had been able to listen freely, Poland had limited jamming but Czechoslovakia and especially Bulgaria experienced the most restricted level of electronic interference, as Sofia stepped up in an effort despite the era of détente, in order to prevent Markov's "seductive stories" from being heard by the public in the mid to late 1970s.

Due to the heaviest levels of electronic interference, which was advanced jamming in Bulgaria, the broadcasts with a low frequency index were at a serious disadvantage; nevertheless almost half of the population still tried to tune in despite the difficulties. Internal evidence actually suggests that the 1977-78 survey may have underestimated the audience of RFE in Bulgaria, since the drop in the data was probably not as sharp as it actually was and so the new 8% increase later reported had measured for both Western radio broadcasts in general and so may have been more corrective than real.<sup>573</sup> So, in reality half (55%) of the population did in fact tune in, still other nations had between 66% to 77%.<sup>574</sup> It should be noted that 33% of men and only 16% of women admitted to listening in to RFE during this time period.<sup>575</sup>

On the topic of RFE's "Perceived Political Position", about three-fifths of Bulgarian listeners surveyed saw the radio broadcaster's political position as being "centrist", but most believed it to be most effective as being "right-wing", in line with the

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<sup>571</sup> "Exposure to and Evaluation of Radio Free Europe's Coverage of Human Rights Initiatives in East Europe, August 1979."

<sup>572</sup> "RFE Reception Conditions in East Europe, May 1979."

<sup>573</sup> "Listening to Western Radio in East Europe, August 1979." pg. 19

<sup>574</sup> "Listening to Western Radio in East Europe, August 1979." pg. 19

<sup>575</sup> "Listening to Western Radio in East Europe, August 1979." pg. 19

results from all the other countries.<sup>576</sup> Similarly, almost all listeners gave no specific indication that they were in any way dissatisfied with RFE's political position.<sup>577</sup> On this topic, the majority of East Europeans in all age groups considered themselves to be politically centrists, with minorities being left-wing under (25%) and above (50%) as right-wing.<sup>578</sup>

Overall public opinions of RFE's public image, based on 1,200 respondents (out of whom, 384 listened and 816 did not) had characterized it as "reliant and salient", though the Bulgarian audience would have welcomed a "milder" general tone on politics, which was surprising since core audiences usually are more committed and demand more extreme content, and in the case of heavily jammed Bulgaria, a core and committed audience would be naturally be expected not want a tone down of rhetoric but rather increase it.<sup>579</sup>

Across the Eastern bloc, the cross-national identification with the West was negative (50%) among those supporting the Communists, but positive (36%) among those identifying as Democratic Socialists and even more positive (61%) among those identifying as Christian Democrats, however it was the most positive among those who consider themselves as Conservatives (+71%).<sup>580</sup> Bulgaria unlike the others, only had the high of (+51%) of all categories in terms of identification with the West, "possibly due to the serious Russophile strain in Bulgarian tradition."<sup>581</sup>

The highest identification with the West was in Czechoslovakia, followed by Poland, then tied between Hungary and Romania, and last was Bulgaria. These findings

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<sup>576</sup> "RFE's Political Position as seen and/or desired by Bulgarian Listeners, November 1978."

<sup>577</sup> "RFE's Political Position as seen and/or desired by Bulgarian Listeners, November 1978."

<sup>578</sup> "The Age factor in respondents' evaluations of their own and RFE's Political Position, 1979." pg 1.

<sup>579</sup> "RFE's image among listeners and non-listeners in Bulgaria (part 2) November, 1979." pg. 32

<sup>580</sup> "RFE's image among listeners and non-listeners in Bulgaria (part 2) November, 1979." pg. 10

<sup>581</sup> "RFE's image among listeners and non-listeners in Bulgaria (part 2) November, 1979." pg. 10

suggest that the RFE does indeed yield influence in communication on identification with the West, given the similarity of trends across all countries.<sup>582</sup>

Also, since “positive attitudes to Western radio shows a negative correlation to the domestic radio” and so likewise, a lack of confidence in the home radio, then correlates with higher ratings for RFE.<sup>583</sup> In terms of specific trends in listening to Western radio, a study between 1977 and 1978, based on 1,072 interviews of respondents abroad, showed that most people wake up before 7 am and go to bed before 11 pm, and so 6 to 9 pm are the peak leisure hours while peak radio broadcasting hours are extended up until 11 pm, although the report notes, that radio listening is not regarded by most people as an actual leisure time activity, though a lot their time is spent trying to listen as much as possible.<sup>584</sup> Although there is a higher amount of listening to the Western radio on Saturdays and Sundays than during the rest of the week, the weekend audience peak is not as high in Bulgaria as it is in the other countries, Bulgarians do still tend to tune into home radio for entertainment.<sup>585</sup> Most respondents indicate that they listen to the radio from their home, despite jamming being heavy, it is still very possible to hear the program although with interruptions. The audience was the same in almost all age groups, but listening to RFE increased with increasing education, 90% caught RFE in their home, but the proportion of those using a portable set in the car was higher with 14% in Czechoslovakia.<sup>586</sup>

RFE’s impact on listening across Eastern Europe translated half of the entire population who have listen to the station regularly; though there is a secondary audience

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<sup>582</sup> “RFE’s image among listeners and non-listeners in Bulgaria (part 2) November, 1979.” pg. 12

<sup>583</sup> “Assessment of the Information Value and the Radiophonic Rating of a Number of Western Radio Stations and the Domestic Radio, May, 1980.” pg. 2.

<sup>584</sup> “Time for Leisure and Time for Listening to the Radio in Bulgaria, November 1979.”

<sup>585</sup> “RFE Listening Patterns in Bulgaria, January 1980.” pg. 18

<sup>586</sup> “RFE Listening Patterns in Bulgaria, January 1980.” pg. 18

of those who have never listened but learn about the news and opinions through others who do listen in.<sup>587</sup> For the 1980 survey, the Bulgarian primary audience was about (32%) while the secondary was about (42%), so in total (74%) had some exposure to the content.<sup>588</sup>

Also, non-RFE listeners indicated that they prefer the BBC (45%), over RFE (42%) followed by VOA (37%) in contrast to Radio Sofia (31%). This relatively critical attitude to the home radio, coupled with RFE's strong second place, suggests that non-listeners include "RFE sympathizers" for whom jamming and other reasons stopped them from listening.<sup>589</sup> In contrast to Radio Free Europe, Radio Sofia was considered by the majority of respondents to be "impassioned and propagandistic" while RFE listeners and non-RFE listeners alike, preferred to listen to the BBC or VOA.<sup>590</sup>

Throughout the mid to late 1970s, the RFE Bulgarian Broadcasting Department equipped with the talents and perspectives of a "new generation" recruited to its broadcasting ranks, expanded its capacity to develop a larger and more engaging set of programs for listeners, as well as in its ability to conduct these audience research analysis surveys. This is because while Bulgarians did experience some increased domestic censorship, this decade also allowed for more touristic travel across the Iron Curtain than ever, especially throughout Non-Aligned Yugoslavia and especially, neutral Austria. There, RFE's staff of émigrés trained in interviewing travelers could engage in "polling" their target audience. Although, it should be noted here, that most travelers with authorized exit visas were either Communist party members or trusted enough not to have any type of

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<sup>587</sup> "The 'secondary audience' of Radio Free Europe, June, 1980." pg. 3

<sup>588</sup> "The 'secondary audience' of Radio Free Europe, June, 1980." pg. 3

<sup>589</sup> "The image of RFE, VOA, BBC and the home radio among Bulgarians, September, 1980." pg. 8

<sup>590</sup> "The image of RFE, VOA, BBC and the home radio among Bulgarians, September, 1980." pg. 8. September 1971 to December 1980, Media and Opinion Research Department, Box 4. OSA 300-6-2



dissident tendencies, in order to travel. Therefore, it is interesting to acknowledge, that RFE listeners also included Communist party members who may not have been ideological believers, and had no issue anonymously voicing their opinion when interviewed about various socio-political issues. The other way, these surveys could be done was by the mail, but just like with the book program correspondence, censorship often stifled honesty. Therefore, the story that the statistical data based on these public opinion “polls” is based on relatively small samples not representing the entire population, even so, a biased portion of the population. Nevertheless, these methods are the closest possible scientifically documented way to measure at least, the continuity or change in public opinion on various questions of concern to potential listeners of RFE and other broadcasters, over time.

### **Radio Free Europe’s Bulgarian Broadcasting Department right before and after the Political Assassination of Georgi Markov, 1975-1979**

The complex case of Georgi Markov’s life and death as a dissident-defector who worked as a writer and broadcaster for the BBC, DW and RFE is examined in detail in the previous chapter. Here, based on the records and transcripts from the Radio Free Europe’s Bulgarian Broadcasting Department, the schedule of the programming as well as the actual content of the broadcasting, leading up to and after the assassination is explored:

A week or so prior to the “Bulgarian Umbrella” assassination of Georgi Markov in London, there was a similar attempted assassination against Vladimir Kostov in Paris. Bulgarian state security connected the two cases, maintaining that Markov encouraged or even recruited Kostov to defect. Kostov survived the attempt on August 26, 1978 and on that day a simple routine review of the most important events in the country during the week was broadcast, without any special mention of Kostov, who by the way, had his own

weekly program. The day after, time was devoted during Inkiow's *Merry Sunday* show, to the election of the new Pope John Paul I, and there was on air speculation about the position that the new pope would take in relation to the USSR, for which it was said, at least one year would be needed to see.<sup>591</sup> That last Italian Pope would die after only one month in power, and be followed by the historical election of the Polish Pope John Paul II, over one month later in October 1978. Kostov would be back broadcasting two days later on the topic of *Dissidence in Bulgaria*, asking "are there dissidents in Bulgaria?" and offering himself, Markov and Slavov as a new type of dissident, a public intellectual-turned defector, that could only exist in a place like Bulgaria where there was no dissidence.<sup>592</sup> Kostov continued later that week on the topic of *Bulgaria in the period, 1939-1949*.

On September 7, 1978 – the morning of Markov's assassination, the RFE program titled *Bulgaria, Russia and the USSR: defeated Bulgaria in WWI as a consequence of the Russian politics* was broadcast by Semerdzhiev.<sup>593</sup> On the day before, the program had included a short story on *Poetry and Conciliation* by Bochev, as well as commentaries about the future of air transport, development of tourism in China, and the question of "are there political prisoners in the US?" On word affairs: the Camp David Summit in particular and on domestic affairs; a commentary on the party's new decision on agriculture.<sup>594</sup>

The next day, on September 8, the news coverage of the Arab-Israeli negotiations at Camp David began amidst a US news story about Congressional hearings on Eastern

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<sup>591</sup> RFE Program: "Merry Sunday", August 27, 1978. Box 444.

Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

<sup>592</sup> RFE Program: "Dissidence in Bulgaria", August 28, 1978. September, 1978. Box 444.

Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

<sup>593</sup> RFE Program: September, 1978. Box 444.

Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

<sup>594</sup> RFE Program: September, 1978. Box 444.

Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

Europe, British unionists detailing abuses of freedom in Eastern Europe and the topic of martial law in Iran.<sup>595</sup> Other items on the list included also, the Crawford case in US-USSR relations, the Italian Communist Party's closer relations with the Chinese, and matters of industrial wages and labor productivity problems within Bulgaria.

On September 9, being Bulgaria's most important holiday at that time, a lot of RFE's coverage would have been naturally dedicated to combatting the Communist regime's regular propaganda. On September 10, during *Merry Sunday* with Inkiow, a commentary on *European culture in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century* was aired.<sup>596</sup> Later that day, Markov's first recording as part of his new program called "Markov Speaks", was scheduled to be broadcast, and it was titled: *The Day of 'Freedom' and the Day of the militia*.<sup>597</sup> The ironic happenstance of all these events coalescing and coinciding along with the Markov's recorded message, all appear to be quite eerie in retrospect. The original text was written in Bulgarian and broadcast in Bulgarian, but this is the English translation:

I do not believe there to be many nations in the world, where the regime has commanded one day (9/9) to celebrate a revolution and its supposed freedoms, but then on the next day (9/10) to celebrate the very institutions whose main purpose is to suppress freedom. In Bulgaria, September 10<sup>th</sup> is the "day of the militia and police, and of the committee for state security (KDS). Basically, these two days express unwittingly in the most ironic way, the essence of past 34 years of the Bulgarian (Communist) era. Only the talent of a major satirist could put together in such a way, two incompatible concepts. A day dedicated to freedom is

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<sup>595</sup> RFE Program: September, 1978. Box 444.

Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

<sup>596</sup> RFE Program: September, 1978. Box 444.

Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

<sup>597</sup> RFE Program: September, 1978. Box 444.

Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

followed the next day by a day that is dedicated to suppression, and the institutions specialization in such suppression....<sup>598</sup>

Markov's opening is themed around the Bulgarian day of freedom commemorating the September Socialist Revolution of 1944 which is in theory supposed to be about freedom. This was a widely observed holiday marked with celebrations, speeches, and parades throughout the country. The day after, would have been a less observed commemoration of the Bulgarian state security services founded in 1947 and restructured in 1952 as an identical mini-twin of the vast Soviet KGB juggernaut.

The tale that he tells about both of these days being back to back, in a nutshell symbolically embodying everything about the 34 years of the existence of the People's Republic of Bulgaria, is quite artistic in so many ways. As always, Markov utilizes story telling based on actual or imagined personal autobiographic experience, laces it satire and humor and finally leaves us with a dark dystopian picture:

If I could ask some colonel I once knew who worked for the KDS, and was a member of the Writers Union, why the "day of freedom" is combined with the "day of the militia", he would have probably answered: "Well, what sort of freedom would there be without the Committee for State Security? Who would guard such freedom?" and if I responded to his statement with silent suspicions, he would have continued in the following way: "If there was no freedom in the motherland, then there would not be any need for state security. The larger the freedom, the larger and more powerful our state security, had to be...for those who have no freedom, nor day of freedom, then there would be no need for state security, nor a day of the militia, so do you understand? The existence of our state security is nothing else, but the necessary expression of our concern for freedom... You cannot allow freedom to exist freely, for freedom to go up and down, and do whatever it wants. We (state security) have to take care of freedom" and so, if my old friend Kiro had heard this conversation, he would have pulled me to the side and he would have told me in a funny way: "Why are

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<sup>598</sup> RFE Program: September, 1978. Box 444. Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

you so simple and stupid to ask the colonel such questions? You should know by now that the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> of September are not two holidays but one and only holiday called “the day of freedom *for* the militia.”

Now, I remember a scary tirade of my neighbor in the hospital – Boris with the numbered days. “Doctor, why don’t we celebrate the Day of Health?” he turned to the physician taking care of him, who responded: “Well, it’s not appropriate to celebrate a Day of Health by those who are unhealthy.” Boris then threw in the punchline, asking “Why doctor? We (in Bulgaria) tend to celebrate exactly that, which we don’t have!” The doctor and I looked suspiciously at each other, but Boris who knew he had nothing to lose, exploded and in one breath said: “Don’t we celebrate the New Year exactly because there is nothing new. Don’t we celebrate Labor Day exactly because we dread to work. Don’t we celebrate the Press Day, because we don’t have an actual press. Don’t we celebrate Constitution Day, exactly because we don’t have an actual constitution. Then why do we who are about to die, don’t have a day of health? Why don’t the lunatics have their day of the mind, then?” So, the doctor and I pretended that we did not hear him. Boris passed away thereafter, but after all these years, his voice saying: “I thought we celebrate that which we don’t actually have” has haunted me.

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This was the message broadcast to nearly half the Bulgarian population, while Markov was in hospital dying of the poison that was inflicted upon him by the regime he was criticizing over the air. Finally, in that final message, Markov sets up in retrospect a symbolic choice for the people, asking Bulgarians at what price has whatever progress they have achieved, been achieved? He then advocates for freedom as the most important choice and freedom not being worth the price of progress. Thus, ends as the life of this literary figure as he speaks his last stark words to his fellow countrymen:

Before the arrival of Communism on September 9<sup>th</sup> in Bulgaria, most of our roads were indeed dirt roads, not cemented, they were the way they had always been for a long time. However, on those roads people could walk much more freely, without another countryman controlling them where to go. Back then, a passport

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<sup>599</sup> RFE Program: September, 1978. Box 444.  
Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

actually meant that you could freely travel abroad, as a basic citizen's right and it did not concern a police force such as the passport control division of the state militia. I am sure that if you ask today's Bulgarians, what would they prefer – to have dirt roads with freedom to move with their passport, or to have cemented roads but with restricted freedom to move, they would have chosen the freer choice.<sup>600</sup>

On September 11 – the day he died, Markov's employer, RFE had the domestic Bulgarian programming of the day featuring a commentary entitled *the political song in Bulgarian* by Bochev as well as a commentary by Inkiow on the Yugoslav Tito and the Romanian Ceausescu on their approaches to Chinese policy during the foreign minister's visit.<sup>601</sup> Kostov broadcast a commentary on *the philosophical conscience for history*, and news events continued to cover the Camp David summit in the United States, as well as analysis on the situation in Iran and the civil war in Nicaragua.<sup>602</sup> On September 12, Kostov aired a commentary titled *Party Propaganda and the truth about the September 1923 uprising* in which he exposes how the crushed September 1923 Communist uprising is portrayed by propaganda, as a fulfillment in the successful September 1944 uprisings, when in reality the decisive factor was the Red Army.<sup>603</sup> Although the image of Soviet and Russian liberation is a particularly powerful one in Bulgaria, as this historical parallel was remolded in the light of the Russian invasion of the Ottoman-held Balkans that resulted in the independence of Bulgaria in 1878. In fact, that year – 1978 was observed as the 100 year anniversary of the modern Bulgaria.

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<sup>600</sup> RFE Program: September, 1978. Box 444.

Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

<sup>601</sup> RFE Program: September, 1978. Box 444.

Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

<sup>602</sup> RFE Program: September, 1978. Box 444.

Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

<sup>603</sup> RFE Program: September, 1978. Box 444.

Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

Finally on September 13, while addressing US-USSR relations, and a continued commentary on the summit at Camp David, as well as Polish protestors in farming, and Bulgarian-Macedonian relations, the news of Georgi Markov was reported upon on air by the Bulgarian reporter Evdokimov. Then following day, the Markov case was continually discussed in an addition to a commentary titled: *Todor Zhivkov: party member number one* broadcast by Kostov, in which he carries on Markov's criticism of the regime and subtly alludes to who would have been the obvious culprit behind Markov's murder.<sup>604</sup>

That day, Inkiow broadcast a commentary titled *Humor before and after the 9<sup>th</sup> of September* in which he commented that the party's effective training and promotion of writers such as himself and Markov to help create better satire and humor as part of its propaganda apparatus, ironically resulted in some of those defectors utilizing some of that training in their work for RFE and its critiques of the regime.<sup>605</sup>

RFE's official statement was that it would "refrain from making any comment or doing any editorializing until a clear statement has been issued which leaves no doubt as to the cause of his death" despite allowing its commentators to argue their suspicions about the murder case.<sup>606</sup> RFE assessed that "Markov's program has enjoyed great popularity...has always been on a high intellectual level and has not, as has been alleged by the press, discussed Zhivkov's private life."<sup>607</sup> During a BBC interview days after Markov's death, Mrs. Markov asserted that the "broadcasts for RFE became absolutely vitriolic" to which RFE commented: "while sharing Mrs. Markov's grief, we were

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<sup>604</sup> RFE Program: September, 1978. Box 444.

Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

<sup>605</sup> RFE Program: September, 1978. Box 444.

Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

<sup>606</sup> "Georgi Markov and Vladimir Kostov", September 17, 1978. Box 46.

<sup>607</sup> "Georgi Markov and Vladimir Kostov", September 17, 1978. Box 46.

RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives. Hoover Library and Archives.

constrained to say that his broadcasts were not vitriolic and never dealt with the private lives of Bulgaria's leaders." <sup>608</sup> Overall, RFE's Bulgarian service editor Kyrill Panoff and recently recruited broadcaster Vladimir Kostov, were the top most quoted in terms of news publications and radio broadcasts concerning Georgi Markov. <sup>609</sup>

In his *Murder on Waterloo Bridge*, Panoff offers opinions and brings forth various facts not written about in any other sources, while also reasserting positions already discussed. Panoff believes that "nothing would have happened to Markov in exile had he not taken what proved to be a fatal decision – to record in Bulgarian and for Bulgarian audiences his *Reports in Absentia*...in particular (*his*) meetings with Todor Zhivkov broadcast in the fall and winter of 1977-78, (which) were beyond any doubt embarrassing for the regime...embarrassing because he was saying openly what others dared only to think, in his descriptions of reality and the relationship between society and the individual."

<sup>610</sup> Panoff who would have served as both Markov's and Kostov's professional superior at RFE, seems to suggest that Markov was aware he was a "marked man" as soon as he began broadcasting for RFE in 1975 and particularly after 1977, an year before his death. <sup>611</sup> Panoff writes about a case from 1970, with Boris Arsoff who had escaped Bulgaria and from Denmark and advocated for the formation of a "secret revolutionary committee" in a publication he called "*Levski*", named after the Bulgarian secret revolutionary committee that Vassil Levski in the 1860s had formed in resistance against the Ottomans, and supported by the Serbians and Russians, except now such an underground organization it

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<sup>608</sup> This statement was quoted by The Guardian on September 14, 1978.

<sup>609</sup> "Review of Public Media quotation of RFE/RL on Markov and Kostov cases", Box 46. Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

<sup>610</sup> Panoff, Kyrill. "Murder on Waterloo Bridge: The Case of Georgi Markov." *Encounter*, November, 1979.

<sup>611</sup> Panoff, Kyrill. "Murder on Waterloo Bridge: The Case of Georgi Markov." *Encounter*, November, 1979.



would be supported by the West against the Soviets, with a long-term goal to overthrow of the Communist regime and replace it with a sustainable situation that was similar to Ceausescu's Romania or Tito's Yugoslavia, being more independent from Moscow.<sup>612</sup>

Arsoff also demanded an end to pressure of Bulgarian émigrés abroad, but while the émigrés at that time did not organize around him and did not take him seriously as he had hoped, Zhivkov took him very seriously and in July 1973, Arsoff was kidnapped by Bulgarian state security agents and brought back to Sofia city court for a treason trial against him as an “underground terrorist endangering national security.”<sup>613</sup> Although he was sentenced to fifteen years of prison, Arsoff mysteriously disappeared, after dying in prison in 1974, right around the time Markov decided to start working for RFE.<sup>614</sup>

Furthermore, Panoff points out that the effects of the Helsinki Accords in 1975 inspired an increased amount of political activism by Eastern European émigrés abroad, and also coincided with a number of dissident developments across the Communist world. Inspired primarily by the Czechoslovak Charter 77, the Bulgarian failed attempt at a “Declaration 78” was supported by Markov. This would have been the first time, an attempt at an officially organized dissident movement was made in Bulgaria. That manifesto put forth “six separate demands: an end to violations of human and civil rights, freer exchange of people and information, improvements in social benefits, the creation of genuinely independent trade unions, abolition of privilege in all spheres of public life, and the

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<sup>612</sup> Panoff, Kyrill. “Murder on Waterloo Bridge: The Case of Georgi Markov.” *Encounter*, November, 1979.

<sup>613</sup> Panoff, Kyrill. “Murder on Waterloo Bridge: The Case of Georgi Markov.” *Encounter*, November, 1979.

<sup>614</sup> Panoff, Kyrill. “Murder on Waterloo Bridge: The Case of Georgi Markov.” *Encounter*, November, 1979.

publication of that Declaration in the daily press...”<sup>615</sup> The Communist regime took this threat seriously, and all commentators did their best to discredit the document and its supporters abroad.<sup>616</sup> Panoff references inside information provided to him by Kostov, that on December 2, 1977 Zhivkov for the first time had publicly addressed the question of dissidence at a closed meeting of a Conference of Young Writers in Sofia, saying that “dissent is not a literary but a political fact – a phenomenon of the present acute ideological struggle between capitalism and socialism... dissent does not exist Bulgaria as a political fact, but there are a number of people who think differently.”<sup>617</sup> Kostov uses the term “*inatchemisleshti*” meaning “those who think otherwise” in Zhivkov’s acknowledgement of the existence of dissident thinking but also his ability to eliminate dissident action.<sup>618</sup> As Markov discusses in his most sensitive broadcasts, the dictator had a particularly successful method of bribing and appeasing his critics within the party.

As Markov had been influential in the realm of mass culture and literature up until June 1969, Kostov until his defection in June 1977, had been the chief television and radio commentator and perhaps “the most familiar face and voice of the Bulgarian media.”<sup>619</sup> Kostov’s defection alarmed the regime perhaps more than Markov’s, and his RFE career began immediately thereafter, broadcasting 20 programs since Markov’s death, from October to December 1978, explaining why he and his wife defected, titled: *Why We have chosen to remain in the West*. Kostov argues three ideological reasons: Communist

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<sup>615</sup> Panoff, Kyrill. “Murder on Waterloo Bridge: The Case of Georgi Markov.” *Encounter*, November, 1979.

<sup>616</sup> Panoff, Kyrill. “Murder on Waterloo Bridge: The Case of Georgi Markov.” *Encounter*, November, 1979.

<sup>617</sup> Kostov, Vladimir. *The Bulgarian Umbrella: The Soviet Direction and Operations*. p. 7

<sup>618</sup> Kostov, Vladimir. *The Bulgarian Umbrella: The Soviet Direction and Operations of the Bulgarian Secret Service in Eastern Europe*. p. 8

<sup>619</sup> “Georgi Markov and Vladimir Kostov”, September 17, 1978. Box 46.

Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

ensorship and centralization of party power in Zhivkov's hands and the Soviet dominance over Bulgaria, based on Zhivkov's initiatives for "an ever-closer integration with the Soviet Union."<sup>620</sup> Kostov as a high level state security agent and political propagandist in the media seemed to have justified his work as a Bulgarian nationalist but could not as a Soviet internationalist.<sup>621</sup> Thus, Kostov's Krastev assignment which was to pose as a fake defector, turned out to be his real opportunity to defect. Kostov's book written a decade after his move to the West, describes in detail how and why he defected but also the state security operations he was involved in.<sup>622</sup> Kostov admits that "he (was) not the first officer of the KDS to choose to return to choose to return to truly human and nationalist values" however, he was among the first to translate that dissident thinking into action when he sought asylum in France and then broadcasted for an American radio station.<sup>623</sup>

In open letter broadcast by RFE, VOA, DW and the BBC, although not Radio France International which had dropped its Bulgarian service in 1974, Kostov and his wife, share their main personal and political problems:

Our homeland – socialist Bulgaria, is dear to us. Nevertheless, there comes a moment when each of us has to assume his share of responsibility in the destiny of the homeland, whatever the price to be paid. For us, that moment has arrived. Let us put it bluntly; the issue is the relationship between our country and the Soviet Union. The leaders of the Bulgarian Communist Party, without informing the people of it, are moving towards the elimination of our national independence and our national sovereignty, towards the incorporation of Bulgaria into the USSR.<sup>624</sup>

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<sup>620</sup> Kostov, Vladimir. *The Bulgarian Umbrella: The Soviet Direction and Operations*. p. 1-15.

<sup>621</sup> Kostov, Vladimir. *The Bulgarian Umbrella: The Soviet Direction and Operations*. p. 1-15.

<sup>622</sup> Kostov, Vladimir. *The Bulgarian Umbrella: The Soviet Direction and Operations*. p. 1-15.

<sup>623</sup> Kostov, Vladimir. *The Bulgarian Umbrella: The Soviet Direction and Operations*. p. 4-5

<sup>624</sup> Kostov, Vladimir. *The Bulgarian Umbrella: The Soviet Direction and Operations*. p. 7

This international and ideological process of Bulgarian integration into the Soviet Union, the seeds of which were sown as early as the mid-1940s had by the early 1970s been revived, when in August 1978, Zhivkov and Brezhnev apparently had agreed to start implementing an official request made in July 1973 by Bulgaria to voluntarily without annexation, join the USSR, as the 16<sup>th</sup> republic.<sup>625</sup> Zhivkov had been awarded the titled “hero of the Soviet Union” in May 1977 after advocating publicly for the “Russification and Sovietization of Bulgaria”, as if it had not been enforced enough.<sup>626</sup>

Kostov confirms in protest this reality based on his own professional experience in Bulgarian broadcast news media, when he writes that by 1976:

As a Communist of 20 years, head of the news service of Bulgarian radio for 3 years, I was still not allowed to inform the public of a decision taken at the Congress of the French Communist Party (which was to decide to drop the term, ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ from their manifesto) because Radio Moscow had not yet announced it. And all I was told in explanation was: ‘You know very well that Soviet radio and Bulgarian radio are integrated!’<sup>627</sup>

Kostov says that even party authorities were not to be informed about certain top secret missions involving the KGB, and cites a training manual which stated that KDS agents were “encouraged to make themselves useful to our Soviet comrades who are given ‘carte blanche’ to decide the methods of collaboration to be employed.”<sup>628</sup> In a sense, the other Eastern bloc security services, most infamously the Stasi in relation to the GDR and FRG, were focused primarily on gathering intelligence locally and keeping control over their own dissident movements and serving their respective regimes, all while being

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<sup>625</sup> Panoff, Kyrill. “Murder on Waterloo Bridge: The Case of Georgi Markov.” *Encounter*, November, 1979.

<sup>626</sup> Panoff, Kyrill. “Murder on Waterloo Bridge: The Case of Georgi Markov.” *Encounter*, November, 1979.

<sup>627</sup> Kostov, Vladimir. *The Bulgarian Umbrella: The Soviet Direction and Operations*. p. 144.

<sup>628</sup> Kostov, Vladimir. *The Bulgarian Umbrella: The Soviet Direction and Operations*. p. 148.

monitored by the Soviet KGB. The Bulgarian partners being deemed as the most reliable and most trusted were to be used beyond domestic purposes, and rather as a the Soviet Union's main choice for front organization-type of work in various regional and international operations. Kostov writes about this based on his foreign experience as a state security officer, stationed in Syria during the early 1970s.<sup>629</sup> Basically, the point being, that while Bulgaria had interests to focus on the 1974 Greco-Turkish conflict on Cyprus, in Syria, he had to prioritize gathering intelligence for the Soviets in the aftermath of the 1973 Arab-Israeli War. Later, he was commissioned to infiltrate Western counterintelligence in 1974, a plan that he began but turned against by 1977 while in Paris.

The inspiration for his defection is self-admittingly his own interest in tuning into Western broadcasting and his own correspondence with Markov, which strengthened his own ideological convictions about the choices he had to make. Kostov openly admits that he had a personal connection with Markov, whom he was acquainted with 10 years earlier in Bulgaria. Thus, the connection between the two was considered a threat to the regime, and that is why both were targeted in the summer of 1978. Since Kostov's assassination attempt was unsuccessful and would not be seriously attempted again, he would in effect replace Markov's position within RFE going into the 1980s. According to RFE's Research Institute, similar to Markov, Kostov became a main reason for Bulgarians continued interest in listening, especially for those considered to be "irregular listeners."<sup>630</sup>

Kostov unlike Markov was a media personality and trained secret service agent with limited knowledge of the ruling party officials, but rather a much deeper insider

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<sup>629</sup> Kostov, Vladimir. *The Bulgarian Umbrella: The Soviet Direction and Operations of the Bulgarian Secret Service in Eastern Europe*. p. 147

<sup>630</sup> "September 1971 to December 1980." Box 4, Media and Opinion Research Department. OSA 300-6-2, p. 5

knowledge into the mechanisms of the state security apparatus which he was part of. On the other hand, Markov while participating in the propaganda machine through the Bulgarian Writers Union, was not a trained secret service agent, although he was granted permission to access the state archives of the secret services, for the purpose of inspiration in writing the script for the most popular and progandized television series *Every Kilometer* in the late 1960s. Georgi Markov's personal connection to Todor Zhivkov, the rumored romantic relationship that he shared with his daughter Lyudmila, is something to be considered when examining Zhivkova's role in the Bulgarian cultural diplomacy.

### **Bulgaria's 1300-year anniversary National Jubilee Celebrations and the role of Lyudmila Zhivkova in the Global Cultural Diplomacy, 1980-1981**

The year 1981 marked the 1,300 year anniversary since the foundation of the first Bulgarian nation-state in the year 681 AD, sometimes referred to as the First Bulgarian Empire given that it dominated most of the Balkans and was even privileged to an equal status military alliance with the Byzantine Empire before being absorbed by it for 200 years, and then reemerging as the Second Bulgarian Empire during the high Middle Ages. Thus, Bulgaria is one of the oldest countries in Europe and by some accounts, the only one to have continually used the same exact name for its nation-state or regional empire, without ever changing it, while existing within the relatively fixed territorial area.

Since 1978 marked the 100 year anniversary since the establishment of the modern Bulgarian nation-state, after nearly half a millennium of being part of the Ottoman Empire, that anniversary of 1878 was observed but not nearly on the scale of the 1981 national jubilee celebrations, which were more than a historical observation of the ancient ethnically mixed origins of the Bulgarian people, but rather an ideal opportunity to further build up

to a crescendo, the successful cultural diplomacy that Communist Bulgaria had already been hard at work, engaging with the various forces in the Non-Aligned movement and throughout the Third World, as part its independent course in foreign policy from the Soviet Union, since the early 1970s. As introduced in the first chapter, the conduct of this cultural diplomacy was primarily driven by Lyudmila Zhivkova, the “red dynasty’s princess.”<sup>631</sup>

The Bulgarian Prime Minister and General Secretary of the Bulgarian Communist Party, Todor Zhivkov was the longest reigning (35 years from 1954 to 1989) and second most travelled Communist leader in Eastern Europe, after the Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito (1953 to 1980). Zhivkov was a clever and skillful politician, perhaps the most powerful in the Eastern bloc, due to his able to handle multiple internal and external challenges (as Markov points out in his broadcasts), and consistently manipulate the Soviet party leadership from Khrushchev to Brezhnev for his own interests. Zhivkov also had requested to join the USSR, three times between 1964 and 1978 and brought the Soviet-Bulgarian relationship to new heights, while simultaneously engaging the Non-Aligned world based on a cultural diplomacy distinct from the ideological playbook of the USSR.

Todor had appointed Lyudmila in 1975 to manage radio, television and the press, at home.<sup>632</sup> By 1980, she basically ran all science, culture and art initiatives at home and abroad although the public was fascinated with her own esoteric Eastern mysticism and philosophy, something characteristically un-Marxist.<sup>633</sup> Even more so, she was single-handedly the driving force behind the organized cultural exhibitions between the Non-Aligned Nations of India and Mexico and others of the Third World. Lyudmila also hosted

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<sup>631</sup> Dragostinova, Theodora. *The Cold War from the Margins: A Small Socialist State on the Global Cultural Scene*. 177-78

<sup>632</sup> Dragostinova, Theodora. *The Cold War from the Margins*. 36-27

<sup>633</sup> Dragostinova, Theodora *The Cold War from the Margins*. 36-27

various Americans and others to discuss controversial topics, and she became quite popular among the new generation of Bulgarian Communists, especially at a time when the new generation of public intellectual dissident defectors embodied by Georgi Markov were effectively attacking the Zhivkov regime by means of Western radio broadcasting.

Zhivkova had personally known Markov as part of her father's "inner circle" during the 1960s, and was herself trained as a historian, having studied Bulgarian History (BA) at Sofia University, Art History (MA) at Moscow State University and Diplomatic History (PhD) at Oxford University.<sup>634</sup> She initially joined in 1972 and then transformed after 1975, the Bulgarian Committee for Art and Culture (CAC) as the most dynamic hub for cross-cultural relations within the party, organizing cultural exhibitions for the "Thracian Treasures" and "Varna Necropolis" (carbon dated as the oldest gold in the world) starting in 1972 and throughout the following decade.<sup>635</sup> (This is explained in the first chapter.)

However, as young public intellectuals of their times, Zhivkova just like Markov were leaders in their own right but they were certainly not on their own. Lyudmila was surrounded by a cluster of public intellectuals obviously loyal to the regime, but less rigidly ideological and much more open to free thinking in their personal approach to culture.<sup>636</sup> This "Zhivkova Circle" within the party included: Bogomil Rainov, a writer and academic who advanced Socialist Realism through the Writers Union, Svetlin Rusev, an artist and world art collector, Alexandar Fol, an archeologist and historian who focused on Classical Greek and Thracian studies: Thracology. Also, Alexandar Lilov who was a philosopher

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<sup>634</sup> "Lyudmila Zhivkova, Bulgarian Cultural Aide." July 22, 1981.

<https://www.nytimes.com/1981/07/22/obituaries/lyudmila-zhivkova-bulgaria-culture-aide.html>

<sup>635</sup> Gigova, Irina. "The Feeble Charm of National(ist) Communism: Intellectuals and Cultural Politics in Zhivkov's Bulgaria."

<sup>636</sup> Gigova, Irina. "The Feeble Charm of National(ist) Communism."



and politician, perhaps the most powerful person in Bulgaria after Zhivkov until 1983, when he fell out of power, and later reemerged as a political force in the 1990s, transforming “the party” into a newly renamed Bulgarian Socialist Party.<sup>637</sup> This group resembled the more liberal and progressive faction of the party, and the people within were a diverse mix, but all had in common the idea of advancing a “new golden age” for Bulgarian culture alongside reforming the traditional thinking of the hardliners.

The UNESCO-supported International “Banner of Peace” Children’s Assembly which opened in Sofia on August 16, 1979, in honor of the UN “Year of the Child”, was also among Zhivkova’s proudest accomplishments, as Minister of Culture. Under the banner motto of “Unity, Creativity, Beauty”, she gathered 2,500 children from 77 countries as a cross-cultural exchange, to show case their talents and make connections from different parts of the world, based on the values of peace and friendship.<sup>638</sup>

The 1,300 year anniversary national jubilee celebration was a series of events planned throughout the year. The archival documents show that planning began as early as 1978, and the designs for these celebration including a series of studies on similar events, such as the extravagant 2,500 year anniversary of Persian civilization marked by Iran in 1971, which they did not intend to match but rather incorporated some aspects of the reenactment ceremonies. Also, cited are the Polish Catholic Millennium marked in 1966, as well as the American bicentennial in 1976 and the 1977 Soviet revolutionary 60<sup>th</sup> year anniversary. However, Bulgaria, a nation with a population of only 8.7 million, according to the official record, between 1977 and 1981, “organized 38,854 cultural events across the

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<sup>637</sup> Markov, Vasil. “Bulgarian Intellectuals Remember Communist Culture.”

<sup>638</sup> Bogdanova, Zlatina. “The ‘Banner of Peace’ Assembly as a National Brand of Bulgaria during Socialism.”

world, highlighting the far-reaching global aspirations of the communist elites in charge of the country.”<sup>639</sup> The state was engaged in sponsoring interdisciplinary initiatives; archeological excavations and historical studies, as well, new monuments and museums were built; film productions, television series, and radio programs were made; in addition to organized concerts, conferences, and mass celebrations.<sup>640</sup>

At home, this extensive state-sponsored extravaganza re-energized society with new public works building projects, such as an grandiose National Palace of Culture (NDK) in Sofia, a hub of the modern city to this day, but it also bolstered the authority and public support for the party domestically. Also in the center city of Sofia, the Monument to the Unknown Soldier between the ancient Saint Sofia basilica and the national cathedral Saint Alexander Nevsky was completed, in addition to the massive futurist and brutalist architectural Buzludzha monument built in the Balkan mountains near the Shipka monument, but at the site of the foundation of the Bulgarian Communist Party in 1891. The Monument to the Founders of Bulgaria was also opened in Shumen, a mid-sized city located closest to the old historic cities of Pliska and Preslav, the capitals of the First Bulgarian Empire and approximate site of the foundation of the nation in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century.

The Bulgarians who adopted a Slavic (related to Eastern European) culture, were historically a genetic mixture between ancient Thracians (related to the Greeks) as well as a small group of Bulgars (related to the Mongols) who according to history and legend, conquered most of the present-day Balkans and unified the Slavic and Thracian tribes into one nation-state in 681 AD, able to withstand the might of the Eastern Roman or Byzantine

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<sup>639</sup> Dragostinova, Theodora. *The Cold War from the Margins*. 2

<sup>640</sup> “Bulgaria is zealously markings its 1,300 birthday.” November 8, 1981.

<https://www.nytimes.com/1981/11/08/world/bulgaria-is-zealously-marking-its-1300-birthday.html>

Empire. Bulgarians as an independent kingdom allied with the Byzantines and eventually adopted Orthodox Christianity in 864-65 AD and created the Cyrillic alphabet around that time, as written by the Byzantine-Bulgarian brothers Cyril and Methodius from the present-day city of Thessaloniki (or Salonica) located in Aegean Macedonia in northern Greece.

A peripheral development that occurred in the aftermath of the planning for this anniversary, was that the Bulgarian state security successfully stole a historical artifact from the location of most sacred place in Eastern Orthodoxy - Mount Athos in Greece. This was called Operation Marathon which was launched in 1982 but was not executed until December 1985 when agents from the Cultural-Historical Espionage or 14<sup>th</sup> section of the KDS, disguised as pilgrims to the Zograf monastery of Saint George, were able to replace the book with a fake, and take back to Bulgaria the original manuscript of the oldest book ever written in the Bulgarian historiography titled *Slavic-Bulgarian History*.<sup>641</sup> This text was written in 1762 by Saint Paisius of Hilendar (Paisii Hilendarski) who completed the work at the Mount Athos monastery and this contributed to the Bulgarian National Revival movement. The reason for this action was the increased emphasis on the role of historical artifacts in cultural diplomacy ever since 1972, and the notion that because the book was written by a Bulgarian about Bulgaria, it did not belong in Greece but in Bulgaria. The problem was that, because the book was illegally obtained, it could not be displayed for the public and was kept a tight state secret defeating the whole point, so in 1997 it was returned with President Petar Stoyanov apologizing for the actions of Todor Zhivkov.<sup>642</sup>

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<sup>641</sup> Hristov, Hristo. "Sensation: Father Paisii's history stolen from Zograf monastery by the State Security Service." October 12, 2012. <https://desebg.com/razsledvanee/914-sensation-father-paisiis-history-stolen-from-zograf-monastery-by-the-state-security-service>.

<sup>642</sup> Hristov, Hristo. "Sensation: Father Paisii's history stolen from Zograf monastery by the State Security Service." October 12, 2012. <https://desebg.com/razsledvanee/914-sensation-father-paisiis-history-stolen-from-zograf-monastery-by-the-state-security-service>.

Zhivkov by 1981 had reached a peak of promoting nationalist and socialist ideals, reminding all Bulgarians around the world: “Bulgaria, one of the oldest states of Europe, which emerged on the ground of the ancient civilizations in our lands, covered a long distance in its development, and has now reached the highest peak in contemporary progress – the triumph of the Socialist social order...the victory of the Socialist revolution marked the greatest ever radical breakthrough in our 13-century-long history.”<sup>643</sup>

The rhetoric of the narrative emphasized the idea that according to human evolution, the highest stage of development is Socialism evolving into Communism. So as the propaganda often proclaimed that Communism would be reached by 1980, conveniently it was also in 1981 that the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the formation of the Bulgarian Communist Party was also marked.<sup>644</sup> The 1981 extravaganza even included the launching of a space satellite (built with Soviet technology) and officially known as “Interkosmos 22-Bulgaria 1300”<sup>645</sup> itself symbolizing the climax reached in a generally successful propaganda effort at branding its national identity during the “global decade” of the 1970s.

By the middle of 1981, overwhelmed and overworked, Zhivkova died due to brain cancer at the age of 38<sup>646</sup>, causing a sudden reversal of the national high into a deep sense of national mourning, which naturally provoked rumors of KGB involvement.<sup>647</sup> Although there is no evidence that she was murdered, there is much speculation about KGB director and incoming Soviet leader Andropov’s private disapproval of how Brezhnev had

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<sup>643</sup> Dragostinova, Theodora. *The Cold War from the Margins*. 22

<sup>644</sup> Dragostinova, Theodora. *The Cold War from the Margins*. 230

<sup>645</sup> Alexandrov, Svetoslav. “Bulgarians still dream about space four decades after their first crewed mission.” January 13, 2019. <https://www.thespacereview.com/article/3638/1>

<sup>646</sup> “Lyudmila Zhivkova, Bulgarian Cultural Aide.” July 22, 1981.

<sup>647</sup> Dragostinova, Theodora. *The Cold War from the Margins*. 192-93

sanctioned for and even supported this successful and ambitious Bulgarian cultural branding as being the oldest civilizational root of Slavic culture and of Russia itself.<sup>648</sup>

### **Radio Free Europe's Bulgarian Broadcasting Department throughout the Bulgarian National Jubilee Celebrations, 1981**

American public diplomacy and propaganda efforts by means of Radio Free Europe and its Bulgarian émigré broadcasters which primarily targeted the Bulgarian Communist Party's corruption and the Soviet-Bulgarian special relationship intersect in an interesting way with the People's Republic of Bulgaria's own public diplomacy and propaganda efforts by means of the cultural exchanges and exhibitions around those significant ties with some of the Non-Aligned nations during Cold War.

In fact, the conduct of the cultural diplomacy itself throughout 1981, as the pinnacle point of Bulgaria's independent course in foreign policy from Moscow, would have in some ways threatened the Soviet Union's public diplomacy and propaganda efforts that supported that "special relationship." The archives will show the scheduled programming and its thematic content throughout the calendar year of 1981 based on selected excerpts around seven main holidays in Bulgaria (at the time): New Year's Day (1/1), Liberation Day (3/3), International Women's Day (3/8), National Culture Day (5/24), Freedom Fighter's Day (6/2), Bulgarian Unification Day (9/6) and Socialist Revolution Day (9/9).

From the very start of 1981, the New Year's Eve (1) broadcast for December 31 1980, delivered a review of 1980, discussing the devastating effects of the first year of the Soviet-Afghan War, but also the more encouraging effects of some protest movements building up across the Eastern bloc, particularly in Poland. As well, a reminder of the

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<sup>648</sup> Tchakarov, Najden. "Education for Peace and International Understanding in the People's Republic of Bulgaria." 166

regime's failure to fulfill its international agreements concerning human rights, five years after the signing of the Helsinki Accords, is something that was particularly emphasized.<sup>649</sup> The failure to reach the full expression of Communism by the year 1980 according to Soviet propaganda, is a topic played around with through satire such as on Inkiow's commentary titled *The Twilight of Communism* where with another reporter, Petrov they both joke about the inability of the Communists to engineer their long-hoped for since the 1960s, "catching-up" and "surpassing" of the Western world.<sup>650</sup>

The following day, on January 2, 1980, Inkiow continues on the same theme but in regards to censorship in his *Socialist Reality: a simple protest can bring big trouble* while Kostov first touches upon the topic of Bulgarian historical identity in his *Kirill and Metodii: Patrons of Europe* which discusses the cultural and religious contributions of Bulgaria to Eastern Orthodoxy and Eastern European history, telling the story of the Byzantine-Bulgarian brother monks who modified the original Greek and created the Cyrillic alphabet in order to translate the Biblical texts to the vernacular Slavic languages. The commentary does not contradict how Bulgarian history was taught on this topic during that time, but instead emphasizes the religious dimension of that history that was often omitted.<sup>651</sup> Later that week, on January 6, Kostov addresses more political themes in *The Domestic Scene: The information of the activities of state and government organs* where he writes that the Communist Party's development of "socialist democratism" requires it to allow for changes in institutions and mechanisms to be developed for more "*glasnost*"

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<sup>649</sup> RFE Program: January 1981. Box 479.

Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

<sup>650</sup> RFE Program: January 1981. Box 479.

Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

<sup>651</sup> RFE Program: January 1981. Box 479.

Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

or “openness” in the state decision-making process. As someone who was a true believer, Kostov engages his audience with the hopeful argument that Communism does have the capacity for self-correction.<sup>652</sup> Bochev as a trained journalist delivers his commentary for the day, titled *TV publicist* and offering a sharp critique of the domestic television network, explaining how it is possible to have news reporting via radio and television without practicing any sort of journalistic critical thinking, but proudly participating in propagandistic support for the regime, asking why television news never addresses any big questions that its viewers might have.<sup>653</sup> On January 9, Kostov’s commentary on the *Bulgarians and their ‘internationalism’* is the first of that year to concretely address the planned cultural diplomacy for that year. Kostov’s argument is that the heritage of Bulgaria’s history is misappropriated, that it has contributed so much to being part of the world around it, that it is not necessary to impose the Soviet narrative of internationalism.

In this overview of Bulgarian history, Kostov maintains that “part of the party propaganda on the jubilee of the Bulgarian nation is the imposition of the party’s vision of the internationalism of the Bulgarians. However, the party bureaucracy at every level has ensured that this narrative in organizing these celebrations does not take an overtly nationalist undertone.”<sup>654</sup> Therefore, he believes that the celebration would be sufficient solely to be presented from the Bulgarian nationalist perspective, and not attempted to artificially incorporate some aspects of Bulgaria’s national heritage into the dominant Soviet narrative of internationalism: what it is, what it stands for and what it advances:

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<sup>652</sup> RFE Program: January 1981. Box 479.

Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

<sup>653</sup> RFE Program: January 1981. Box 479.

Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

<sup>654</sup> RFE Program: January 1981. Box 479.

Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

The issue at hand is that, in doing so, the party bureaucracy attacks and attempts to undermine valuable things that are part of the Bulgarian heritage. Even at the start of these thirteen centuries, the jubilee of which will be celebrated this year, Khan Asparukh and his old Bulgarian tribe established an age-old standard that even today has to be at the bedrock of any sort of correctly practiced, internationalism. That has to do with the respect of a person's individuality, the protection of one's own dignity through the recognition of the dignity of another person's individuality, as opposed to collectivism. Thanks to this, the relations between the Old Bulgarians and the Slavic tribes already inhabiting the land, were based on such principles of respect, and such Bulgaria became a diverse but strong cradle of Slavonic culture.

The greatest personalities of Bulgaria's national revival leading up to the revolutionary movements for independence, also created high standards for national dignity for dealing with other people... the great revolutionary heroes Georgi Rakovski, Vasil Levski and Hristo Botev who encouraged individuals to rise up and organize for freedom, who worked with other neighboring nations to do so, and then selfless gave up their lives, trying to liberate Bulgaria during the 1860s and 1870s. These were the values, of dignity for one self and based on that, relating to others.

However, the current party propaganda wants to impose different values and different standards on us. Its internationalism is based on that of Georgi Dimitrov, who entirely dedicated his life for advancing the cause of Soviet-centered internationalism. Why did he give up control of Bulgaria through the party to the Soviet secret services? This party propaganda proclaims its internationalism based on the example of the "great Soviet people" which is really a surrender of Bulgarian interests to that of the Soviets. What is so great about the Soviet example? Is it because of the massive casualties that its own bureaucracy inflicted on its own people? Or is it because of the supremacy that its bureaucracy continues to impose on so many other peoples? But what can all of this have to do with true internationalism?<sup>655</sup>

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<sup>655</sup> RFE Program: January 1981. Box 479.  
Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.



On January 11, Kostov continues in a new commentary on this same topic and theme, writing in *critical notes on Bulgarian press articles* that the party continuously misappropriates the real history of Bulgaria for its own propaganda purposes and he attempts to alert his audience to be aware of how that has happened and is happening:

A strange whim of history is today, the party leadership led by Todor Zhivkov has the time to organize the celebration of the 1300 years since the foundation of the Bulgarian state on the Balkans. It is understandable that the party leadership is using and will use the jubilee for the purposes of its own narrow party politics and propaganda. It is also understandable, that the jubilee celebrations despite being organized for party politics, also deeply excite the entire nation. For exactly that reason, the society is interested to carefully see how the party leadership will manage in portraying itself in these events. The agenda adopted by the congress of senior party functionaries already can show us the general direction of this year's campaign. From its text, as we have already been able to view, it can be seen in what concrete interests the party bureaucracy desires to steer the purpose of these celebrations.<sup>656</sup>

On New Year's Eve 1980, the Communist party mouthpiece *Rabotnicesko Delo*, began publishing a new special column *1300 Years Bulgaria* dedicated to guiding the public on the national jubilee celebration.<sup>657</sup> Kostov as a former media personality and state security agent admits his own complicity in promoting the role of the press in its only added value of effectively advancing a propaganda viewpoint. Kostov notes that a prominent newspaper platform like that cannot be ignored if Bulgarians are to be informed about the official schedule and news stories about the cultural celebrations during the year, but he is concerned that the party will take advantage of these organized events that year, to embark on a campaign to again rewrite Bulgarian history for its own purposes, but this

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<sup>656</sup> RFE Program: January 1981. Box 479.  
Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

<sup>657</sup> RFE Program: January 1981. Box 479.  
Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

time seizing an ideal opportunity to promote that rewritten history through cultural celebrations. Kostov warns his audience about the newspaper publications, to “please read through all of them, and whenever you see changes in the historical facts... ask yourself on the basis of what, and in the name of what, are these changes made!”<sup>658</sup> Later Kostov cites a published article titled *the great beginning – the creation of the Bulgarian state* by a Bulgarian historian, who he refers to as “the academician Angelov.” Kostov engages in an argument with Angelov for emphasizing only Bulgaria’s Slavic heritage as well as that of the Mongol khans (both being related to Russian history) at the expense of the Greco-Thracian peoples which were significant as an ethnic makeup during the 7<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>659</sup>

The remaining routine programming does not allude too much to history except for Semerdzhiev’s commentary on *relations between Bulgaria and the USSR* which he addresses in light of the terms “eternal friendship” and the “ever closer integration” and how they have played out historically and might change into the 1980s.<sup>660</sup> Bochev’s commentary on *the role of the mass media in the Party Congress campaign and the campaign around Zhivkov’s pre-congress report* by Kostov, both present their political analysis on the trajectory that they consider to be pursued and also address *the Countdown to launching the Columbia Space Shuttle* which was scheduled for the spring of 1981.

In a separate type of broadcast transcript written in Bulgarian, along with some additional documents including letters of correspondence dated from December 1980 to January 1981, the Bulgarian historian Boyan Choukanoff is mentioned in relation to a

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<sup>658</sup> RFE Program: January 1981. Box 479.

Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

<sup>659</sup> RFE Program: January 1981. Box 479.

Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

<sup>660</sup> RFE Program: January 1981. Box 479.

Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

conference symposium on the 1300 year anniversary of Bulgaria, organized between the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and Columbia University in the City of New York.<sup>661</sup> The title of the conference being “Bulgarian contributions to the Slavic Culture”<sup>662</sup> which was hosted by Columbia University’s Department of Slavic Languages, Literature and its chairman, professor Robert McGuire who also worked at the Harriman Institute for Russian, Eurasian, and East European Studies (as Boris Bakhmeteff Professor Emeritus of Russian and East European Studies).<sup>663</sup> In fact, the professor’s introductory remarks at the conference, are recorded in English with him commenting that:

(The professor) believe(s) that this conference is a first for Columbia University; not a first as far as conferences go, of course... but a first when it comes to an acknowledgement, discussion, and exploration of the place of Bulgaria in the development of shaping culture in the Slavic land.<sup>664</sup>

The theme of cultural diplomacy is raised again for criticism in the context of domestic publications in the *Nardodna Kultura* magazine. Among these were issues with how ideological arguments were structured in those articles, which presented collectivization as a significant theme, suggesting somehow that these tribes practiced a primitive form of Socialism. The Bulgarian academic Topencharov is critiqued for his use of the term “the masses of peoples” which he argues was the only guiding force behind the Bulgarian tsars’ victorious military triumphs against their enemies.<sup>665</sup>

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<sup>661</sup> Columbia University and the 1300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Bulgaria. Box 479. Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. Hoover Library and Archives.

<sup>662</sup> Additional details of this conference has been searched for but nothing substantial has been found through any online Columbia University archives or in any other set of similar sources from RFE/RL broadcasting records examined at the Hoover Library and Archives.

<sup>663</sup> Harriman Institute, Columbia University. <https://harriman.columbia.edu/person/robert-a-maguire/>

<sup>664</sup> Columbia University and the 1300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Bulgaria. Box 479. Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. Hoover Library and Archives.

<sup>665</sup> RFE Program: March 1981. Box 483.

Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

On March 1, the commentary *critical notes on Bulgarian Press' Articles* delivered by Kostov, examines articles published the previous month, in which he points out articles written by various authors on various subjects and points out criticisms, on all sorts of topics, mostly focused on the *corruption of the state bureaucracy* and the *failure of the Soviet model in Bulgaria*.<sup>666</sup> Semerdzhiev likewise that day, on a continuation of his program on *relations between Bulgaria and the USSR*, analyzes the relationship between Moscow and Sofia especially since the 1956 de-Stalinization led by Khrushchev, implying that after over two decades under Brezhnev, a hardline approach has triumphed.

On March 2, on *the young and creative intelligentsia*, Bochev follows up on the subject of domestic politics, by reporting about a conference organized that year, and hints at Zhivkov's continued skillful ability to organize and mobilize the new generation of public intellectuals (after that of himself and Markov) to support the party's platform.

On March 3, the Bulgarian Liberation Day (2) celebrating the end of the Russo-Turkish War, which was not massively observed at that time, not much is mentioned about that on the broadcast schedule, though Kostov does have a commentary on *the Bulgarian appraisal of the Soviet Congress* in which he points out that "under the power of the Communist party, Bulgaria for nearly four decades has followed the Soviet socialist model, implementing the experience of a foreign nation...and certain things that well accommodate the Soviets, done in Bulgaria, remain unknown for the Bulgarians."<sup>667</sup> Kostov also suggests that Bulgaria despite not ever part of the Russian Empire nor the Soviet Union, has experienced the same level of "Russification" on par with the Ukraine.

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<sup>666</sup> RFE Program: March 1981. Box 483.  
Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

<sup>667</sup> RFE Program: March 1981. Box 483.  
Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

<sup>668</sup> On March 4, Inkiow raises the question in his *Where did the promise of Communist paradise disappear?*, again satirizing the idea once held that by 1981, Communism would be achieved in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union would overtake the United States in the contest of the Cold War, and he does so by critiquing the predictions made as far back as 1961 by a fictional satirical professor named “Liapkin-Tiapkin.” <sup>669</sup>

Between March 6 and 10, in honor of International Women’s Day (3), Kostov and his wife broadcasted a series of commentaries on *Women’s Day in Bulgaria*, the *Necessary changes in the life of Bulgarian Women* and *Why Women are more liberal than the Men?* The questions addressed had to do with a recent French *Le Monde* study about why Western women were more liberal than men, and why that is, but Kostova suggests that the Western socio-economic structures are not the same in the Communist world, where women’s worker emancipation had taken place much earlier. <sup>670</sup> Also, a recent party directive is discussed, which has called for women to give more birth, while at the same time enjoying gender equality in the labor force, to which it is remarked, that before the party was in charge, average women were able to make choices with the traditional guidance of their family and now they are subjected to the party’s political directives. <sup>671</sup> However, what is not discussed is that the charismatic female personality of Lyudmila Zhivkova, albeit the daughter of the dictator, who was female leading force of the country’s cultural diplomacy.

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<sup>668</sup> RFE Program: March 1981. Box 483.

Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

<sup>669</sup> RFE Program: March 1981. Box 483.

Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

<sup>670</sup> RFE Program: March 1981. Box 483.

Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

<sup>671</sup> RFE Program: March 1981. Box 483.

Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

At RFE, Romyana Ouzounova, was among the only broadcasters who they tried initially to promote on par with Kostov, Bochev, Semerdzhiev and Inkiow in terms of substituting Markov, supposedly failed to happen.<sup>672</sup> Her commentary on *the atmosphere under which the contemporary Bulgarian writers have to work* brings to light various experiences by writers in Bulgaria, while not mentioning Markov, she does discuss the influence of the Writers Union in terms of self-censorship and party propaganda.<sup>673</sup>

RFE's Bulgarian editor Panoff on *The Russian Literature: Boris Pasternak and Doctor Zhivago* talks about the state of Soviet censorship of revolutionary literature. On March 11, Kostov's *The dull pre-congress of 'discussions' sign of a dull Congress?* and Inkiow's *Why the new man can become fearless* continue their commentary through news reporting and through creative storytelling focusing on domestic Bulgarian socio-cultural topics considered to be of special interest to the audience.<sup>674</sup>

Then the commentaries in mid-March titled *13 Centuries of Bulgarian State* and *13 Centuries of Bulgarian State* respectively written by two other RFE contributors, Ognianoff and Zaharieff, continue on the main topic of the 1981 national jubilee. The issues discussed are about the types of monuments and structures being constructed in honor of the celebrations, while they do not take issue with that, what is questioned is the Communist symbolism as an agenda being imposed on monuments that should be purely commemorative of the old Bulgarian history, based solely on archeology and anthropology.

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<sup>672</sup> RFE Program: March 1981. Box 483.

Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

<sup>673</sup> RFE Program: March 1981. Box 483.

Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

<sup>674</sup> RFE Program: March 1981. Box 483.

Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

On May 22, Kostov's commentary on *Zhivkov on the international situation* is broken down based on Bulgaria's relation with three types of nations; those of the West which largely ignored Bulgaria's cultural diplomacy with the exception to a degree in France, Austria and Japan, those who are Non-Aligned which fully embraced it from India to Mexico, and those of the Soviet sphere, which by and large saw it as a form of geopolitical competition and were not suited to either embrace or reject it. While he does not go into details about this, he does manage to break down the speech for his audience.

On May 24, Bulgaria's National Culture Day (4) celebrating the Saints Cyril and Methodius, Kostov's commentary suggests that they be addressed as "the holy brothers" rather than just by their names.<sup>675</sup> Kostov interviews an academic Likhachov on the Bulgarian old Church Slavonic literature which was open and accessible to all other Slavic nations, but that people should not forget that they were also influenced by the Byzantines, through whom Bulgaria received Eastern Orthodox Christianity. However, what is pointed out is that there is an adoption of the Russian historical perspective on Bulgaria as well as a Marxist-Leninist interpretation that distorts the true history of the Bulgarians.<sup>676</sup>

Bochev's commentary the next day on *The Day of Bulgarian Culture* begins by criticizing how the celebration of the "holy saint brothers" and their spiritual contribution to humanity is reduced to just an commemoration of the Bulgarian alphabet and celebrated largely for student youth activism.<sup>677</sup> Bochev writes that it is the spirit of Cyril and Methodius not that of Marx and Engels that should animate every aspect of our culture,

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<sup>675</sup> RFE Program: May to June 1981. Box 489.

Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

<sup>676</sup> RFE Program: May to June 1981. Box 489.

Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

<sup>677</sup> RFE Program: May to June 1981. Box 489.

Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

and it is the two brother saints that have made Bulgaria a part of European civilization, being one of the first nations to create its own alphabet for its own people. <sup>678</sup>

On May 24, on the *13 Centuries of the Bulgarian State* program, Ognianoff details the history of old Bulgaria from its founding khans to its later tsars, and he makes mention of how Bulgarians were settled even back then in what is modern Thrace and Macedonia and that was always part of the core of the Bulgarian lands. <sup>679</sup> The 1961 Bulgarian History textbook is pointed out for criticism concerning how certain historiography of the old khaganate time period was portrayed falsely and how it should be portrayed. <sup>680</sup>

*Bulgaria's 1300<sup>th</sup> anniversary observance in Pittsburgh, PA* was broadcast by Choukanoff on May 23, as a news report concerning a symposium held that month, and it concluded on the supposed willingness for Bulgaria and the US to engage in cooperation in the field of science and culture. <sup>681</sup> The Bulgarian ambassador to the US was present and so were some figures of the Bulgarian diaspora, in the opening of the symposium, the President of Duquesne University in Pittsburg, the Roman Catholic father Donald S. Nesti proclaimed in English, as written into the rest of the Bulgarian transcript, that: “there is (nothing) more important that to try to enter into another culture, and have one’s mind set to understanding the myths and stories, the music and dances, the way of life of a particular people” <sup>682</sup> Later, an interview by RFE’s Choukanoff with Walter Kolar, director of

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<sup>678</sup> RFE Program: May to June 1981. Box 489.

Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

<sup>679</sup> RFE Program: May to June 1981. Box 489.

Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

<sup>680</sup> RFE Program: May to June 1981. Box 489.

Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

<sup>681</sup> RFE Program: May to June 1981. Box 489.

Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

<sup>682</sup> RFE Program: May to June 1981. Box 489.

Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.



Duquesne University's Institute of Folk Arts director in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, which helped organize the symposium was held. Also, news of a Bulgarian theatrical play; Yordan Radichkov's "An attempt at Flying" being staged at Yale University's Theater in New Haven, Connecticut were all broadcast that during that month of May.

On June 2, the *Day of the Freedom Fighters* (5) of the Bulgarian National Revival, not much observed in Bulgaria even today, Kostov on that topic opens by saying: "people, the fight for freedom exists, since we people became people...with many conflicts, with many battles, with many casualties, people can change one social order for another."<sup>683</sup> While this day celebrates the freedom fighters; Hristo Botev who alongside Vassil Levski were murdered in the course of their tragically failed struggle for Bulgarian liberation, leading Bulgaria to depend on external forces such as Russia for its freedom; a definitive feature that has shaped modern Bulgarian history, this message nevertheless encourages its listeners to hold on to their hope, in their individual personal battles despite the cynicism. Kostov in *An Unfulfilled Promise* comments on his own memories after the Soviet Union crushed Czechoslovakia in its attempts to reform Communism, he writes that in Bulgaria then in 1970, there was some effort on behalf of the regime which he served, to convince the public that more "democratic" reforms will be implemented in line with the party's leadership.<sup>684</sup> Kostov notes that more than a decade later, these promises have been unfulfilled, contributing to the public's cynicism that they remain "enslaved."

Inkiow's *Story about the shortcomings of Communism* the next day echoes a similar sentiment saying "great are the accomplishments of building socialism, especially in

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<sup>683</sup> RFE Program: May to June 1981. Box 489.  
Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

<sup>684</sup> RFE Program: May to June 1981. Box 489.  
Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

accumulation of shortcomings.”<sup>685</sup> The story he tells is one of hope amidst shortcomings, for some that hope seemed to be about believing the utopian lies of socialism, for others it was the hope of just getting by.

Bochev’s commentary on Communist celebrations of the 1,300 anniversary of Bulgaria, are critiqued on the contradiction that the Marxist-Leninist viewpoint of history as a form of materialist “class struggle” does not value Bulgaria’s heritage, so then why does the party promote such nationalist celebrations?<sup>686</sup> Basically, Bochev then postulates that the party no longer believe their own ideology nor acts in accordance to doctrine, but rather utilizes ideology was a form of political warfare, while simultaneously acting pragmatically to legitimize their regime on the world’s stage. In a sense, the irony of RFE’s conservative commentators criticizing Zhivkov for not being nationalist enough, or acting in Bulgaria’s national interest, is something that the Bulgarian leadership seems to have not been ignoring or at least, acting upon in their own unique way. These 1981 national jubilee celebrations in particular, illustrate the successful and skillful way that Bulgaria promoted its national interests through cultural diplomacy, while also incorporating aspects of Communist ideology, something nevertheless achieved with a lot of pragmatism.

On September 6, the Bulgarian National Unification Day (6) which marked the 1885 unification between Ottoman Eastern Rumelia and the liberated Principality of Bulgaria, (a holiday observed widely today) but not at all during that time in Bulgaria, Kostov and Panoff comment on *The Domestic Scene: The ‘personality problems’ within the Communist System* by drawing attention to the tendency of Communist totalitarianism

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<sup>685</sup> RFE Program: May to June 1981. Box 489.  
Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

<sup>686</sup> RFE Program: May to June 1981. Box 489.  
Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

to create a cult of personality for the leadership, from Stalin to Brezhnev in Russia and in Bulgaria from Dimitrov to Zhivkov, the trend seems to be quite evident and unstoppable.

<sup>687</sup> While the commentators have plenty to offer in critiquing the Communist ideology in terms of its philosophy, their most effective arguments are the obvious ones, the fact that the Communist system while delivering on equality, results in everyone being essentially equally miserable, and while promising a utopian society, seems to in practice create nothing more than a personal dictatorship running controlled, totalitarian society.

Likewise, in their *Literary criticism and 'Patriotnost'*, Bochev and Panoff, discuss the past, and future fate of Bulgarian culture and literature in light of its difficult present situation, based on a "literary front" which preserves a sense of "*patriotnost*" or patriotic element to it. They write that: "it has been forgotten that authority is not only social, not only professional, but it is political... this is why rather than critique concrete names and titles of books, it is easier to sweepingly censor."<sup>688</sup>

The commentary on *The History and Character of the Red Army* made again by Bochev and Panoff, talks about Soviet militarism, arguing that the Soviet-styled military-industrial complex has naturally been imposed on Bulgaria though not on the same massive scale. They claim that the Soviet state has always prioritized its military industry at the expense of the economic wellbeing of its people on one hand, but on the other hand, having experienced a devastating cost for victory during the war, the Red Army's brutal but heroic

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<sup>687</sup> RFE Program: September to October 1981. Box 496.  
Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL. Hoover Library and Archives.

<sup>688</sup> RFE Program: September to October 1981. Box 496.  
Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL. Hoover Library and Archives.

character was forged. Also, they reference in a neutral manner, the controversial French far right historian, Dominique Venner and his critical study of the Soviet military.<sup>689</sup>

Of course, it was the Red Army which was the initial force that brought about the Soviet sphere of influence which solidified into the Eastern bloc in the years after the end of the war, and it was also the Red Army for whom a statue was erected in the entrance to Sofia (which stood from 1954 to 2023), that set the stage for the September Socialist Revolution, nearly 3 years before Georgi Dimitrov arrived and as the nation's first Communist leader began consolidating power domestically and forging the special relationship with the Soviet Union, through his political superior in Moscow, Jozef Stalin.

On September 9, the Revolution Day (7), Bochev's *On Bulgarian Communist Holiday* and Kostov's *The 9<sup>th</sup> of September in the light of the 13 Centuries of Bulgarian History* was broadcast on the 4 year anniversary of Markov's death on September 11.<sup>690</sup> Kostov brings up the 70<sup>th</sup> birthday of Todor Zhivkov and discusses how big of a deal this year's holiday must be to the party's image. The fact that those two years "681-1944" which have appeared on the national coat of arms alongside the Bulgarian lion and the red star of Communism since 1947, in a way portray the day; September 9<sup>th</sup> as the single highest peak of human development that Bulgaria has had in its 1,300 year history. Thus, if the fulfillment of that Communist promise failed to manifest by 1981, what did appear in its highest climax, was Zhivkov and his daughter's ingenious decade-long political legitimization project. Although her mysterious and unexplained death in the midst of the

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<sup>689</sup> RFE Program: September to October 1981. Box 496.  
Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL. Hoover Library and Archives.

<sup>690</sup> RFE Program: September to October 1981. Box 496.  
Bulgarian Broadcasting Department. RFE/RL  
Corporate Records. Hoover Library and Archives.

celebrations, has caused certain conspiratorial conclusions to be reached concerning the nature of the dark and deadly Soviet-Bulgarian “special relationship.”

### **Chapter Conclusion**

On conclusion, to answer the questions directly or indirectly raised by the content cited throughout this chapter: What types of topics did the broadcasts focus on foremost? We can see that throughout 1978-1981, the broadcast transcripts examined, can be categorized into two main themes: those reports functioning as news reporting commentaries that revolve around current events, and which are created solely to address something that has recently happened or is happening in real time, or those which are based on routinely-scheduled commentary on various subjects ranging from culture to history, by various personalities; in the manner that any news media organization functions.

The difference for RFE was that for the first 25 years of its existence, it was presented as an émigré-run private network based on American philanthropy rather than a well-funded and well-organized US government covert information operation. So, when that was revealed to the world, the governments of the targeted “captive countries”, naturally, continued to consider the organization not as a traditional news service like the BBC or VOA but rather as they referred to RFE/RL as “hostile, enemy radio propaganda.”

In this chapter, the on air topics covered the most are the regime-orchestrated political assassinations of 1978 and the regime-organized national jubilee celebrations of 1981, as well as their potential connection and correlation. Therefore, the messaging does remain constant but with limited changes, based on the personal style and professional perspectives of the broadcasting personality, i.e. Markov to Kostov. For both, an ongoing critique of the Soviet-Bulgarian relationship and the exposing of corruption within the

Communist party remain constant themes, due in large part because that is what the émigrés have a problem with foremost, but also partially because that narrative best supports and advances the main mission of the organization that they are contributing to.

Finally, to understand the extent to which public attitudes correlate with changes in the state and society over the course of the Cold War time period, it is necessary to examine in terms of this audience research analysis as well as the series of socio-political events and shifting global geopolitical structural dynamics, from the late 1970s to late 1980s, that led to the collapse of Communism and the end of the Cold War.

**CHAPTER 5:**  
**AMERICAN PUBLIC DIPLOMACY AND PROPAGANDA CONCERNING**  
**BULGARIA, EASTERN EUROPE AND THE SOVIET UNION TOWARD**  
**THE END OF THE COLD WAR, 1970s-1980s**

**Chapter Introduction**

This final dissertation chapter deals with the broader historical debates concerning the conclusion of the Cold War as well as the critical series of socio-political events that defined the shifting global geopolitical structural dynamics of international relations throughout the 1970s and 1980s. The chapter's timeframe includes an overview of the human rights agenda during the détente era from 1969 to 1979 and the restart of geopolitical tensions from 1980 to 1984 through to the superpower summit diplomacy characterizing the late 1980s and early 1990s; a brief but dramatic time period in recent world history marked by the collapse of Communism across Eastern Europe in 1989, the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the conclusion of the 45 year-long Cold War.

This final chapter provides a necessary historical narrative that addresses the broader circumstances under which American foreign policy and public diplomacy engaged with the Communist world, based on a number of changing socio-economic and geopolitical factors from the détente era to its breakdown. In the backdrop of that global framework, the situation in Bulgaria throughout the 1980s will be examined based on RFE/RL's audience research analysis surveys, which will demonstrate changing public attitudes over time but also RFE's agenda and by extension, its successes in shaping the perspectives of the political opposition after the collapse of Communism. Additionally, this

final chapter examines the broader factors that contributed to the end of the Cold War, from the changing political and economic dynamics within the US and USSR, to the critical role of science and technology in the Digital Revolution emerging from the Nuclear Arms Race.

Furthermore, the socio-economic circumstances that enabled Bulgaria to become to so-called “Silicon Valley of the Eastern bloc” are explained, demonstrating the beneficial byproduct of its cultural diplomacy that resulted from its independent course in foreign policy in spite of its close ties to Moscow. The role of technology in both the Digital Revolution as it relates to economic competition in the Cold War but also as it relates to changes in communication over time, is explored as well. Here, the role of technology in disseminating propaganda and as an important platform for public diplomacy is also touched upon in relation to how radio but also television and motion pictures play a role.

Finally, these described dynamics are discussed in relation to Bulgaria during the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, after the collapse of Communism. This chapter then weaves in and out, showing how relations between the USSR and US led to the end of the Cold War, and how each narrative of these events, is categorized falling in between on three main distinct schools of thought in the historiography of the end of the Cold War.

### **The Détente era: the Human Rights Agenda under Nixon, Ford and Carter,**

#### **1969-1979**

American foreign policy as part of its Cold War grand strategy remained constant in terms of long-term objectives, although some short-term objectives in public diplomacy reflected the changing circumstances in world politics from one presidential administration to the other, especially in regard to any shifts in Soviet foreign policy. US foreign affairs from the start of détente through its end encompassed the Nixon, Ford and Carter



administrations (1969-1979), while the restart of superpower geopolitical tensions escalated during the first Reagan administration (1980-1984) but then shifted to superpower summit diplomacy in the second Reagan administration (1985-1989).

In contrast, Soviet foreign policy remained constant during the reign of Brezhnev (1964-1982) but changed after Andropov and Chernenko (1982-85) and particularly so with Gorbachev (1985-1991). If the 1970s were a high point for crisis in the Western world, the 1980s were for the Communist world, a culmination of crises that led to its undoing.

During the start of the *détente* era, Moscow and Washington adopted a pragmatic *realpolitik* approach to geopolitics, during which Nixon related to Brezhnev as an equal partner with legitimate superpower interests, slightly drawing back from early Cold War grand strategies of containment and rollback. Nixon's famous meeting with Mao in 1972 resulted in the restoration of relations with China at a time when ties between Moscow and Beijing were most strained. Furthermore, this began the process of opening up China to economic reforms after 1978, transforming world trade into the 1980s and 1990s.

The world economy experienced several significant shifts during the 1970s, beginning with the collapse of the gold-dollar exchange standard, known as the Bretton Woods system which had been established at the United Nations Monetary and Financial Conference in 1944. This so-called "Nixon shock" announced on August 15, 1971, led to the abandonment of the gold-dollar exchange standard and ultimately enabled the US to acquire resources without restriction, by issuing its own currency, the dollar.<sup>691</sup> American debt increased without much external consequence except for internal price inflation and

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<sup>691</sup> Arrighi, Giovanni. *The World Economy and the Cold War, 1970-1990* in the *Cambridge History of the Cold War*, 31.

stagnation, or “stagflation.”<sup>692</sup> Additionally, an oil embargo led by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in reaction to US support for Israel during the 1973 Arab-Israeli war did not ultimately achieve its political purpose.<sup>693</sup> Instead, the spike in oil prices benefitted the USSR as a top oil and gas exporter during a time when the network of energy pipeline infrastructure connecting Western Europe with the Soviet Union was being constructed, despite some American concerns that energy exports could be used as a geopolitical weapon against Western Europe. Later on in the 1980s, Saudi-American strategic cooperation following the failed embargo, allowed the US to weaponize energy by deliberately pushing down global oil prices and thus causing a drop in the profit for Soviet oil and gas exports.<sup>694</sup> These arrangements are significant in that they economically enabled and allowed for the conditions in which US could outspend the USSR into the 1980s, a main structural reason<sup>695</sup> that contributed to the conclusion of the Cold War.

Americans during this time, were becoming much more conscious about competition from the newly organized (since 1973) European Economic Community together with the robust and revived West German and Japanese economies.<sup>695</sup> In an economic context though, there was never really any competition with the Soviet economy, the American economy was always much more advanced and developed than the Soviet economy ever hoped to be at any given point in time during the Cold War. The USSR could only compete with the US in the realm of the global military industry including the nuclear arms and space races, intelligence operations and ideological influence in the Third World.

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<sup>692</sup> Arrighi, Giovanni. *The World Economy and the Cold War, 1970-1900* in the *Cambridge History of the Cold War*, 31.

<sup>693</sup> Arrighi, Giovanni. *The World Economy and the Cold War, 1970-1900*, 29-30.

<sup>694</sup> Schweizer, Peter. *Victory: The Reagan Administration's Secret Strategy That Hastened the Collapse of the Soviet Union*.

<sup>695</sup> Arrighi, Giovanni. *The World Economy and the Cold War, 1970-1900* in the *Cambridge History of the Cold War*, 40-44.

Despite this, during the 1970s, the West did experience general economic malaise in a relative context compared to the long-lasting economic growth of the 1950s and 1960s.

More significantly, serious internal debates about Western resilience had been ongoing ever since the series of socio-political protests during the late 1960s which also concerned America's initial involvement and eventual, definitive defeat with the fall of Saigon in the Vietnam War on April 30, 1975. The failed ending of this nearly two decade-long proxy conflict to contain the spread of Communism in Southeast Asia was a major public diplomacy disaster for the US, and thus in a zero-sum context, a major ideological victory for the USSR, which naturally was to be countered by Western radio broadcasting.

In regards to issues within domestic and foreign US politics, after the resignation of Richard Nixon on August 9, 1974 as a result of the Watergate scandal, his Vice President Gerald Ford continued in the spirit of détente especially in regards to nuclear arms limitation agreements but unlike Nixon, Ford embraced the human rights agenda which was to be included in the Helsinki Accords, produced as part of the process known as the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) from 1973 to 1975.

The CSCE's main purpose was to provide a framework for the diplomatic stabilization of East-West relations and aimed to set the stage for the conclusion of the Cold War.<sup>696</sup> The USSR in 1969, had requested this conference to take place in neutral Finland, in order to seek Western recognition for the post-WWII borders of the Soviet satellite states in the Eastern bloc. By 1973, this "Helsinki Process" had provided a platform to address long-standing disputes in European security and had allowed for economic, cultural, scientific and environmental cooperation to be forged across the

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<sup>696</sup> Foot, Rosemary. *The Cold War and Human Rights* in the *Cambridge History of the Cold War*, 459

boundaries of the Iron Curtain.<sup>697</sup> However, this process was also significant in developing transnational communication between Western institutions and start-up human rights groups. The Helsinki Declaration or the Final Act was signed on August 1, 1975 by the 35 participating Western and Eastern European nations plus Canada and the US. In its *Declaration on Principles Guiding Relations between Participating States* known as “The Decalogue” since it contained ten points of agreement, importantly defined “human rights” in its Principle VII as: “the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief.”<sup>698</sup> This was an important byproduct of the entire process as for the first time, the Soviets had formally agreed to upholding the explicit Western concept of human rights in the Eastern bloc, as originally drafted in the 1948 UN Declaration of Human Rights.

Despite the widespread contemporary criticism that the Helsinki Process was a Western ideological capitulation to the Soviets, who would inevitably ignore the human rights provision, in retrospect, the 1975 Helsinki Declaration is considered among the most important diplomatic achievements of the *détente* era, as it solidified a common Western policy on emphasizing human rights while also inspiring the formation of domestic watchdog groups, and an increase of dissident defectors within the Eastern bloc.<sup>699</sup> While the Helsinki Process may have given diplomatic legitimacy to the Brezhnev doctrine in the aftermath of the 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia, it also gave ideological legitimacy for the Soviet system to have to confront the notion of upholding the practice of human rights. Since the late 1960s, some prominent Soviet dissidents such as

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<sup>697</sup> Foot, Rosemary. *The Cold War and Human Rights* in the *Cambridge History of the Cold War*, 459-50.

<sup>698</sup> The Helsinki Final Act, OSCE: August 1, 1975. <https://www.osce.org/helsinki-final-act>

<sup>699</sup> Foot, Rosemary. *The Cold War and Human Rights* in the *Cambridge History of the Cold War*, 445-46, 48-55.

Andrei Sakharov, Aleksander Solzhenitsyn, Joseph Brodsky and Yuri Orlov among others, participated in supporting civil society organizations such as the Initiative Group for the Defense of Human Rights in the USSR, Committee on Human Rights in the USSR and the Moscow Helsinki Group to monitor implementation of the Helsinki Accords and report on human rights abuses.<sup>700</sup> As a result of these developments, it can be noted that prior to 1975, the levels of dissident arrest remained quite low with only several high profile cases, however from 1977 to 1983, the KGB had reportedly experienced a dramatic increase in the number of domestic dissidents and political criminals.<sup>701</sup> Meanwhile, support to dissident movements was supplemented by private civil society non-governmental organizations such as the US Helsinki Watch Committee, funded by the Ford Foundation.

Another related and defining moment that occurred during the Ford administration, was the January 1975 enactment of the Jackson-Vanik amendment to the Trade Act of 1974, which was quite an important development. This amendment was introduced and championed as early as 1972 by Senator Henry “Scoop” Jackson and ultimately linked the status of US trade relations with non-market economies such as the USSR to the issue of freedom of human movement in the framework of human rights.<sup>702</sup>

US foreign relations with the USSR despite détente were stressed due to the issue of freedom of movement for Soviet Jews. The USSR had supported the establishment of Israel in 1947-48 however by the 1967 Six-Day War, diplomatic relations were broken off as the Soviets pursued an anti-Zionist stance in backing the Pan-Arab cause across the Middle East. During this time, over three million Jews lived in the USSR (a population

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<sup>700</sup> Foot, Rosemary. *The Cold War and Human Rights* in the *Cambridge History of the Cold War*, 460-61.

<sup>701</sup> Foot, Rosemary. *The Cold War and Human Rights* in the *Cambridge History of the Cold War*, 453.

<sup>702</sup> Mitchell, Nancy. *The Cold War and Jimmy Carter*, in the *Cambridge History of the Cold War*, 72-73.

larger than that of Israel), while the Israeli 1950 law of return which promised citizenship for Jews or those with Jewish ancestry that relocated to the “promised land.”<sup>703</sup> This led to an increase of exit visa applications by Soviet Jews, while some were allowed to leave, most applications were refused and those individuals were called “refuseniks.”<sup>704</sup> It should be noted, that Communist world in general did not allow for the free movement of people fearing a demographic “brain drain” and therefore, had imposed an “education tax” as part of their exit visa requirements, strictly regulating and restricting emigration for everyone.

After the Israeli victory in the 1973 Yom Kippur War in which the Arab nations attacked Israel, this issue returned to the forefront of human rights and was weaponized by US foreign policy. Again, some Soviet Jews were allowed to emigrate to Israel and the US, where Brighton Beach in Brooklyn, New York especially became the main ethnic enclave for Eastern European Jewry and all other Soviet immigrants, it would be referred to as “Little Odessa” by the 1990s, based on the Black Sea port city in Soviet Ukraine.<sup>705</sup>

The Free Soviet Jewry Movement in the US was organized by American Jewish human rights groups led by figures like Elie Wiesel, who sought to raise awareness to the plight of refuseniks such as Natan Sharansky who in 1973 was denied an exit visa (his wife was allowed to emigrate) but he was arrested in 1977 for espionage and only freed in 1986 and similarly, the 1970 Dymshits-Kuznetsov hijacking affair involving refuseniks detained trying to escape the USSR, all helped elevate the cause.<sup>706</sup> In that context, the traditional realpolitik approach to détente was successfully altered due to domestic political pressures

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<sup>703</sup> Rachel Beinus. *The Experience and Emigration of Soviet Union Jews: 1970-2000*. April 8, 2021.

<sup>704</sup> Nathans, Benjamin. *Refuseniks and Rights Defenders: Jews and the Soviet Dissident Movement*, in *From Europe's East to the Middle East: Israel's Russian and Polish Lineage*. 346.

<sup>705</sup> “From Odessa to New York City:

The Unique Legacy of America's Soviet Jewry.” NYPL, July 13, 2022.

<sup>706</sup> Nathans, Benjamin. *Refuseniks and Rights Defenders: Jews and the Soviet Dissident Movement*.

exerted by the movement. Thus, a driving force led by Nixon-Ford US Secretary of State and National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger together with Congressman Charles Vanik (D-OH), Senator Jacob Javits (R-NY) and Senator “Scoop” Jackson (D-WA) and his assistants: Paul Wolfowitz and Richard Perle, who from 1972 to 1974 successfully lobbied for the amendment. Although, the amendment did not accomplish its immediate purpose, with Soviet Jewry only being unrestricted to move by the late 1980s, it did permanently enshrine human rights as part of US foreign and trade policy, and inspired the inclusion of the human rights provision under the Helsinki Accords, which would be described as a “time bomb” directed at the ideological foundations of the USSR.<sup>707</sup>

The Carter presidency embraced the human rights agenda aimed at the Soviet Eastern bloc, although Jimmy Carter himself not well-known, while campaigning in 1976, had actually denounced his opponent Gerald Ford for agreeing to the unenforceable human rights provisions in the Accords, in exchange for Soviet legitimization.<sup>708</sup> As President, Carter continued to utilize the human rights agenda as a weapon against the USSR rather than a universal US foreign policy, to the disappointment of those who had hoped that the US would stop supporting anti-Communist authoritarian leaders worldwide. These contradictions would lead to anti-American unrest in the Middle East and Latin America such as the 1979-80 Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua. Although Carter had concluded the September 7, 1977 treaty with Panama (returning the Panama Canal by 1999) as well as the Camp David Accords between Egypt and Israel on September 17, 1978.<sup>709</sup> A week

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<sup>707</sup> “Interview with Gerald Ford” August 4, 1997. National Security Archive:  
<https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/coldwar/interviews/episode-16/ford1.html>

<sup>708</sup> Mitchell, Nancy. *The Cold War and Jimmy Carter*, in the *Cambridge History of the Cold War*, 71.

<sup>709</sup> “Carter's Foreign Policy.” Office of the Historian:  
<https://history.state.gov/departments/history/short-history/carter>

prior, on September 8, 1978 a day in Iran remembered as Black Friday, the Carter administration supported the Shah's imposition of martial law and crackdown on protestors in Teheran.<sup>710</sup> This sparked the 1979-80 Islamic Revolution in Iran and subsequent 444 day-long hostage crisis that led to an ongoing breakdown of relations between Teheran and Washington. The CIA's immediate response failed with the Operation Eagle Claw rescue mission but later on succeeded by using a fake film studio Hollywood as part of the Canadian Clipper Operation, made famous in the *Argo* (2012) movie.<sup>711</sup>

US foreign policy unlike in the Nixon-Ford administrations where Henry Kissinger held two of the top national security and foreign relations positions simultaneously, was much more contradictory under Carter, and was characterized by a constant state of debate between the more détente-minded Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and more aggressive National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski.<sup>712</sup> Brzezinski's hawkish and hardline anti-Soviet attitude defined US foreign policy with the Eastern bloc, after the election of the Polish Pope and the rise of Lech Walesa in the Solidarity movement.<sup>713</sup> Carter's presidency did contribute to détente's nuclear disarmament framework of Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) starting with the 1972 ABM Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (SALT I) signed by Nixon and Brezhnev in Moscow, and followed up by Ford's 1974 agreement on continued negotiations in Vladivostok, with the signing of the SALT II treaty in Vienna by mid-1979.<sup>714</sup> However, that turning point of an year, would be defined by the Islamic revolution in Iran that consolidated by February 11, 1979 as well as the Soviet invasion of

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<sup>710</sup> Mitchell, Nancy. *The Cold War and Jimmy Carter*, in the *Cambridge History of the Cold War*, 82.

<sup>711</sup> "Argo: The Ingenious Exfiltration of the Canadian Six." CIA:

<https://www.cia.gov/stories/story/argo-the-ingenious-exfiltration-of-the-canadian-six/>

<sup>712</sup> Mitchell, Nancy. *The Cold War and Jimmy Carter*, in the *Cambridge History of the Cold War*, 68-69.

<sup>713</sup> Mitchell, Nancy. *The Cold War and Jimmy Carter* in the *Cambridge History of the Cold War*.

<sup>714</sup> Njolstad, Olav. *The Collapse of Superpower Detente, 1975-1980* in the *Cambridge History of the Cold War*, 152-55.



Afghanistan at year's end on December 25, 1979. Although the Soviet-Afghan War and the Polish domestic crisis were the short-term causes for tensions restarting, the breakdown of the decade-long era of détente as assessed by historians was due to long-term reasons:<sup>715</sup> 1) continued mutual suspicion; while Nixon and Brezhnev forged an interpersonal connection similar to that shared by Kennedy and Khrushchev or by Reagan and Gorbachev; Ford and Carter did not connect with the increasingly geriatric Brezhnev who outsourced high-level decision-making to the KGB, while the secret services of both sides speculated that each side was taking advantage of the other, 2) unresolved internal ideological issues within each side (the legacy of 1968 protests) which incentivized the superpowers who were not economically interdependent to restart global tensions, 3) the goal of détente being to control and calm down the Cold War conflict but not to end it.

The Carter doctrine based on the Eisenhower and Truman doctrines which were directed at upholding US interests as well as access to oil in the Middle East while containing Communism beyond Eastern Europe and East Asia was announced in January 1980. Carter authorized Brzezinski and later on Congressman Charlie Wilson (D-TX) to organize a plan to fund by means of military support and training, the Islamic Mujahedeen “freedom fighters” through Saudi Arabia and Pakistan during the entirety of the Soviet war in Afghanistan, which between 1979 and 1992 would turn out to be the CIA’s longest-running and most-expensive covert military action program, known as Operation Cyclone.

<sup>716</sup> The US-led global boycott of the 1980 Moscow Summer Olympics, was later responded

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<sup>715</sup> Njolstad, Olav. *The Collapse of Superpower Detente, 1975-1980* in the *Cambridge History of the Cold War*, 152-55.

<sup>716</sup> Crile, George. *Charlie Wilson's War: The Extraordinary Story of the Largest Covert Operation in History*, 1-7, 507-35.

to by the Soviet-led global boycotting the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics.<sup>717</sup> Meanwhile, this restart of tensions was wholly embraced by the incoming Reagan administration that defined the last decade of the Cold War.

### **The end of Détente, Reagan and the restart of the Cold War, 1980-1984**

The conservative “Reagan Revolution” in the 1980 election was won on a sweeping domestic platform that advanced the “trickle-down” economic policy of tax cuts and deregulation known as “Reaganomics” alongside a neoconservative foreign policy that manifested as the Reagan Doctrine in actively promoting regime change or rollback rather than mere containment in countering Communism. Reagan was reelected overwhelmingly by 1984, however it was during his first term, particularly in March of 1983, when two particular speeches set the tone for foreign policy throughout the early 1980s:

On March 8, 1983, the infamous “evil empire” speech was delivered by the President to the 41<sup>st</sup> Annual National Association of Evangelicals in Orlando, Florida. Reagan explicitly labelled the Soviet Union as “the focus of evil in the modern world” and warned Americans to not “ignore the facts of history and the aggressive impulses of an evil empire, to simply call the arms race a giant misunderstanding and thereby remove yourself from the struggle between right and wrong and good and evil.”<sup>718</sup> By this statement, he was arguing against any sort of strategic détente, but in moral terms that the US must ultimately defeat the USSR, and against any moral equivalence between the two, especially in relation to the Nuclear Arms Race. If this speech was intended to identify the problem, the next one, two weeks later, would be intended to propose a potential solution.

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<sup>717</sup> Njolstad, Olav. *The Collapse of Superpower Detente, 1975-1980* in the *Cambridge History of the Cold War*, 152-55.

<sup>718</sup> Reagan, Ronald. “The Evil Empire.”

PBS: <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/reagan-evil-empire/>

On March 23, 1983, in a White House oval office address, the President announced the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) also known as the “Star Wars” program. Reagan who had previously characterized the Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) doctrine to nuclear military strategy, as a “suicide pact” between the superpowers, said in his speech that “since the dawn of the atomic age, we’ve sought to reduce the risk of war by maintain a strong deterrent and by seeking genuine arms control.”<sup>719</sup> He began by saying: “let me share with you a vision of the future which offers hope - it is that we embark on a program to counter the awesome Soviet missile threat with measures that are defensive.”

Reagan then issued an epic request after posing his most thought-provoking question:

What if free people could live secure in the knowledge that their security did not rest upon the threat of instant US retaliation to deter a Soviet attack, that we could intercept and destroy strategic ballistic missiles before they reached our own soil or that of our allies? I call upon the scientific community in this country, those who gave us nuclear weapons, to turn their great talents to the cause of mankind and world peace, to give us the means of rendering these nuclear weapons impotent and obsolete.<sup>720</sup>

This speech successfully sold this policy to a public who really wanted an end to the arms race, and would embrace this proposal as an act of redemptive reconstruction, by restoring the isolationism that existed before WWII, and returning America to the innocent utopian “shining city on a hill.”<sup>721</sup> The text of the speech was quite brilliantly and strategically scripted, as it echoed the sentiment of most Americans at the time. Meanwhile, Ronald Reagan with this announcement, launched one of the most controversial and

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<sup>719</sup> FitzGerald, Frances. *Way Out There in the Blue: Reagan, Star Wars, and the End of the Cold War*. 114-121, 254-256.

<sup>720</sup> FitzGerald, Frances. *Way Out There in the Blue: Reagan, Star Wars, and the End of the Cold War*. 114-121, 254-256.

<sup>721</sup> FitzGerald, Frances. *Way Out There in the Blue: Reagan, Star Wars, and the End of the Cold War*. 114-121, 254-256.

expensive government funded military-technological projects ever, the crowning jewel of what would go down as the largest peacetime military buildup in American history.

Although the “Star Wars” SDI project never manifested as planned in terms of defense policy, it was incredibly successful as a form of propaganda against the Soviets, who feared that the US actually had the satellite capacity for the weaponization of space and that such a missile defense shield would render the nuclear deterrent irrelevant to the Nuclear Arms Race and thus, enable Washington to strike first without worrying about any retaliation from Moscow. Soviet chairman Yuri Andropov, the KGB director (since 1967) who had assumed power in November 1982, had since May 1981, initiated Operation *Raketno-Yadernoe Napadenie* (RYAN) in anticipation of the US initiating nuclear war.<sup>722</sup>

This tense situation contributed to a Soviet nuclear false alarm incident in September 1983 while NATO’s Able Archer 83 exercise in Western Europe scheduled for November 7 of that year, would make late 1983 and early 1984 perhaps the most dangerous time for the risk of nuclear confrontation since the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962, which occurred around the mid-point of the Cold War.

**The Silicon Valley of the Eastern bloc: The Scientific-Technical Revolution in Bulgaria in the backdrop of the American-led Global Digital Revolution, 1970s-1980s**

The Nuclear Arms Race (1945-1987) and Space Race (1957-1975) were at the very core of Cold War scientific and technological competition. While the US was initially more dominant from 1945 to 1962 in the Nuclear Arms Race due in part to the advances made by the Manhattan Project and its more dynamic military industry, the USSR had initially

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<sup>722</sup> Reynolds, David. *Science, Technology and the Cold War* in the *Cambridge History of the Cold War*.

invested its military industry toward the Space Race and from 1957 to 1965 pioneered multiple achievements which were as scientific as they were symbolic. The competition between the two superpowers, resulted in the growth of new approaches to space exploration as larger and more lethal nuclear weapons were developed, as well.

The US had arguably surpassed the USSR in the time between 1969 and 1975 in the Space Race, while the USSR during that same time period had reached parity, and in some aspects even surpassed the US in the sheer quantity of nuclear weapons. This in effect, was a reversal of roles, although it was quite short lived, for as the USSR certainly by the 1980s had a much more powerful military than it had in the 1950s, despite the American fear of the Soviets being much stronger at the start of the Cold War than at its end, the US would eventually catch up in all aspects of the Cold War by the mid-1980s.

During the détente era, the Soviet military and intelligence forces being on par with that of the Americans, also posed a considerable ideological challenge in the Third World. Meanwhile, as the Second World developing nations such China embarked on economic reforms and the Soviet Eastern bloc experienced economic stagnation amidst their own version of the computing revolution as will be explored in regards to Bulgaria, meanwhile, the First World developed nations of America, Western Europe and Japan were undergoing a technological transformation that spread into the realm of the marketplace and consumer culture. This Third Industrial Revolution sparked by a government-backed military industrial complex introduced satellite-based technologies and the internet network which accelerated digital communication and gave rise of an ever more interconnected world by the 1990s.

The Digital Revolution in the West originated with the development of computing during the 1950s and 1960s by means of government funded research at public and private universities such as MIT and Stanford, but by the 1970s and 1980s, this had largely advanced in the commercial sphere. It was in the midst of the 1957 “Sputnik Moment” that the US Defense Department’s Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) was founded and well-funded in order to accelerate technological advancement in areas.

This part of the US government was instrumental in the development of the Advanced Research Projects Agency Network (ARPANET) which later became the Internet. DARPA also contributed to the creation of the personal computer (PC) as well as stealth technology, drones, satellites and the Global Positioning System (GPS).<sup>723</sup> The growth of these initiatives through government contractors, public-private partnerships and private sector entrepreneurship eventually forged the “big technology” companies of Silicon Valley, mostly clustered around the San Francisco bay area in California.

The 1945 ENIAC (Electronic Numerical Integrator and Computer) was first built with support from the US military research funding at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia by John Eckert and John Mauchly and patented in 1964. However, a 1956 patent-sharing agreement between IBM (International Business Machines Corporation) and Mauchly’s Sperry Rand Corporation was subject to a 1967 anti-trust court case which was tried between 1971 and 1972. Then in 1973, the US federal district court ruled in *Honeywell, Inc. v. Sperry Rand Corp., et al.* that that the invention of the electronic digital computer is to be in the public domain.<sup>724</sup> The investigation found that the ENIAC was in fact based on the original prototype of the Atanasoff–Berry Computer (ABC) built between

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<sup>723</sup> Wirbel, Loring. *Star Wars: US Tools of Space Supremacy*.

<sup>724</sup> *Honeywell, Inc. v. Sperry Rand Corp.*, 54 F.R.D. 593 (D. Minn. 1971)

1937 to 1942, and that “Eckert and Mauchly did not themselves first invent the automatic electronic digital computer, but instead derived that subject matter from one Dr. John Vincent Atanasoff.”<sup>725</sup> Atanasoff and his assistant Berry at Iowa State University were legally recognized as the inventors of the first computer. Born in Upstate New York to a Bulgarian father and an Irish mother in 1903, Atanasoff during the decade-long legal proceedings that would result in his rightful recognition as the “inventor of the computer” was awarded the highest honorary title by the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAS) and invited to visit Bulgaria twice (in 1970 and 1985) prior to his passing in 1995.<sup>726</sup>

For Bulgarians and Bulgarian-Americans, Atanasoff has since served as a source of national pride but also for the Bulgarian Communists, a story of the Western Capitalist system attempting to steal his ingenuity, but even more so, as a convenient symbol for Bulgarian innovation and its reputation as the “Silicon Valley of the Eastern bloc” in the midst of the “Scientific-Technical Revolution” launched during the 1960s-1970s.

As Victor Petrov documents in his recent *Balkan Cyberia: Cold War Computing, Bulgarian Modernization, and the Information Age behind the Iron Curtain* (2023), due in part to its own technical innovative engineers but also due to excellent industrial espionage and technological theft, Bulgaria indeed was the “Silicon Valley of the Eastern bloc”, holding 45% of the market share in electronic exports within the Eastern bloc and at one point was among the top ten technology exporting nations in the world.<sup>727</sup> In fact, during that time period, Bulgaria had exported more computers than all of the other COMECON countries combined and was the only one able to produce its own hardware disks.<sup>728</sup> Petrov

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<sup>725</sup> *Honeywell, Inc. v. Sperry Rand Corp.*, 54 F.R.D. 593 (D. Minn. 1971)

<sup>726</sup> Petrov, Victor. *Balkan Cyberia: Cold War Computing, Bulgarian Modernization*. 1-4.

<sup>727</sup> Petrov, Victor. *Balkan Cyberia: Cold War Computing, Bulgarian Modernization*. 5.

<sup>728</sup> Petrov, Victor. *Balkan Cyberia: Cold War Computing, Bulgarian Modernization*. 5.

shows how early on, Bulgaria was actually the only Eastern bloc economy that did not have any sort of high-skilled tech industry, with the USSR and GDR dominating in computing.

<sup>729</sup> However by the early 1960s, at the initiative of Western-educated Professor Ivan Popov as the director of the State Committee for Science and Technical Progress, a massive leap-frogging occurred in the computing industry, starting with ELKA (“Electronic Calculator”) produced in 1965 which was even advertised by 1968 in the British *Financial Times*. <sup>730</sup> Then at the 1970 Japanese World Expo in Osaka, the ELKA was displayed under the title of the “world’s first electronic calculator” and even exported to Switzerland. <sup>731</sup>

This Communist “Scientific-Technical Revolution” response to the Capitalist Digital Revolution, was a byproduct of several factors including the Soviet-Bulgarian special relationship that allowed for Bulgaria’s independent course in foreign policy during the era of détente. To a large extent, Capitalist economic powers like Japan provided a lot of financial investment and technological know-how, as well, but so did neutral nations such as Sweden and Austria. However, India was perhaps the most significant factor for the realization of this technical phenomenon that was experienced by Bulgaria, since India as a demographically advantaged economy and Non-Aligned Nation was an ideal place where Communist bureaucrats could learn to be successful Capitalist entrepreneurs. Petrov refers to India as an “anti-Cold War” force which was “economically important – the biggest potential market of the non-socialist world a potential gold mine for a regime that was always in search of convertible currency.” <sup>732</sup> Indeed, as he argues, it was the ideal place where hard currency could be earned and technical expertise tested.

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<sup>729</sup> Petrov, Victor. *Balkan Cyberia: Cold War Computing, Bulgarian Modernization*. 55.

<sup>730</sup> Petrov, Victor. *Balkan Cyberia: Cold War Computing, Bulgarian Modernization*. 57.

<sup>731</sup> Petrov, Victor. *Balkan Cyberia: Cold War Computing, Bulgarian Modernization*. 144.

<sup>732</sup> Petrov, Victor. *Balkan Cyberia: Cold War Computing, Bulgarian Modernization*. 141.



Furthermore, Petrov's research on the digital revolution here compliments Dragotsinova's history of Bulgaria's cultural diplomacy by assessing the economic and technological benefits acquired by the cultural and diplomatic initiatives of the 1970s, claiming that: "In India, the Second World met the First on the grounds of the Third."<sup>733</sup>

However, while Bulgaria's cultural diplomacy and domestic engineering was an important part behind the recipe for this success, a critical factor was also the role played by its foreign intelligence and industrial espionage efforts to steal secrets from abroad. This was of course, one of the benefits of the Soviet-Bulgarian strategic alliance, whereby the KGB informally designated the KDS as a front for the acquisition of Western technology, and mass producing it for the entire Eastern bloc. The KDS Scientific-Technical Intelligence (STI) unit proved to be proficient in such "tech theft" operations.

Of course, the Soviets themselves also engaged in such industrial espionage far and wide, as evident in the KGB's Line X front organization which was exposed by the "Farewell Dossier" in 1981 after a defection by Colonel Vladimir Vetrov.<sup>734</sup> This revealed the extent of Soviet satellite state espionage in the Western technology sector. In response, Western counterintelligence initiated covert operations which would feed faulty technology, complicating the ability of Soviet technology collection efforts. The most successful of such operations was the ability to clone Steve Jobs' and Steve Wozniak's 1977 Apple I and II personal computers by adding a Cyrillic alphabet keyboard and rebranding it as the IMKO-1 and IMKO-2, first built in 1979 and then mass produced after 1983, as the Pravetz-82. This computer was mass produced at the newly constructed

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<sup>733</sup> Petrov, Victor. *Balkan Cyberia: Cold War Computing, Bulgarian Modernization*. 144.

<sup>734</sup> Weiss, W. Gus. "Duping the Soviets: The Farewell Dossier."  
<https://www.cia.gov/resources/csi/studies-in-intelligence/1996-2/the-farewell-dossier/>

Instrument-Building Factory in Pravetz – hometown of First Party Secretary, Todor Zhivkov.<sup>735</sup> These computers were not accessible by the average Bulgarian for personal ownership, however some schools and universities did utilize them for instruction in computer science, and they were exported all over the COMECON and the Third World.

As part of the New Economic Mechanism (NEM) designed to attract Western investment, an American company, Rockwell Automation had expressed interest in pursuing a deal, but it did not materialize.<sup>736</sup> By 1987, Western media even noted some surprising figures; Bulgaria was exporting nearly 70 percent of all Eastern Bloc advanced electronics.<sup>737</sup> Petrov notes that in the official annual statistics for 1987, over 38% of industrial workers were employed in the technology sector.<sup>738</sup>

Throughout the post-Communist transition of the 1990s, this state-subsidized computer industry would collapse and a private sector alternative would not be formed due to overwhelming foreign competition. Instead, Bulgaria would emerge along with Romania, Ukraine and Russia, as one of the top global hubs for cyber hacking and virus production during the 1990s and into the 2000s, as “a consequence of having developed a generation of young Bulgarians whose programming skills found few outlets.”<sup>739</sup>

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<sup>735</sup> Petrov, Victor. *Balkan Cyberia: Cold War Computing, Bulgarian Modernization*. 214.

<sup>736</sup> “Bulgaria Hopes to Attract Foreign Investors” in the *Los Angeles Times*, 1980.  
<https://latimes.newspapers.com/image/385354604/?match=1&terms=Harry%20Trimborn%20Bulgaria>

<sup>737</sup> “Milliarden Dollar Schulden in Moskau” in *Der Spiegel*, 1982.

<https://www.spiegel.de/politik/milliarden-dollar-schulden-in-moskau-a-64c1f01f-0002-0001-0000-000014354979>

<sup>738</sup> Petrov, Victor. *Balkan Cyberia: Cold War Computing, Bulgarian Modernization*. 5.

<sup>739</sup> Petrov, Victor. *Balkan Cyberia: Cold War Computing, Bulgarian Modernization*. 300

## **American Public Diplomacy and Propaganda by means of the movies:**

### **Foreign Films in contrast to the National Cinema, 1970s-1980s**

The role of technology in producing and promoting propaganda is an underlying theme of the narrative explored throughout this entire dissertation. Although, radio technology continues to be utilized especially for daily news reporting and talk shows programming as a form of mass communication around the world, even to this day. The technical ability to broadcast television and mass produce motion pictures by means of movie theaters or even video cassettes had been widespread by the 1970s and 1980s, overtaking radio as the primary source of news and entertainment in the Western world.

Television broadcasting became mainstream in the First World during the 1950s and 1960s, and by the 1970s and 1980s had caught up even in the Second World. As noted earlier, television broadcasting is more complicated and much more susceptible to government censorship or even network self-censorship than radio broadcasting, allowing the likes of the BBC, VOA or RFE/RL to be much more effective as a form of mass communication than television ever could have been able to be. The Soviet propaganda though had always claimed the radio as their own, emphasizing “the father of radio” to be the Russian Alexander Popov by annually celebrating Radio Day in honor of May 7, 1895 when sound was transmitted through his radio prototype, although this Russian scientist was unable to commercialize it as the British Italian Guillermo Marconi had successfully done in the 1920s.<sup>740</sup> While there is no single inventor of television, among its pioneers during the 1950s was David Sarnoff, a Russian Jewish businessman who immigrated to

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<sup>740</sup> “Russia: Mother of Invention.” BBC – British Broadcasting Service:  
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/88802.stm>

New York but only identified as American.<sup>741</sup> Prior to that time period, the famous all American inventor Thomas Edison had not only successfully commercialized the motion picture camera but even sought to monopolize the early movie making industry.

In fact, it was a protest against Edison's motion picture company based in Fort Lee, New Jersey by film makers in the 1920s-30s that moved the center of the American film industry to Hollywood, in its current location within Los Angeles, California.<sup>742</sup>

The reason why these above seemingly irrelevant facts about the origins of these technologies are mentioned, is to note the process by which an origin story is formed or a success story of a famous personality takes shape. The social, religious or national identity of a group of people is most effectively forged through creating compelling narratives. Storytelling has always been in existence, however the medium through which it is developed and disseminated of course, changes over time. The inventions of the radio, motion picture camera, telephone, television, and computer are obviously critical in functioning as the platforms through which ideas can be effectively communicated.

The American motion picture industry and its role in producing propaganda while supporting US public diplomacy is a big part of the origin story of Hollywood. After America's involvement in WWII, the US government and motion picture studios collaborated closely in the production of propaganda motion pictures in support of the Allied war morale, in fact, as explored in the earlier in the second chapter, the founders of the Voice of America were professional communicators involved in movie making.

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<sup>741</sup> "About Sarnoff: American Experience." PBS – Public Broadcasting Service.

<sup>742</sup> "How did Hollywood end up in...Hollywood?" PBS – Public Broadcasting Service, Southern California.

During the McCarthy Red Scare in the late 1940s and through the 1950s, the initial target of the US House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) was the entertainment industry, with the “Hollywood Blacklist” put in place to ban those suspected of sympathizing with leftist organizations. This forced Hollywood to change course and to start producing content contributing to the cultural Cold War against Communism.

In *Hollywood's Cold War* (2007), Tony Shaw demonstrates how cinema was strategically weaponized as part of propaganda, ideology, domestic politics and foreign policy in the global battle for mass public opinion. Shaw's book focuses primarily on the role played by movies in producing propaganda during different stages of the Cold War:

Scholars now accept that, partly because of the ubiquity of the mass media in the second half of the Twentieth Century, the Cold War was a propaganda contest par excellence. Never before in history had the belligerents in a civil and international conflict possessed the means of communicating so deeply and so widely. Rarely before had belligerents also needed to play the propaganda game so assiduously... Crucially, propaganda was also inextricably linked to many Americans' highly ideological approach towards the Cold War. Conventionally, historians have thought of propaganda as an accessory to the traditional military, economic and political components of US Cold War strategy – the ‘fourth weapon’ in Washington's armory. Furthermore, what if propaganda and ideology went hand in hand, reinforcing one another, underpinned by a psychological and cultural approach to the Cold War? <sup>743</sup>

How Hollywood studios initially dominated all aspects of the industry from production to distribution in theaters shows how they could control the message in relation to ideology. From the First Red Scare to the Second Red Scare, Shaw also points out the few films made during the course of the war which purposefully tried to portray Russia as an war time Ally, such as *Mission to Moscow* (1943). <sup>744</sup> Russian cinema itself was initially

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<sup>743</sup> Shaw, Tony. *Hollywood's Cold War*. 2-3

<sup>744</sup> Shaw, Tony. *Hollywood's Cold War*. 23-24.

influenced by the French Lumiere brothers at a time when Paris was the world's movie capital, however after the Russian Revolution, Soviet cinematography was centralized in Moscow, led by the likes of Sergei Eisenstein who pioneered the art of political propaganda films, such as his famous *Battleship Potemkin* (1926). Meanwhile, with the start of the Red Scare, films such as *The Iron Curtain* (1948) or *The Red Menace* (1949) purposefully exacerbated the tensions in coordination with the US Information Agency (USIA).<sup>745</sup>

Also, the CIA's Office of Policy Coordination (OPC) was quite involved in the making of the UK-produced animated *Animal Farm* (1954) and the adaptation of George Orwell's dystopian *1984* (1956).<sup>746</sup> The theme of political subversion was ever present such as in *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962) or *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964) which even satirized nuclear conflict. While most of these films played up on such fears, not all were explicitly focused on the USSR, and most focused on promoting American exceptionalism and militarism, domestically.

This military-entertainment complex developed as a mutually beneficial relationship between Hollywood and the Pentagon, which allowed the free use of military equipment, as long as the scripts conformed to the official position of the US military concerning a particular conflict.<sup>747</sup> In effect, this would become a powerful form of propaganda that could be used to shape public opinion on foreign affairs both at home and abroad. Although, *Top Gun* (1986) is probably the single best example, which contributed to a rise in enlistment, others such as *Apocalypse Now* (1979) and *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989) were much more graphically anti-war in regards to the failed Vietnam War.

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<sup>745</sup> Shaw, Tony. *Hollywood's Cold War*. 72-94.

<sup>746</sup> Shaw, Tony. *Hollywood's Cold War*. 72-94.

<sup>747</sup> Shaw, Tony. *Hollywood's Cold War*.

Shaw argues that while the late 1960s and 1970s allowed for more independent film production, the Hollywood military entertainment complex returned to dominance during the 1980s as exemplified by the cultural dimension of the Reagan Revolution during that time period.<sup>748</sup> Ronald Reagan himself being a Hollywood actor from 1937 to 1964 prior to serving as California governor from 1967 to 1975, often skillfully operated in the domestic political area as well as in regards to framing foreign policy through the lens of the camera. This was significant as the US did not seek to wage the Cold War only before an American audience, but rather had to do so, in front of the arena of global public opinion, and in particular concerning the audience of those living under Communism, over whose freedom, the Cold War confrontation particularly in Eastern Europe had initially began.

In the Eastern bloc, some American movies were made accessible during the domestic thaw brought about by détente, however print publications, books and radio broadcasts were an easier way to learn information about the West. Nevertheless, contraband video and audio cassettes were smuggled in for consumption, along with other Western “luxury” goods for hard currency.<sup>749</sup> Also, the fact that East Germans could catch West German television, as Hungarians could tune into the Austrian air waves, Bulgarians also were able to view to a limited degree Greek and Turkish television. In the same way as how Western radio broadcasts were countered with electronic jamming interference, television broadcasts were as well. In the case of Bulgaria, its own domestic motion picture industry was able to also produce propaganda for the masses as a form of entertainment.

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<sup>748</sup> Shaw, Tony. *Hollywood's Cold War*. 301-06.

<sup>749</sup> “Chuck Norris vs. Communism.” PBS: Public Broadcasting Service, January 4, 2016: <https://www.pbs.org/independentlens/documentaries/chuck-norris-vs-communism/>

Bulgaria's film industry since 1962 has been dominated by Nu Boyana Film Studios, which today serves as an inexpensive alternative for outsourced Western films. The modern movie industry developed as late as the late 1950s and early 1960s, with the oldest Bulgarian film ever made being a short dark comedy produced as early as 1915.<sup>750</sup>

Evgenija Garbolevsky in her authoritative book on the topic: *The Conformists: Creativity and Decadence in the Bulgarian Cinema, 1945–89* (2011) argues that Bulgarian cinema unlike other aspects of life, was never entirely subjected to the political propaganda purposes of the Communist Committee of Arts and Culture since it allowed for various apolitical genres to be produced for entertainment and thus attracted intellectuals to contribute content as screenwriters. In the most famous case, Georgi Markov had contributed to writing scripts for the 26 television serial episodes of the 1969 to 1971 show called *Every Kilometer* which ironically was indeed a political piece of propaganda.<sup>751</sup>

Nevertheless, Garbolevsky maintains that “Bulgarian filmmakers, similar to their counterparts across the Eastern Bloc, vigorously resisted fitting into the role of lackeys of the Communist regime” and that the government allowed filmmakers certain freedoms to attain aesthetic standards and priorities, as long as they did not address forbidden topics or challenge established norms.<sup>752</sup> Overall during the Communist time period, 20 television series were produced per year and around 600 feature films were produced in total with movie production peaking at around 25 per year during the 1980s.<sup>753</sup> However, she notes

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<sup>750</sup> Garbolevsky, Evgenija. *The Conformists: Creativity and Decadence in the Bulgarian Cinema, 1945–89*. 1-10.

<sup>751</sup> Garbolevsky, Evgenija. *The Conformists: Creativity and Decadence in the Bulgarian Cinema, 1945–89*. 1-3.

<sup>752</sup> Garbolevsky, Evgenija. *The Conformists: Creativity and Decadence in the Bulgarian Cinema, 1945–89*. 1-2.

<sup>753</sup> Garbolevsky, Evgenija. *The Conformists: Creativity and Decadence in the Bulgarian Cinema, 1945–89*. 1-2.



that since 1989, the output of feature films has dropped to only 4-5 per year and that from 1990 to 2005 only 60 films were made, since Western movies were now available and more interesting for the public.<sup>754</sup> Furthermore, she says that all of the top ten Bulgarian movies ever made are from the 1960s to the 1980s.<sup>755</sup> Some of these are romantic tragedies such as *The Peach Thief* (1964) or *Doomed Souls* (1975), but notably the best ones are of a dark and historical nature, such as *The Goat Horn* (1972) which is about how the Ottomans brutally conscripted the eldest male child for service to the janissary corps or *Time of Violence* (1988) depicting how the Ottomans forcefully Islamized Bulgarian Christians.

The most expensive films ever made were the product of the 1981 national jubilee celebrations, titled *Asparukh: The Glory of the Khan* (1981) about the foundation of medieval Bulgaria and *Measure against Measure* (1981) about the liberation of Ottoman Bulgaria. More, recent films include *The World Is Big and Salvation Lurks Around the Corner* (2008) about the difficulties of the modern diaspora living abroad in the West and about a young man and his grandfather rediscovering his generational heritage in Bulgaria. The other recent film called *Radiogram* (2017) is set during the 1970s-1980s and is about a family of Muslim Turks who were faced with the “Revival” process, while attempting to listening to jammed radio music that was broadcasted from Turkey and the West.

### **The Bulgarian-Turkish “Revival Process” and the “Big Excursion” of the 1980s**

*Time of Violence* (1988) was produced as a controversial propaganda film right in the midst of the Bulgarian government’s campaign to force the Turkish minority to either change their names or be deported to Turkey. The movie depicts how once upon a time,

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<sup>754</sup> Garbolevsky, Evgenija. *The Conformists: Creativity and Decadence in the Bulgarian Cinema, 1945–89*. 3.

<sup>755</sup> Garbolevsky, Evgenija. *The Conformists: Creativity and Decadence in the Bulgarian Cinema, 1945–89*. 3.

the Ottoman Turks had brutally forced the Bulgarians to change their religion and therefore, centuries later Bulgaria now in a position of power, could exact vengeance.

In *Cinema of Flames: Balkan Film, Culture and the Media* (2001) Dina Iordanova particularly focuses on the types of propaganda produced in the diverse multiethnic Balkan region of Southeastern Europe, leading up to the breakup of Yugoslavia and the conflicts in Bosnia and Kosovo in the 1990s. Prior to the episodes of ethnic cleaning, there were signs of a similar albeit way less deadly situation that unfolded in Bulgaria in relation to its Turkish population. Iordanova cites an example of pure propaganda produced as part of one of the last movies made under the direction of the Communist regime by 1988:

Here, in the film *Time of Violence*, the clash between Turks and Bulgarians is presented as a manifestation of an eternal conflict between Islamic and Christian civilizations. The two forces are juxtaposed through the use of a range of filmic devices; the dark colors of the Muslim's clothes are contrasted to the light once worn by Slavs, heavy oriental music alternates with melodic Slavic tunes, and the grim, wrinkled face of a Muslim pasha is offset by the healthy complexion of a Slavic child. The violence perpetrated by the Islamic oppressors is cruel and merciless, and the distress suffered by the martyred Slavs, degrading and painful. The ultimate message of *Time of Violence* is that Muslims are responsible for centuries of suffering; this must not be allowed to recur...<sup>756</sup>

Of course, the Balkans being once called “the powder keg of Europe” leading up to the Great War (or WWI) was a long-standing geopolitical zone of confrontation for the Great Powers of Europe, and a crossroads of civilization at the meeting point between Europe and Eurasia. However, during the Cold War confrontation, the Balkans also became a microcosm for the different alliances, including pro-Soviet Bulgaria, pro-Chinese

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<sup>756</sup> Iordanova, Dina. *Cinema of Flames: Balkan Film, Culture and the Media*. 58

Albania, Non-Aligned Yugoslavia, and NATO-members Greece and Turkey with pro-American but authoritarian Ankara being perhaps the most powerful regional actor.

As a result of the end of the Cold War and collapse of Communism, the breakup of the Federal Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia unraveled, sparking a brief but brutal civil war conflict between Serbia and Croatia (1991-95) the inter-ethnic conflicts within Bosnia (1992-1995) and Kosovo (1999) which ended with NATO's first ever military action.

Bulgaria ultimately avoided such ethnic conflict, whereas an intensified clash with the independent Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) now called North Macedonia could have resulted over Macedonian claims to the Bulgarian Pirin region, it did not. Also, no war with neighboring Turkey was ignited, a conflict which would have had catastrophic consequences for the country. Sofia's long-standing fears of its former colonial overlords; the Ottoman Turks, was compounded, as it was also the only Warsaw Pact nation neighboring two NATO-members in Ankara and Athens. After successfully celebrating its national jubilee celebrations in 1981, Bulgaria descended into an economic crisis which was overshadowed by concerns of demographic decline, leading to the government actually attempting to impose higher taxes on families without children.<sup>757</sup> These long-term factors along with a series of alleged Turkish terrorist-staged attacks were the main causes behind the so-called "Regenerative or Revival" national process which was a policy of forced assimilation and compulsory name changing for the Turkish minority who made up 10% of the population.<sup>758</sup> The policy's purpose was to target Bulgarian Muslims or ethnic Turks living in Bulgaria and to convince them that they were

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<sup>757</sup> Bulgarian Communist Party Archives, 1B, op. 34, a.e. 89, list 34, 1984.  
Central State Archive of the Republic of Bulgaria.

<sup>758</sup> Compton, Richard. *A Concise History of Bulgaria*. 208-215.

actually Bulgarians, who had been forcefully converted to Islam under five centuries of Ottoman rule. This process required them to renounce their “Islamic” names and embrace Slavic-sounding names instead.<sup>759</sup> The euphemistic term “revival” or “regenerative” had to do with “rebirth” or the National Revival movement that preceded the Russian liberation of Bulgaria from the Ottomans. In addition, the Turkish language which was banned in schools since 1972 would be prohibited for public use, as well. The “Revival Process” officially began in December 1984 and was proclaimed as completed by February 1985, when some 100,000 people legally changed their names according to the policy.<sup>760</sup>

Although, this “Revival Process” indeed violated human rights, the ethnic cleansing that followed would be euphemistically known as the “Big Excursion” that occurred from May 30 to August 30, 1989, when the nearly 360,000 Bulgarian Turks who had refused to comply with the “Revival Process” were basically requested to return to Turkey or unofficially and forcefully be deported.<sup>761</sup> Prior to this, from May 20-30, 1989 a series of protests against the policy involved over 60,000 Bulgarians and Turks.<sup>762</sup> Turkey on August 22, closed its border to stop the flow of “Bulgarian citizens without a Turkish visa.”<sup>763</sup> On December 29, 1989, after the resignation of Todor Zhivkov, the new Bulgarian government under Petar Mladenov of the renamed Bulgarian Socialist Party ended this “Big Excursion” and announced that Bulgarian Turks would be welcomed back and their property would be restored.<sup>764</sup> By 1990, legal procedures were put in place to correct the

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<sup>759</sup> Pozharliev, Lyubomir. “Nationalism Revived: The ‘Revival’ Process in Bulgaria: Memories of Repression, Everyday Resistance and Neighborhood Relations 1984-1989.” 1-2.

<sup>760</sup> Pozharliev, Lyubomir. “Nationalism Revived: The ‘Revival’ Process in Bulgaria: Memories of Repression, Everyday Resistance and Neighborhood Relations 1984-1989.” 1-2.

<sup>761</sup> Kalinova, Evgenia. “Remembering the ‘Revival Process’ in Post-1989 Bulgaria.” 568.

<sup>762</sup> Kamusella, Tomasz. “Words Matter: Bulgaria and the 30th anniversary of the largest ethnic cleansing in Cold War Europe.” *New Eastern Europe*: February 25, 2019.

<sup>763</sup> Kamusella, Tomasz. “Words Matter.” *New Eastern Europe*: February 25, 2019.

<sup>764</sup> Kalinova, Evgenia. “Remembering the ‘Revival Process’ in Post-1989 Bulgaria.” 568-93.

damages done toward its Turks and in 1998, the Bulgarian President Petar Stoyanov formally apologized to the Turkish nation and by 1993, news broadcasts in Turkish were allowed on Bulgarian radio and on television by 2001.<sup>765</sup> In 2012, Bulgaria had recognized these events as a form of ethnic cleansing against its Turkish minority.<sup>766</sup>

From 1985 to 1988, the Bulgarian Broadcasting department of Radio Free Europe seized upon the “Revival Process” and called it out as a blatant violation of the human rights provisions under the 1975 Helsinki Accords. The Bulgarian secret services determined in a counterintelligence report from that time period, with these conclusions: (RFE) claims that returning Bulgarian names to Bulgarian Turks was the typical ethnic nationalism of the Balkans. Instead, (RFE) under US interests seeks to incite ethnic conflict within Bulgaria... they claim (our) aggressive NATO-neighbor in Turkey, which Bulgaria was destabilizing, while in fact, Turkish terrorists were destabilizing Bulgaria.<sup>767</sup>

## **Radio Free Europe’s Bulgarian Broadcasting Department:**

### **Audience Research Analysis, 1980s**

RFE’s Research Institute’s Media and Opinion Research Department had worked together with the Bulgarian Broadcasting Department in order to monitor and document public attitudes by its potential audience as a form of “polling.” This section, reviews the results of audience research surveys and internal reports that span the decade and beyond:

According to a 1979-1980 survey, about half of the adult population in Eastern Europe, had been listening to RFE, with an approximate total audience of over 27.4 million adults, compared to the VOA audience of 8.5 million and the BBC audience of 8.7 million.

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<sup>765</sup> Kalinova, Evgenia. “Remembering the ‘Revival Process’ in Post-1989 Bulgaria.” 568-93.

<sup>766</sup> Kalinova, Evgenia. “Remembering the ‘Revival Process’ in Post-1989 Bulgaria.” 568-93.

<sup>767</sup> M VI L 1160 T 3 (1985-1988) – “The Black Radio Propaganda against Socialism.” COMDOS.

<sup>768</sup> As shown in previously conducted surveys, the home radio stations were generally tuned into more often for entertainment rather than news, whereas RFE was listened to primarily for information rather than for entertainment. <sup>769</sup> Thus, only the combination between RFE together with another Western broadcasting station could produce the pattern similar to that which was associated with the regular time in listening to the regime radio.

In Bulgaria, Radio Free Europe would never replace listening to Radio Sofia, although the report concludes that this is to be expected in view of earlier findings which show that not news but primarily entertainment are what listeners wanted from their home radio station, which was considered to be a form of “secondary activity.” <sup>770</sup> By contrast, because listening to RFE serves news information needs, requiring the listener’s full attention, it is considered to be a form of “primary activity.” <sup>771</sup>

Although jamming plays a role here, it is not considered to be as decisive as one might have thought, since the proportion of semi-regular or irregular RFE listeners is hardly larger in Bulgaria than it is in Romania or Hungary. <sup>772</sup> The nearly 2.5 million Bulgarians who did listen to RFE demonstrated that jamming can be overcome provided listening motivations are strong enough to generate the effort. A possible reason why there was a larger audience for the BBC and DW rather than for RFE in 1979-80, could have been the domestic situation between 1978 and 1981, which would have paralleled the

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<sup>768</sup> “Listening to Western Radio in East Europe (1979-1980), January 1981.” 1. Open Society Archives, 300-6-2, box 6.

<sup>769</sup> “Listening to Western Radio in East Europe (1979-1980), January 1981.” 2. Open Society Archives, 300-6-2, box 6.

<sup>770</sup> “Listening to Western Radio in East Europe (1979-1980), January 1981.” 37. Open Society Archives, 300-6-2, box 6.

<sup>771</sup> “Listening to Western Radio in East Europe (1979-1980), January 1981.” 37. Open Society Archives, 300-6-2, box 6.

<sup>772</sup> “Listening to Western Radio in East Europe (1979-1980), January 1981.” 37. Open Society Archives, 300-6-2, box 6.

global breakdown of détente, resulting in an increase of censorship especially in light of the 1981 national jubilee celebrations. These developments meant that RFE's audience decreased in Bulgaria.<sup>773</sup> Additionally, RFE's audience research suffered setbacks during these years, as Bulgaria decreased the allowance of exit visas, stepping up its restrictive passport policies which made contact with potential listeners much more difficult than that of those from the other "captive countries."<sup>774</sup>

From another survey capturing trends in public attitudes, it was assessed that those interviewed, who had not listened to RFE broadcasts were not as anti-regime oriented as the regular RFE audiences.<sup>775</sup> However, it was also assessed that the "core audience" character of RFE's Bulgarian listeners failed to produce the exceptionally strong pro-US stance as observed among listeners from Czechoslovakia, in contrast, the Bulgarian net-rate in favor of the United States during an escalated conflict with the Soviet Union was (+72%) which was about equal to the national average of (+74%).<sup>776</sup>

From a 1980-81 survey on Eastern European attitudes on the crisis situation in Poland, the data confirms that there was a spike in those who had been interested to tune into RFE for news updates.<sup>777</sup> During the fall of 1981 when martial law was imposed within Poland, Western radio broadcasting had increased by 50% alone in Bulgaria, with

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<sup>773</sup> "Listening to Western Radio in East Europe (1979-1980), January 1981." 34. Open Society Archives, 300-6-2, box 6.

<sup>774</sup> "Listening to Western Radio in East Europe (1979-1980), January 1981." 31. Open Society Archives, 300-6-2, box 6.

<sup>775</sup> "The Overlap of Western Radio Audiences in East Europe: A Technical Report (1979/1980), May, 1981." 20.

<sup>776</sup> "The Overlap of Western Radio Audiences in East Europe: A Technical Report (1979/1980), May, 1981." 20.

<sup>777</sup> "Listening to Western Broadcasts during the Polish events of August to November 1980-January 1981." 7.

the RFE being ranked first, BBC second and VOA third.<sup>778</sup> However, according to that internal report, 29% of the respondents thought that the mass protests led by Solidarity resulting in the “Polish crisis” were perceived as being exaggerated in scope by RFE.<sup>779</sup>

From a 1981 survey, the overall evaluation of RFE was deemed slightly less positive than the image of the other broadcasters but in absolute terms, the most positive RFE evaluations were recorded among small core audience listeners from Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia followed by Hungary, Poland, and Romania.<sup>780</sup> It was assumed that the heavy jamming in Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria, actually resulted in a core audience of strongly motivated listeners. This investigation was based on 246 Bulgarian listeners being interviewed; 183 of whom were RFE listeners, 126 being BBC listeners and 43 being DW listeners.<sup>781</sup> Though the overall audience of Western broadcasts is significantly smaller in Bulgaria than in the other East European countries, RFE’s leading position is noteworthy considering that RFE is most heavily jammed in Bulgaria. The report considers that in 1981, RFE’s Bulgarian service was better able to resist jamming than the Czechoslovak service, as the survey showed a larger Bulgarian compared to Czechoslovak audience by 6% but also revealed that over 60% of Bulgarians listening to Western broadcasters were RFE listeners compared to the 40% of Czechoslovaks.<sup>782</sup> From a 1982 survey, it was found that most Eastern bloc listeners still considered RFE to be unbiased, although some respondents did detect bias, especially in Hungary, Poland and Romania, places where its

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<sup>778</sup> “Listening to Western Broadcasts during the Polish events of August to November 1980-January 1981.” 7.

<sup>779</sup> “Listening to Western Broadcasts during the Polish events of August to November 1980-January 1981.” 21.

<sup>780</sup> “Listening to Western Radio in East Europe (1981/Early 1982).” 1-2.

<sup>781</sup> “Listening to Western Radio in East Europe (1981/Early 1982).” 28.

<sup>782</sup> “Listening to Western Radio in East Europe (1981/Early 1982).” 31-32



broadcasts were not heavily jammed.<sup>783</sup> This survey also found that between 26% to 39% of respondents perceived a “right-wing” political bias while only less than 9% picked up any “left-wing” bias in the political perspective employed by the broadcaster.<sup>784</sup>

Another report found those travelling from Eastern Europe representing the Czechoslovak, Hungarian and Polish societies reflected far stronger pro-American attitudes than those who were interviewed from Western European societies such as Britain, France and West Germany.<sup>785</sup> While there was no data available from Bulgaria, Hungarian respondents unlike others showed a considerable degree of desire for a return to détente, it was speculated that the reason was their Kadarist compromise on “goulash” Communism.<sup>786</sup> Across the Eastern bloc, opinion on open acts of political resistance were endorsed most highly by Polish respondents whereas Czechoslovaks considered such actions with the lowest approval, while those Hungarians and Bulgarians who had refused to either approve or disapprove remained relatively the same.<sup>787</sup> The report asserts that: RFE’s contribution to the climate of opinion which sustains dissidents in their struggle for human rights, is also demonstrated in the high concentration of pro-dissident attitudes among RFE listeners. The degree of this support though depends on general climate of opinion.<sup>788</sup>

In another 1982 survey, concerning changes since the 1975 Helsinki Accords, an interesting shift in public opinion is noted in contrast to a similar 1975-76 survey during which (43%) of respondents believed that RFE is just another Western broadcaster in

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<sup>783</sup> “Perception of and Attitudes toward bias in RFE Broadcasts, March 1982.”

<sup>784</sup> “Perception of and Attitudes toward bias in RFE Broadcasts, March 1982.”

<sup>785</sup> “Attitudes to the United States and the Soviet Union in West and East Europe, March 1982.”

<sup>786</sup> “East Europeans assess the official East Bloc line on Peaceful Coexistence, December 1982.” 8

<sup>787</sup> “Highlights of East European attitudes toward acts of open opposition by dissidents (Internal Communications Aspects), 1983.” 4.

<sup>788</sup> (“Highlights of East European attitudes toward acts of open opposition by dissidents (Internal Communications Aspects), 1983.” 4.

contrasts to (75%) who identified the unique role played by RFE's messaging after the breakdown of détente and restart of Cold War confrontation during the early 1980s.<sup>789</sup>

In an internal program evaluation report from 1981-82 concerning RFE's Bulgarian service, some summaries, relevant remarks and recommendations are made:

The problem of the philosophical matrix of the commentaries on RFE also raises a question of source, aside from broadcasts of international news, the 'home service' aspect of the Bulgarian service appears to be based almost entirely upon official communist sources, such as its 'cross-reporting' from other communist countries, with the possible exception of Poland.<sup>790</sup>

The report recommended that the Bulgarian service is to essentially develop more sources of information other than the official press, especially within Bulgaria, but also work to broadcast articles written by Western journalists in English and translate them into Bulgarian. Also, this report then discusses the programs of Vladimir Kostov who was among the top broadcasters of the 1980s:

Kostov is one of the most subtle and effective of Radio Free Europe's Bulgarian commentators when he deals with current Bulgarian affairs, and there is no question aside from context and sources (that) his commentaries are intelligent, deal with serious questions in a serious way, and have a reasonable and appropriate tone... (Kostov) does an excellent job of applying outside theoretical concepts to the inner life of the party but on the other hand, he leaves the impression that he believes it possible for illogicalities and shortcomings within communist societies to be resolved within the context of communist doctrine...if he does in fact regard the situation, then Radio Free Europe is promoting reformist communism, but if he does not, then he should make the fact much more explicit.<sup>791</sup>

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<sup>789</sup> "Two Measures of RFE's Uniqueness in the Eyes of its Audience, June 1982." 17.

<sup>790</sup> "Report on the Bulgarian Service, RFE – May 13, 1982"

<sup>791</sup> "Report on the Bulgarian Service, RFE – May 13, 1982." 37.

Kostov who is praised for his intellectual ability to critique corruption within the party but also criticized on how he frames his ideological stance, is in contrast his colleague Inkiow mentioned in this program evaluation is regards to his ability to make use of effective satire: These commentaries, especially the satirical commentaries by Inkiow, are the sort of thing which can make Radio Free Europe's Bulgarian service highly effective. Inkiow may use communist sources for his analysis, but he approaches them with a sharp eye and a good knowledge of communist doctrine; the hearer cannot doubt that his objective is to demonstrate the irrationality of communist principles. He utilizes other sources, as in but overall, he exemplifies the thinking typical of the intelligent Bulgarian in Bulgaria when he jokes about the communist economy and communist philosophy. Therefore, the intelligent Bulgarian can identify very closely with such as speaker.<sup>792</sup>

In a similar internal program evaluation report from 1982-83 concerning RFE's Bulgarian service, a recommendation is made that Georgi Markov's programming is to be re-broadcast routinely since such programs are "sure to hold the listeners' attention from beginning to end. To be sure, the public everywhere craves revelations about the private lives of national or local celebrities."<sup>793</sup>

This evaluation reviews Vladimir Kostov's broadcast concerning Lyudmila Zhivkova's death in 1981 for which an obituary statement by RFE was never produced. Kostov portrays her legacy as being solely the consolidation of Communist party control over Bulgarian culture, even though her interest was much broader than that. Kostov's commentary asks why she even studied in Britain, and why she seem so interested in Western culture, while not mentioning her interest in Eastern culture.<sup>794</sup> In the report,

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<sup>792</sup> "Report on the Bulgarian Service, RFE – May 13, 1982." 40.

<sup>793</sup> "Report on the Bulgarian Service, RFE – May 13, 1982." 11.

<sup>794</sup> "Report on the Bulgarian Service, RFE – May 13, 1982." 34.

Kostov's commentary on Zhivkova's death was deemed "not enlightened because, apparently, he limited himself to officially available details of her biography."<sup>795</sup>

Furthermore, that same 1983 report details successes and failures during the previous year and makes recommendations about closer coordination between RFE and the US embassy in Sofia, and on following up on advice on the operation's commitment to objectivity in reporting on certain negative news stories concerning the US:

Radio Free Europe's policy guidelines concerning consistence with US foreign policy goals, objectivity and reporting of US problems and setbacks may be unrealistic at present...broadcasting to a country such as Bulgaria, where the United States is the target of daily vilification via every conceivable channel at the regime's disposal, it would be unrealistic to dwell upon US 'problems and setbacks'. While older Bulgarians probably retain a good image of America, Bulgaria's post-war generations have been raised in an official environment of rigid and blatant anti-American bias.<sup>796</sup>

Instead, the concrete recommendation is made to focus on domestic Bulgarian news:

Bulgarian affairs should be allotted a greater share of airtime devoted to specific topics recommended in lieu of peripheral topics...Bulgarians like to hear news and comment about themselves, especially so if they emanate from a radio source representing a country which many Bulgarians like and admire while others, on grounds of ideology or self-preservation, openly condemn but respect as a world power.<sup>797</sup>

In a similar internal program evaluation report from 1984 a note about the uniqueness of Bulgaria within the Eastern bloc is made with RFE's Bulgarian service:<sup>798</sup>

There are historical, geographical, political and cultural reasons why Bulgaria should be considered a worthwhile target for RFE's mission... The present Bulgarian Communist party leaders have a vested interest in vaunting the country's special relationship with Moscow. A truer picture of the real feelings of the Bulgarian people emerge from Georgi Markov's recently published book *The Truth That Killed* (1983) and

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<sup>795</sup> "Report on the Bulgarian Service, RFE – May 13, 1982." 34.

<sup>796</sup> "Report on the Bulgarian Service, RFE – May 13, 1982." 3.

<sup>797</sup> "Report on the Bulgarian Service, RFE – May 13, 1982." 8.

<sup>798</sup> "RFE Bulgarian Broadcasts: Review of Programs in January 1984 – March 23, 1984." 2.

particularly from the chapter entitled “love for big brother.” By providing Bulgarians with unfettered information about developments at home and abroad which their rulers deny them, RFE can help to breach their deliberate isolation, thus encouraging the survival of indigenous democratic and cultural traditions and the forces of pluralism which are the natural allies of the US and its partners in the free world. The question to be asked, therefore, is whether the programs of RFE as constituted at present, are likely to contribute to this objective?<sup>799</sup>

Later on, some negative comments about Kostov are made in relation to his colleagues:

Mr. Kostov is important for Radio Free Europe, although objections have been often heard in émigré circles, that recent dissidents have played the Communist game too long to deserve confidence and respectability and should not be allowed to hold a security clearance...Mr. Kostov’s commentaries are considered to be somewhat disappointing, in his matter of style rather than content, sometimes projecting the personality of a pedantic apparatchik for whom the use of evasive party jargon comes naturally and who is prepared to take some party directives at face value. In contrast to Mr. Kostov, Mr. Semerdzhiev, a high-ranking former party member, had scored highly with his political commentary on intimate knowledge of the BCP’s ideological somersaults in relation to Zhivkov.<sup>800</sup>

That report also warns against broadcasting too much negative news about the West:

It is difficult to see how the programmes could made more militantly anti-Communist or anti-Soviet without breaching current RFE/RL guidelines since 1976. However, it is recommended that information unfavorable to the West should be weighed very carefully before use. It goes without saying that RFE cannot hide the obvious programs and short-comings of the West’s open societies without ultimately losing credibility.. but it can avoid sowing dependency and contempt directed against the West.<sup>801</sup>

Between 1983 and 1984, the Bulgarians who were able to travel to the West, in particular to Vienna, Austria and were interviewed as respondents, had shown a 7 point increase in the same survey conducted since 1978-79 with (55%), 1979-80 (58%), 1981-

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<sup>799</sup> “RFE Bulgarian Broadcasts: Review of Programs in January 1984 – March 23, 1984.” 2.

<sup>800</sup> “RFE Bulgarian Broadcasts: Review of Programs in January 1984 – March 23, 1984.” 9.

<sup>801</sup> “RFE Bulgarian Broadcasts: Review of Programs in January 1984 – March 23, 1984.” 16-17.

82 (58%), 1982-83 (56%) and 1983-84 (63%) – that being the largest sample ever assembled who indicated that they listened to RFE.<sup>802</sup> However that (63%) of Bulgarians is lowest, when compared to the samples from Hungary (74%), Czechoslovakia (77%), Romania (81%) and Poland (90%).<sup>803</sup> In contrast, VOA ranged only between a (20%) in Bulgaria and a high of (48%) in Poland. RFE's audience remained the largest among Western broadcasters, but its listeners compared the broader population at large, nevertheless remained at (15.2%) being dwarfed by the regime controlled radio network at (64.7%) during this time period.<sup>804</sup> News reporting remained the single greatest attraction for its RFE audience at (95%) and (62%) for editorial commentaries. News programming such as Kostov's or Semerdzhiev's which offered a more in-depth analysis of current events, both nationally and internationally, attracted RFE listeners.<sup>805</sup>

During a 1984 survey, that assessed attitudes toward changing living conditions over 20 years, most Bulgarian respondents indicated a mixed response, whereas others from the Eastern bloc with the exception of the Hungarians, were decisively negative.<sup>806</sup> The highly regular RFE listeners, with their firmest refusal of perceiving progress under Communist rule, constituted the antithesis to the pro-regime groups in four out of the five countries. RFE's implicit message against accepting the status quo as permanent is, thus, most effectively internalized by the radio's most faithful followers.<sup>807</sup>

On opinions about how RFE should continue to cover the respective regimes of the Eastern bloc, the demand for a "very critical" stance was strongest in Romania (65%) and

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<sup>802</sup> "Listening to Western Radio in Bulgaria, July 1984."

<sup>803</sup> "Listening to Western Radio in East Europe, 1983/Early 1984, September 1984." 10.

<sup>804</sup> "Listening to Western Radio in East Europe, 1983/Early 1984, September 1984." 8.

<sup>805</sup> "East European Area Audience and Opinion Research - October, 1984."

<sup>806</sup> "East European Perceptions of Change and its direction. December, 1984"

<sup>807</sup> "East European Perceptions of Change and its direction December, 1984."

weakest in Hungary (37%).<sup>808</sup> The Bulgarian respondents similar to the Czechoslovaks responded at (57%) “very critical.”<sup>809</sup> The data gathered between 1972 and 1984, suggests that the way that their respective regime handles relations with the West, seems to correlate with how RFE’s audience preferred the coverage to be.

During the September 1, 1983 Soviet shootdown of Korean Air Lines Flight 007, a survey from April 1984, demonstrated that the overwhelming majority of respondents knew about the downing of the plane from Western radio broadcasting, followed by “word of mouth” in which the person transmitting the news was likely to have learned about it from the radio.<sup>810</sup> This KAL 007 civilian airplane incident although an accidental tragedy, developed into a propaganda disaster showcasing Soviet aggressive recklessness and contributed to the already escalated tensions with the West.<sup>811</sup>

Similarly, a survey of empirical research into public attitudes toward the causes of “tensions in the world today”, found that East European and American attitudes on the subject were similar while West European attitudes diverged in some important respects from both.<sup>812</sup> Eastern Europeans and Western Europeans as well as Americans all agreed that the Soviet armament drive was the chief reason for today’s tensions in the world. However, Western Europeans diverged from Eastern Europeans and Americans, claiming that the expanding Soviet influence in Europe was of secondary significance to the American foreign policy of renewed confrontation with the Soviet Union.<sup>813</sup>

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<sup>808</sup> “The Desired RFE stand toward the East European Regimes, November, 1984.” 14-15.

<sup>809</sup> “The Desired RFE stand toward the East European Regimes, November, 1984.” 14-15.

<sup>810</sup> “The East European Echo of the downing of the South Korean Airliner (communications aspects of, and personal reactions to, the event) April, 1984.” 2.

<sup>811</sup> “The East European Echo.” 2.

<sup>812</sup> “Who Bears Responsibility for World Tensions? December 1984.” 5.

<sup>813</sup> “Who Bears Responsibility for World Tensions? December 1984.” 5.

The 1984 report also found that “propaganda deployed by the East European regimes against the ‘aggressive policies of the Reagan administration’ had little effect, US policy of confrontation was selected least frequently.”<sup>814</sup> The Polish, Czechoslovak and Romanian responses reflected the strongest anti-Soviet sentiments; whereas the Bulgarians were least anti-Soviet and the Hungarians were comparatively not as anti-Soviet.<sup>815</sup> The potential of conflict within the Third World was selected more often by Bulgarian and Hungarian respondents than by the others, so it may not be accidental that they ranked the threat of “expanding Soviet influence” fewer (32-33% as opposed to 57%-58%).<sup>816</sup> Thus, criticism of the US for “world tensions” tended to be strongest among the Hungarians and Bulgarians, followed by the Romanians and then Poles, but least among Czechoslovaks.<sup>817</sup> Overall, all of these respondents who included RFE listeners and non-listeners alike, interpreted the world in pro-American terms while the Hungarians and Bulgarians showed a great deal of ambiguity.<sup>818</sup>

An audience research survey conducted between 1983 and 1985, showed that in Bulgaria as in the Eastern bloc, RFE (40%) remained the Western station with the largest audience in Bulgaria, followed by the BBC (27%), VOA (20%) and DW (10%).<sup>819</sup> So obviously, compared to the other Western broadcasters, RFE’s audience on an average day or week is quite substantial, although compared to the Communist-run domestic home radio (such as Radio Sofia), which was RFE’s archenemy, RFE always remained at second place.<sup>820</sup> The report speculates that this is due to heavy jamming and in order to expand

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<sup>814</sup> “Who Bears Responsibility for World Tensions? December 1984.” 10.

<sup>815</sup> “Who Bears Responsibility for World Tensions? December 1984.” 12-13.

<sup>816</sup> “Who Bears Responsibility for World Tensions? December 1984.” 16-17.

<sup>817</sup> “Who Bears Responsibility for World Tensions? December 1984.” 16-17.

<sup>818</sup> “Who Bears Responsibility for World Tensions? December 1984.” 16-17.

<sup>819</sup> “Media and Opinion Research Department, August 1983-December 1985.” 27.

<sup>820</sup> “Media and Opinion Research Department, August 1983-December 1985.” 27.



access to a broader potential audience, it recommends that the station work toward an increased signal strength as well as a potentially longer daily schedule. <sup>821</sup>

During a 1985 survey, Bulgarian respondents were asked to identify RFE's coverage as being 'reliable/unreliable' or 'responsible/irresponsible', 'up-to-date', 'antiquated' or 'too sharp'/'too mild' and most respondents thought that RFE's programming techniques were up to date (40%) whereas only (6%) considered them to be antiquated. <sup>822</sup> Bulgarian listeners were somewhat more likely than others to judge RFE's tone as being too sharp and RFE's image remained more or less constant over time, when one compared the survey results from the latest survey years 1978-79 to 1983-1984. <sup>823</sup>

However, from 1978-79 to the 1983-84 survey, the percentage of respondents assessing RFE as reliable fell slightly but so did those labelling it unreliable. <sup>824</sup> The highest percentage of positive ratings were made by older listeners over the age of 50, while those with elementary education were its most frequent listeners. The lowest percentage of positive ratings however were from younger listeners under the age of 35, and those with university education were its least frequent listeners. A significant finding indicated in the report, is that both young and older respondents considered RFE's tone to be more sharpened than too mild. <sup>825</sup> The overall ratings of RFE were generally positive, although the main surprise was that RFE has the least impact among the educated youth, which is considered to be "a group of vital importance for the future of Bulgaria and the future

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<sup>821</sup> "Media and Opinion Research Department, August 1983-December 1985." 27

<sup>822</sup> "Bulgarian Listeners assess Radio Free Europe, June 1985."

<sup>823</sup> "Bulgarian Listeners assess Radio Free Europe, June 1985."

<sup>824</sup> "Bulgarian Listeners assess Radio Free Europe, June 1985." 11.

<sup>825</sup> "Bulgarian Listeners assess Radio Free Europe, June 1985." 6.

effectiveness of RFE. (Therefore), serious consideration must be given to this phenomenon clearly revealed by the data.”<sup>826</sup>

A 1985 survey on Eastern bloc respondents asked about religious beliefs with the question: “Do you believe in the existence of God?” found that almost all of the Polish respondents, more than one-half of the Hungarian and Romanian respondents, and about 40% of the Czechoslovak and Bulgarian respondents replied “Yes, we believe in God” and thus, the vast majority of respondents were affiliated with a religious denomination.<sup>827</sup> The Poles attended church services much more often than the others, while 1/4 Czechoslovaks and Bulgarians and 1/3 Romanians and Hungarians actively participated in religious services.<sup>828</sup> Overall, RFE listeners were slightly more than non-listeners to be believers and the more frequent the listener, the more likely they were to be a believer than a non-believer.<sup>829</sup> All respondents reported that Christian church attendance was unchanged over the last 4-5 years but only in Bulgaria was there an exception, having a (9%) increase in church attendance.<sup>830</sup> On religious attitudes, the data shows that over (95%) of the Poles and Romanians and (90%) of the Hungarians associated with a religious denomination, while (82%) of the Czechoslovaks and (64%) of the Bulgarians were affiliated.<sup>831</sup> In the Czechoslovak, Hungarian and Bulgarian situation, a larger percentage of men rather than women went to church, while in the Polish and Romanian, much more women attended church regularly.<sup>832</sup> Of course, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia being Roman Catholic whereas Romania and Bulgaria as well as (Yugoslavia not included) being Eastern

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<sup>826</sup> “Bulgarian Listeners assess Radio Free Europe, June 1985. 12.

<sup>827</sup> “Religious Beliefs and Practices in East Europe, August 1985.” 2.

<sup>828</sup> “Religious Beliefs and Practices in East Europe, August 1985.” 2.

<sup>829</sup> “Religious Beliefs and Practices in East Europe, August 1985.” 2.

<sup>830</sup> “Religious Beliefs and Practices in East Europe, August 1985.” 2.

<sup>831</sup> “Religious Beliefs and Practices in East Europe, August 1985.” 2.

<sup>832</sup> “Religious Beliefs and Practices in East Europe, August 1985.” 8

Orthodox. Overall, RFE listeners were (7%) more likely to be religious, but not in Czechoslovakia, where the percentage was the same but in Bulgaria it was three times more likely that a believer would tune into RFE than a non-believer.<sup>833</sup> The report suggests that a new trend of religious consciousness has heightened among the young and well-educated respondents, accelerating the awakening of religious feelings in Bulgaria.<sup>834</sup> However, religious revival is strongest in Poland and Romania followed by Bulgaria, in Czechoslovakia and Hungary, there has actually been a decline in religiosity.<sup>835</sup>

Later on, an internal program evaluation report found from 1987 concerning RFE's Bulgarian Broadcasting department indicated that news reporting which constituted, nearly 20% of daily programming has been able to successfully "correct, complement and augment what is provided to Bulgarians by their own media (and) a significant proportion of broadcast time was devoted to commentaries and analyses of major news stories, most of which originated from the Bulgarian news service."<sup>836</sup> This report further concludes that in the 25 years since 1962, much had changed within Bulgarian society:

The Bulgarian population is exposed to a relatively wide range of native broadcast and print media, numerous newspapers, magazines, and journals, several radio and television stations; the quantity of information available is not limited but the content of the information and how it is broadcast, differs substantially from the West. The media has a clear didactical educational purpose, not to provide broad objective news coverage and impartial analysis of events and policy, but rather to inspire, direct and leads its audience; 'agitation and propaganda' it would be a mistake however, to assume that the Bulgarian media offers no critique of political, government, economic and other social institutions. Bulgaria has investigative reporters who have exposed well-publicized scandals...critique is always limited to the failure of individuals to carry out assigned

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<sup>833</sup> "Religious Beliefs and Practices in East Europe, August 1985." 8.

<sup>834</sup> "Religious Beliefs and Practices in East Europe, August 1985." 13.

<sup>835</sup> "Religious Beliefs and Practices in East Europe, August 1985." 15.

<sup>836</sup> "Evaluation of the Bulgarian-language service of RFE in July-August 1987." 1. Box 446. RFE/RL Corporate Records, Hoover Library and Archives.

responsibilities, and never of the actual failure of policies... Also, it would be equally a mistake to believe that Bulgarians are totally ill-informed or cut off from any sources of information...<sup>837</sup>

Much later on, another internal important program evaluation report found from the fall of 1989 right around the time of the collapse of Communism in Bulgaria, that:

Since November 10 1989, realities in Bulgaria have changed, and continue to evolve so much that Radio Free Europe has to entirely readjust its philosophy, targets and programming....

Therefore, some already broadcasted programs may be irrelevant already...<sup>838</sup>

Furthermore, the report suggests that with the rapidly changing situation, the radio broadcaster as a political communicator can now play the role of “an active participant in the internal opposition... and in shaping the events to come.” The main developments mentioned as being the focus of RFE’s news and commentary coverage are “the crumbling of Communist establishments and dogmas” and the “dissident activities (in which) RFE’s antenna became the de facto public tribune of the protest.”<sup>839</sup> RFE manager and Bulgarian dissident defector himself, Stephane Groueff raises these critical questions:

Does RFE’s Bulgarian Service avoid the mistake of equating opposition to Communism with support for democracy? The roots of Radio Free Europe and of its Bulgarian employees are in the struggle against Communism, and that experience colors current broadcasting. RFE’s commentators enthusiastically welcomed the formation of a new government free of Communist/Socialist participation...

Of course one does not expect Radio Free Europe to treat the Bulgarian Socialist Party or other Communists with sympathy, and there is no intention here to argue that the criticism directed against Communism past or present is not justified...<sup>840</sup>

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<sup>837</sup> “Evaluation of the Bulgarian-language service of RFE in July-August 1987.” 9-10. Box 446. RFE/RL Corporate Records, Hoover Library and Archives.

<sup>838</sup> “Bulgarian Broadcast Department BIB-Commissioned Evaluation in September-October 1989.”

<sup>839</sup> “Bulgarian Broadcast Department BIB-Commissioned Evaluation in September-October 1989.”

<sup>840</sup> “An Evaluation of Broadcasts in Bulgarian by RFE – April 17, 1991.” Box 446. RFE/RL Corporate Records, Hoover Library and Archives.

As RFE broadcasts were no longer being jammed by means of electronic interference, as a result, these uncensored transmissions accelerated social changes and became a guiding force for the political opposition in the new democracy. In the final years prior to the downfall of the Communist regime, the Bulgarian state security services were increasingly anxious about the impact of RFE's broadcasts on different public circles, as according to intelligence reports from February 1987, the broadcaster had a total of 1,825 employees and 46 radio transmitters, and transmitted approximately 1,060 hours per week in 21 languages with a focus on "human rights" issues in Eastern Europe.<sup>841</sup>

Unlike the high amount of concern by the Bulgarian government for the activities of Radio Free Europe, a state security report concerning the Voice of America stated that: VOA does not focus on Bulgarian news, only what is happening in the US, the Bulgarian language of the broadcasters is not proficient, the VOA does not mention human rights in Bulgaria, it broadcasts too much music, not enough interesting information, their schedule clashes with other preferred broadcasters, its rarely jammed but its signal strength is not clear, many people don't know it has a Bulgarian version, so RFE and the BBC are much more preferred than the VOA in Bulgaria.<sup>842</sup>

Both the VOA's and RFE's Bulgarian Broadcasting Department would continue to operate even after the immediate collapse of Communism in Bulgaria in late 1989 and 1990, and these two internal program evaluation reports from 1991 and 1992, show some of the changes in RFE's approach as well as how other aspects remained the same.

At the onset, the Bulgarian service has "adopted to the new conditions in the country, particularly the freedom and independence of the press and the greater

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<sup>841</sup> Baev, Jordan. *Chapter 13: Bulgarian regime countermeasures against Radio Free Europe* in Johnson and Eugene, *Cold War Broadcasting: Impact on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*, 273.

<sup>842</sup> "Information Message from August 11, 1986 on the Voice of America in Bulgaria."  
M VI L 1160 T 4 (1985-1990) – "On the subversive nature of RFE/RL in 1987 and the first half of 1988"

accessibility of political leaders and government officials.”<sup>843</sup> In the report, professor John D. Bell, a historian, writes that he had the chance to talk with an official from the now renamed Bulgarian Socialist party, who commented that there is no longer imbalance in the media, as the democratic opposition which was no longer underground, has had the powerful voice of RFE behind them the entire time, to which he comments that “I consider this a magnificent complement to RFE for the role it played in bringing down the Zhivkov regime and providing a voice to the country’s nascent political opposition.”<sup>844</sup> Bell writes: In the year that has passed since that conversation, conditions in Bulgaria have changed markedly. Bulgaria’s leading dissident, Dr. Zhelyu Zhelev, holds the presidency and a government has been formed with limited Socialist/Communist participation. Freedom of speech and of the press are realities and vigorous debates occur on every major issue. To what extent has RFE’s Bulgarian Service adapted to these new circumstances? Is its commitment to foster democratic values still essentially equivalent to opposition to Communism? These are difficult issues that have apparently not yet been fully resolved, accounting for what I perceived to be considerable unevenness in the coverage of domestic events.<sup>845</sup>

Finally, in the subsequent winter of 1992 program evaluation report, professor Bell emphasizes something significant that will indeed become the essence behind the new mission for Radio Free Europe and will remain of upmost relevance for Bulgaria and the Eastern bloc during the transition time period of the 1990s:

One of the greatest challenges facing Bulgaria is the creation of a viable civil society outside of the boundaries of government and political party life. The Bulgarian service can assist in this process by focusing attention on the efforts of individuals or groups to create institutions or professional organizations and to manage their

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<sup>843</sup> “An Evaluation of Broadcasts in Bulgarian by RFE – April 17, 1991.” 5. Box 446. RFE/RL Corporate Records, Hoover Library and Archives.

<sup>844</sup> “An Evaluation of Broadcasts in Bulgarian by RFE – April 17, 1991.” 5. Box 446. RFE/RL Corporate Records, Hoover Library and Archives.

<sup>845</sup> “An Evaluation of Broadcasts in Bulgarian by RFE – April 17, 1991.” 5. Box 446. RFE/RL Corporate Records, Hoover Library and Archives.

own affairs, in education, etc. an should make every effort to speak to the new generation that has largely assumed responsibility for the country's future. <sup>846</sup>

## **The Collapse of Communism in Bulgaria and throughout Eastern Europe, 1989-1991**

The Bulgarian Communist Party's monopoly on political power for 45 years held since September 9, 1944 (80 years ago as of 2024) officially ended on November 10, 1989 (35 years ago as of 2024) when after nearly three decades in power, Todor Zhivkov publicly resigned as head of party and head of state, in what can best be described as the very definition of a "palace coup" – this occurred on the day after the fall of the Berlin Wall symbolically marked the end of Communism throughout Eastern Europe on November 9, 1989. However, because Bulgaria did not fully experience the type of "people's revolution" in action witnessed across the Eastern bloc, but rather change occurred after a faction supporting Mikhail Gorbachev within the Politburo, finally decided to oust Todor Zhivkov.

So while the Communist Party's dictatorship ended, the renamed Bulgarian Socialist Party would go on to win the 1990 democratic elections with its first Prime Minister being Russian-born Andrei Lukanov (assassinated in 1996). The party was later voted out briefly by the country's first democratic opposition leader Filip Dimitrov, but returned again from 1994 to 1997 under young Zhan Videnov, and then again finally from 2005 to 2009 under Ukrainian-born Sergei Stanishev. Unlike the domestic situation in Poland, Hungary or even Russia where the Communists were unable to win again by challenging Boris Yeltsin in the 1996 elections, in part due to funding from the oligarchs and US interference in those Russian elections. The situation in Bulgaria had more in

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<sup>846</sup> "RFE's Bulgarian Service, Evaluation and Proposals – January 17, 1992." Box 446. RFE/RL Corporate Records, Hoover Library and Archives.

common with Romania and Ukraine in their political model of development which did not give rise to a flourishing civil society, nor any form of authoritarianism but rather descended into a corrupted but competitive oligarchy, which is still arguably in effect.

Sofia during the late 1980s diverged from Moscow as in a sense, it remained as frozen and stuck in 1984 as if the onset of Gorbachev's reforms in 1985 had not yet arrived. Bulgaria in that way, was more similar to Romania or even East Germany in how its leadership related to Gorbachev's reforms.<sup>847</sup> These reforms actually started under Andropov, who began to decrease subsidies to satellite states in prioritizing the USSR, and no longer upheld the Eastern Bloc as a favored partner in terms of trade. Zhivkov tried to adjust to this new reality as early as 1982, by implementing the New Economic Mechanism (NEM) but Bulgaria like the other satellite states was also heavily dependent on Soviet oil and gas to meet energy needs, so when the USSR faced with increased domestic economic challenges, could no longer provide oil and gas at cheap, subsidized prices, Sofia had to buy oil and gas at actual international market prices, further contributing to an increasingly worsening economic crisis.<sup>848</sup> In addition, Zhivkov tried but failed to establish a connection with the new leader, Gorbachev, and by 1987 had concluded that "the purpose of glasnost in the USSR was to expose the need for perestroika in the economy, but since Bulgaria had already introduced economic *perestroika* (NEM), it had no need for *glasnost*."<sup>849</sup> Later in 1989, Zhivkov bitterly admitted that "perestroika did not succeed in Bulgaria...Unfortunately, *perestroika* and its failure opened the doors for the fall, not only of perestroika, but of Communism as a whole."<sup>850</sup> For most people at the time, hope was

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<sup>847</sup> Kravetska-Owens, Nassya. *Communism versus Democracy: Bulgaria, 1944 to 1997*. 10.

<sup>848</sup> Bottoni, Stefano, and Sean Lambert. "The Decline and Fall of the Soviet Bloc (1973–1991)."

<sup>849</sup> Compton, Richard. *A Concise History of Bulgaria*. 208-215.

<sup>850</sup> Kravetska-Owens, Nassya. *Communism versus Democracy: Bulgaria, 1944 to 1997*. 16.



lost that a genuine attempt at *glasnost* and *perestroika* would reach Bulgaria, though nearly half the population continued to tune into Radio Free Europe, which continued to be jammed until 1989 (the Soviets had ceased jamming of Radio Liberty in 1987).

Bulgaria had enjoyed a relatively high level of development compared to the rest of the Communist world throughout the 1970s, but by the late 1980s, it was ranked among the most repressed Communist societies for human rights and socio-economic development.<sup>851</sup> Zhivkov's position was challenged within the party, after the "Revival Process" was accelerated into the "Big Excursion" during the summer of 1989. The public intellectual class which he had so skillfully manipulated since the days of Markov, finally turned against Zhivkov, together with the reformist faction led by Lilov (expelled in 1983) and ironically, the KGB itself at Gorbachev's direction.<sup>852</sup> While, this moment was indeed a turning point toward the transition away from Communism, it was long and though one.

November 10, did not mark the beginning of a process of moral healing in Bulgaria, while Zhivkov officially resigned, he was never tried by a court nor convicted of any crime, living his life under "house arrest" retirement until his death in 1998, and even writing a memoir in defense of his controversial political career: *Against Some Lies*.<sup>853</sup> Zhivkov correctly calculated that the political chaos and the high social cost of the economic transition, would eventually breed nostalgia for the Communist era, he embodied.<sup>854</sup>

Nassya Krlevska provides an in-depth historical and political analysis on the transition time period, explaining how in contrast to the rest of the Eastern bloc, once the Communist regimes collapsed and elections were held, the alternative in Bulgaria was not

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<sup>851</sup> Krlevska-Owens, Nassya. *Communism versus Democracy: Bulgaria, 1944 to 1997*.

<sup>852</sup> Krlevska-Owens, Nassya. *Communism versus Democracy: Bulgaria, 1944 to 1997*. 1-10.

<sup>853</sup> Crampton, Richard. "The Communists in Power: The Rule of Todor Zhivkov, 1965–1989."

<sup>854</sup> Crampton, Richard. "The Communists in Power: The Rule of Todor Zhivkov, 1965–1989."

there, its opposition democratic parties were made up of members who were not part of an underground political party or trade union, which had only begun to organize informally in 1988 and most if not all, were former members of the Communist party, including the academic-turned dissident who did not ever become a defector, Dr. Zhelyu Zhelev.<sup>855</sup>

Professor Zhelev had authored a book which was banned in 1982 and had simply been titled *Fascism* (1967), his work subtly highlighted the commonalities shared within totalitarian societies. Zhelev would go on to serve as Bulgaria's first democratic President from 1992 to 1997 (a big accomplishment for the anti-Communist opposition) although the Presidency (at that time) was created by the new Constitution, as largely a diplomatic and ceremonial title, as opposed to the Prime Minister who held the real political power.

After the removal of Zhivkov as head of party and head of state in 1989, his own foreign minister Petar Mladenov was appointed as head of state while maintaining control of the ruling party which renamed itself on April 1, 1990, making emphasis of its reformist commitment to "social democracy" or "democratic socialism."<sup>856</sup>

During the mass demonstrations of December 1989, the new 18 separate opposition organizations against the Communists met at the Sociology department of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and organized themselves into the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF or SDS).<sup>857</sup> In fact, some of the earliest form of civil society protest movements coalesced around the Bulgarian Helsinki Watch Committee as well as a newly formed in 1988, "Ecoglasnost" organization which focused on various ecological and environmental issues such as the impact on Bulgaria from the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster in Ukraine.

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<sup>855</sup> Kravetska-Owens, Nassya. *Communism versus Democracy: Bulgaria, 1944 to 1997*. 1-10.

<sup>856</sup> Kravetska-Owens, Nassya. *Communism versus Democracy: Bulgaria, 1944 to 1997*. 28

<sup>857</sup> Kravetska-Owens, Nassya. *Communism versus Democracy: Bulgaria, 1944 to 1997*. 175

These demonstrations reached a turning point on December 14, which a newspaper declared “can be considered to be a key date in the evolution of democracy in Bulgaria. On that day, Sofia witnessed something it had not seen for 45 years.”<sup>858</sup> Although these peaceful protests continued into January 1990, no violent clashes ensued until January 1997, when an aggravated group of protestors openly stormed the Parliament building. These protests were contained and there were no bloody uprisings as Romania had experienced with the televised execution of Ceausescu and his wife, in December 1989.

The overall relatively “quiet” atmosphere within the government led some to believe, that instead there would be no “clean break” with the past, as no massive symbolic changes were happening. Krlevska quotes a conversation taking place between protestors at a demonstration, with someone supporting the new ruling Socialists saying: “May November 10 mark the second liberation of Bulgaria” and someone else responding: “Hey, surely you don’t consider the seizing of power by the Reds in 1944 as a liberation, do you?” Ignoring that remark, the leading speaker continues by exclaiming: “Let us hope that this would not remain merely a romantic initiative or a heroic intention. We have been lied to as a nation many times. We have no more energy for empty hopes. This is why I want us to support the efforts of Comrade Petar Mladenov, to rally together all forces of the nation, to save our humanity, to save our Fatherland!”<sup>859</sup> Krlevska critiques the “round table” format which had worked well for Poland and the others, but which did not work in Bulgaria, as it allowed the renamed Socialists to claim that they also wanted to reform the system along with the democratic opposition party. Thus on June 11, 1990 – Bulgaria’s

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<sup>858</sup> Krlevska-Owens, Nassya. *Communism versus Democracy: Bulgaria, 1944 to 1997*. 192

<sup>859</sup> Krlevska-Owens, Nassya. *Communism versus Democracy: Bulgaria, 1944 to 1997*. 35

first democratic elections since 1931 were won with a large majority by the BSP (a similar situation only occurred in Romania in contrast to the other Eastern European nations).<sup>860</sup>

On November 15, 1990 the “People’s” part was dropped from the official name which remained; the Republic of Bulgaria. But Bulgaria was the very first one to draft a new constitution, which was a byproduct of the ruling Socialist-majority in Parliament. Kravevska argues that “it is no secret that some of its provisions are hampering the country’s democratic development to this day” especially in regards to how corruption is addressed by the judiciary system.<sup>861</sup> This is not a case of authoritarianism, but rather of the rise of an oligarchy-run organized crime network taking over the government while allowing for corruption and never legally holding to account the former regime.

The 1991 Constitution was inspired by a mixture of European parliamentary systems which recreated the unicameral Bulgarian Grand National Assembly consisting of 240 MPs who are elected every four years, or whenever a government collapses. This Parliament then elects the Prime Minister as head of party and the Council of Ministers, which run the government alongside the President who as head of state runs the military. During the 1990s, a multiparty system developed with the BSP, SDS and DSP – Turkish Movement for Rights and Freedoms led by Ahmed Dogan who was viewed as a heroic figure against the “Revival Process” but then turned out to have been a secret service informant. Dogan allegedly maintained relations with Turkish President Erdogan and was considered to be a “kingmaker” in coalitions, until recently. Between 2001 and 2005, the former monarch was elected as Prime Minister Simeon Saksokorburggotski who assured

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<sup>860</sup> Vodicka, Karel. “From Eastern Bloc to European Union” in *Comparative Processes of Transformation since 1990*. 231

<sup>861</sup> Vodicka, Karel. “From Eastern Bloc to European Union” in *Comparative Processes of Transformation since 1990*. 210

Bulgaria's entry into NATO and the EU. Then from 2009 to 2020, Boyko Borissov (ex-security guard to Zhivkov) but of the pro-European populist GERB party (continuation of SDS) was in power for three consecutive terms until that coalition collapsed, leading to a political crisis since April 2021 in which a ruling government cannot be formed and pro-Russian President Rumen Radev (elected since 2016) remains the most influential figure.

As a result of the long and difficult post-Communist transition of the 1990s, Bulgaria has regularly featured in Freedom House rankings as among the lowest level in terms of consolidation of civil society of all the post-Communist states, on par more with its neighbors in the Western Balkans, across the Black Sea in the Caucasus and even Central Asia, rather the rest of Central and Eastern Europe. At the same, it should be noted that Bulgaria in the past decade or since joining the European Union, has made significant progress, despite widespread corruption remaining a persistent problem.<sup>862</sup>

Bulgaria was also negatively impacted by the decade-long Balkan Wars of the 1990s, as its first democratic Prime Minister Philip Dimitrov who responded to the breakup of Yugoslavia beginning in 1991, commented on those uncertain circumstances:

Out of all the countries in the region, Bulgaria was affected the most by the events of the former Yugoslavia because of its proximity to Macedonia. For the rest of the world, Macedonia's case offered no solution to Yugoslavia's problem. Still, it did resolve the issue of containing the problem within the 'Western Balkans' rather than affecting 'the Balkans' in their entirety...Bulgaria could not have withstood a flare-up of nationalist sentiment like the one in neighboring Greece. Bulgaria was fighting for its future and the future of the region. Greece could afford to delve into the past...<sup>863</sup>

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<sup>862</sup> Vodicka, Karel. "From Eastern Bloc to European Union" in *Comparative Processes of Transformation since 1990*. 293

<sup>863</sup> Kravetska-Owens, Nassya. *Communism versus Democracy: Bulgaria, 1944 to 1997*. 370

Bulgarian relations with its newly formed Balkan neighbors in Serbia, Macedonia as well as Greece, Turkey and Romania all stabilized and improved, at around this time. However, while Bulgaria's "special relationship" with Russia was over, warm and positive ties with both Russia and Ukraine were maintained especially in regards to cultural diplomacy, energy infrastructure as well as in the flow of investments. On his opinion of Yeltsin's Russia during the 1990s, Dimitrov remarks about Moscow's view of the Balkans: The battle for Bulgaria was also crucial for Russia's foreign policy on the Balkans...the aim was to fit Bulgaria into the Russian concept of 'near abroad', i.e. a group of countries 'legitimately' treated as a zone of Russian influence.... In early 1993, Russian foreign minister Kozyrev first promoted the idea of the so-called 'Orthodox Arch' and then the notion of a 'Byzantine-Slavic' cultural space that was meant to include Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia and even Greece into the Russian orbit (together with Belarus and Ukraine). This was accepted by many European countries as a legitimate reaction of the former Empire (to the French it probably seemed innocently similar to the concept of Francophonie)... While trying to reestablish control at least over some former members of the Soviet Union (namely Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova)...Russian foreign policy also aimed at creating a stronghold on the Balkans.

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As a result of those conflicts on the Balkans, NATO's first ever military intervention, by bombing Belgrade in March 1999, eventually made Serbia into a long-standing ally that redeveloped its own "special relationship" with the Russian Federation. Among others in Eastern Europe; Bulgaria has found itself among Slovakia and Hungary flirting at times with Moscow during most of the thirty years since the end of the Cold War.

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<sup>864</sup> Kravetska-Owens, Nassyia. *Communism versus Democracy: Bulgaria, 1944 to 1997*. 373

## **American Public Diplomacy with the Soviet satellite states, Gorbachev, the breakup of the Soviet Union and the End of the Cold War, 1985-1991**

Throughout the late 1980s and the 1990s, the Soviet-Bulgarian special relationship would gradually be dissolved, although relations between Sofia and Moscow remained stable into the 2020s. As for how things began to change not only for Bulgaria but for indeed for the entire Communist world back in 1982, after an 18-year long era characterized by economic stagnation and wide-spread corruption amidst the breakdown of détente, the Ukrainian-born Soviet paramount leader, Leonid Brezhnev died.

Then long-time KGB director, Yuri Andropov took over during a deep chill in tensions, and then died after 2 years, to be followed by his ally, Konstantin Chernenko who ruled for another year before dying in 1985. The turning point arrived when, the geriatric leadership class while dying away, nominated the youngest member of the politburo, Mikhail Gorbachev in March 1985 and encouraged him to face the daunting task of reviving, reinvigorating and reforming the economy, which he began with his signature economic policy known as “*perestroika*” and its political equivalent “*glasnost*.”

When the CPSU selected Gorbachev, they did so with the full support of the secret services which controlled much of Soviet society and the military-industrial complex which was the backbone of the Soviet centrally planned economy.<sup>865</sup> Gorbachev was of a different generation and was attracted to big ideas of change and reform after witnessing the stagnation of the preceding geriatric leadership of Brezhnev. Cold War historians have affirmed that while long-term and short-term global structural dynamics defined the end of the Cold War, the ultimate decision-making was done by Gorbachev, who:

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<sup>865</sup> Brown, Archie. *The Gorbachev Factor*.

...did more than anyone else to end the Cold War...(His) pursuit of revolutionary goals by realization that means were no less important in politics than ends marked one of his sharpest breaks with the Bolshevik legacy and decades of Communist practice, within his first five years in power, Gorbachev evolved from Communist reformer to democratic socialist of a social democratic type...His public pronouncements and policies increasingly reflected that personal political evolution.<sup>866</sup>

Gorbachev had since assuming power in 1985, carried out an anti-corruption effort which was actually attempted as far back as 1982, and which had as its goal to reform the bureaucratic government inefficiencies of the centrally planned economy.<sup>867</sup> However, the single most tragic symptom of these societal problems was most dramatically demonstrated with the Chernobyl nuclear plant disaster near Kiev, Ukraine on April, 1986. The explosion was caused in part due to technical issues with the power plant being covered up by the local bureaucracy due to political censorship but would come to symbolize the failure of the entire experiment of constructing a Communist system that worked for its people.

At that time, in contrast to previous Soviet political traditions, Gorbachev decided instead to publicly disclose (although with delay) the catastrophe despite the government's embarrassment, in order to highlight the major issues within the Soviet military industrial complex, which was the driving force behind the nation's command economy.<sup>868</sup>

Gorbachev only began enacting these reforms starting in 1986, since throughout this first year, Reagan's 1983 Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) and the ongoing 1979 Operation Cyclone which was countering the Soviet military by proxy in Afghanistan, were the top two US initiatives challenging the Soviet military-industry and command economy.

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<sup>866</sup> Zubok, Vladislav. *Gorbachev and the End of the Cold War: Different Perspectives on the Historical Personality.*

*In the Cold War Endgame*, edited by William C. Wohlforth. 207-241.

<sup>867</sup> Plokhy, Serhii. *The Last Empire: The Final Days of the Soviet Union.* 319-388

<sup>868</sup> Plokhy, Serhii. *The Last Empire: The Final Days of the Soviet Union.* 319-388



The debate among historians then asks, if Gorbachev made his changes in foreign policy in reaction to US foreign policy, or if he had always intended to embark on the reforms, he eventually implemented, regardless of rollback as advanced by the Reagan Doctrine. The question raised then is to what extent, did Gorbachev's "new thinking" on foreign affairs, rooted in reviving the stagnant command economy, was inspired in response to the change in American foreign policy after 1980, when tensions restarted?

The renewed rhetoric had culminated a nuclear crisis by 1983, as Andropov apparently was convinced that Reagan would start a nuclear war, however after his death and with the rise of Gorbachev, a new diplomatic approach by both leaders attempted. A series of superpower summits between Reagan and Gorbachev starting with the first 1985 Geneva Summit in Switzerland, which initiated the interpersonal relationship between the two leaders where they agreed upon renewing a nuclear disarmament framework.

During the second 1986 Reykjavik Summit in Iceland, Reagan refused to backdown on the threat of SDI as a bargaining chip in negotiations. Reagan's "Star Wars" dream also apparently had another aspect to it, which was his own belief that the SDI would render nuclear weapons obsolete, and on that impulse, he tried to make common ground with Gorbachev, suggesting an agreement aimed at the abolition of all ballistic missiles within ten years.<sup>869</sup> This agreement formed the framework for the breakthrough Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF Treaty) which was signed at the Washington Summit on December 8, 1987 at the White House. This treaty (which the US annulled in 2019) effectively ended the Nuclear Arms Race, as both sides agreed not only to reduce their

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<sup>869</sup> Hoffman, David. *The Dead Hand: The Untold Story of the Cold War Arms Race and its Dangerous Legacy*. 212-214, 223-228

nuclear arsenals but to eliminate an entire category of nuclear weapons through a comprehensive on-site verification program, allowing for further nuclear disarmament.

On December 7, 1988, nearly an year after the Washington Summit, at the Governor's Summit in New York, Gorbachev addressed the General Assembly of the United Nations with his famous speech announcing to the world, the Soviet "new thinking" on foreign affairs. This 1988 UN speech by Gorbachev was quite revolutionary in that it actually proclaimed a path toward effectively ending the Cold War. In fact, this is perhaps one of the most significant UN speeches ever delivered in history. While on US soil at the UN headquarters, Gorbachev stated explicitly that: "that force and the threat of force can no longer be, and should not be instruments of foreign policy."<sup>870</sup> Additionally, he stated: On the whole, our credo is as follows: Political problems should be solved only by political means, and human problems only in a humane way...Now about the most important topic, without which no problem of the coming century can be resolved: disarmament... Today I can inform you of the following: The Soviet Union has made a decision on reducing its armed forces. In the next two years, their numerical strength will be reduced by 500,000 persons, and the volume of conventional arms will also be cut considerably. These reductions will be made on a unilateral basis... By this act, just as by all our actions aimed at the demilitarization of international relations...<sup>871</sup>

This official announcement of a limited withdrawal of the Soviet military stationed throughout the Warsaw Pact collective security alliance since the start of the Cold War, held profound consequences for the Eastern bloc in 1989. The collapse of Communism in the eight countries of Eastern Europe, six of which were Soviet satellite states, was able to

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<sup>870</sup> "Address by Mikhail Gorbachev at the UN General Assembly Session (Excerpts)." December 7, 1988, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, CWIHP Archive. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116224>

<sup>871</sup> "Address by Mikhail Gorbachev at the UN General Assembly Session (Excerpts)," December 7, 1988.

occur within such a short time only because the Soviet Union under Gorbachev upheld his “new thinking” on foreign policy not only as an idea but as actual practice.

This change to Soviet grand strategy as outlined in the 1988 UN speech was manifested as the most important short-term breakthrough that resulted in the end of the Cold War. For Gorbachev, this “new thinking” strategy was his solution to the crisis concerning the overall sustainability of Communism, and its main elements included the ideologization of international politics based on “universal human values” as opposed to the traditional Marxist-Leninist concept of “class struggle” as well as most critically, the abandonment of the use of military force as a means of foreign policy.<sup>872</sup>

Ultimately, Gorbachev believed that the USSR together with the US through a UN framework would be able to play a responsible role in a new rules-based world order after the Cold War ended. On Soviet-American relations during the course of the superpower summitry from 1985 and 1989, a contemporary historian have noted that the Eastern bloc was not even the main discussed topic:

...As strange as it may seem, questions about East Germany, Hungary and even Poland cropped up little in the talks between the United States and the Soviet Union. Afghanistan by contrast attracted ceaseless attention...for (the Americans), the Afghan question was litmus test of Gorbachev’s sincerity in changing his entire foreign policy.<sup>873</sup>

Although that may have been the case up until February 15, 1989, when the last Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan, the momentous year featured the unexpected series of events that unfolded across that Eastern bloc and set the stage for the imminent conclusion of the Cold War confrontation. The year 1989, began in the US with the inauguration of

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<sup>872</sup> Service, Robert. *The End of the Cold War: 1985-1991*, 329-340

<sup>873</sup> Service, Robert. *The End of the Cold War: 1985-1991*. 329-340

President George H.W. Bush, who had extensive experience in foreign policy, not only as Ronald Reagan's two-term Vice President but also as director of the CIA and ambassador to the People's Republic of China in the 1970s when that nation embraced economic reforms similar to what the Soviets were pursuing in terms of "perestroika" in the 1980s.

However, on June 4, 1989, the Chinese Communist Party's crackdown on student protestors during the infamous Tiananmen Square protests in Beijing, ended any hopes for potential political reforms within that emerging economic power. On that same day in Eastern Europe, Poland held its first partially free parliamentary elections, during which the trade union turned political party, Solidarity won the majority in the new Parliament.

In response to this and all the other events, "Gorbachev refused to interfere; he made clear that he would never endorse a reproduction of the Chinese methods in Warsaw or sanction military intervention from abroad."<sup>874</sup> This development further set the stage for the so-called Autumn of Nations "people power" revolutions that would sweep across the region, tearing down the Iron Curtain, and resulting in the collapse of Communism symbolically marked by the fall of the Berlin Wall on the evening of November 9, 1989.

In effect, Gorbachev's official abandonment of military intervention in the Soviet-occupied Eastern bloc as affirmed by the 1968 Brezhnev Doctrine was reframed humorously; the "Sinatra Doctrine" as coined by Foreign Ministry spokesman Gennady Gerasimov in 1989, alluding to a Frank Sinatra's song called *My Way*. This essentially meant that those within the "Socialist family of nations" including Yugoslavia and Albania will be free from now on to chart an independent future without a threat of Soviet invasion.

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<sup>874</sup> Service, Robert. *The End of the Cold War: 1985-1991*, 329-340

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the United States and the Soviet Union (for the final time) convened at the Malta Summit from December 2-3, 1989, where for the first time US President Bush and Soviet Premier Gorbachev, representing the two competing superpowers met with the intended purpose to officially end the Cold War confrontation. Gorbachev at this last Cold War summit, concluded with the bold and hopeful statement:

The world is leaving one epoch and entering another.

We are at the beginning of a long road to a lasting, peaceful era.

The threat of force, mistrust, psychological and ideological struggle should all be things of the past.<sup>875</sup>

For all his noble efforts at diplomacy, Gorbachev would be symbolically awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1990. Of course, while the world did indeed enter a new era during this time, it was not exactly what Gorbachev had in mind when proposing a new era of peaceful Soviet-American cooperation. That following year, on October 3, the world would witness the reunification of Germany after four decades of division while the Russian Federation lead by Gorbachev's main rival, Boris Yelstin declared its sovereignty on June 12, 1990 as part of the formation of a new Commonwealth of Independent States.

At that point with the Cold War being effectively over, the US under President Bush would unilaterally wage the Persian Gulf War without any concern for the restraints of the no longer relevant bipolar Cold War structure. Meanwhile, an attempted coup d'état (this event was covered extensively by Radio Liberty as it was no longer jammed, as of 1987) lead by the state secret services and including military leadership from the Afghan war would try to depose Gorbachev from power in the name of preserving the USSR. This failed KGB coup d'état on August 19, 1991 was the final turning point that led to the

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<sup>875</sup> Plokyh, Serhii. *The Last Empire: The Final Days of the Soviet Union*. 319-388.

Belavezha Accords on December 8, 1991 and ultimately toward Gorbachev's resignation which fatally sealed the fate of the Soviet Union on the evening of Christmas Day 1991.

On December 25, 1991, the famous red banner that symbolized international Communism ever since the Russian Revolution of October 25, 1917, would be finally removed from the Kremlin after the formal resignation of the last Communist Party General Secretary, in effect resulting in the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), after nearly 70 years on the world stage. In retrospective, while most Soviets at the time supported Gorbachev's domestic reforms of "*glasnost*" and "*perestroika*" and even the "new thinking" on foreign affairs as advanced by the last Soviet leader, which resulted in the collapse of Communism in Eastern bloc; the controversy is usually centered on the series of events of 1990-91 during which the breakup of the Soviet Union itself unraveled. It is the disintegration of the Soviet Union which was cited by Putin as far back as 2005 to be, in his opinion the "greatest geopolitical disaster of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century."

For Russia, the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union is naturally a controversial subject that has been politicized as the foundational basis of the current government which has been in power for nearly 25 years. During this time the Russian Federation has engaged in its own public diplomacy and propaganda efforts against the Western world, spearheaded since 2005 by the Russia Today (RT) international broadcasting news network. RT along with similar Russian-backed operations have been described by the West, as misinformation and disinformation and attention has increased especially since the US government investigations into Russian interference around the 2016 Presidential election. The American administrations of Clinton, Bush, Obama, Trump and Biden have all experienced varying degrees of difficulties in diplomacy with Putin.

As of 2024, it has been 10 years since the “Euromaidan” revolution of 2014 which re-directed Ukraine’s orientation toward the historically American-backed European Union and away from Russia’s attempts to form a new Eurasian Union. What followed was the Russian annexation of the Crimea announced on March 18, 2014 and the subsequent strategic attempts to dominate the Black Sea, as well as a hybrid war in Eastern Ukraine which has escalated since February 24, 2022 when Russian President Vladimir Putin announced a “special military operation” leading to a state of full scale war with Ukraine.

This war has been characterized as marking “the end of the post-Cold War world order” forged primarily by the US, in the past 30 years. It has increased global tensions between Russia and China on one hand, and the US and NATO on the other, leading to the breakdown of normal relations between Russia and the EU, including Bulgaria which did not shift its diplomatic stance on Russia after 2014 but in the wake of the most recent invasion changed course on Russia, on board with the EU and NATO.

### **Chapter Conclusions: The Historiography and Historical Schools of Thought on the End of the Cold War**

The historiographical debate that overshadows the timeframe and research of this dissertation considers the broader three schools of thought concerning the short-term and long-term causes for the end of the Cold War. Although in reality, academic arguments concerning the short-term and long-term causes for the end of the Cold War, can be categorized either within one of the above or most commonly, somewhere between these three historiographical schools of thought on the history of the Cold War confrontation, though these three categories concern particularly the way that the historical narrative is recorded. These are the three distinct historiographical viewpoints briefly summarized:

The first (1<sup>st</sup>) view maintains generally that the United States won the Cold War and basically defeated the Soviet Union. This school of thought is termed the “triumphalist” approach which emphasizes the role that US President Ronald Reagan played throughout the 1980s. Historians of this view and former statesmen tend to argue that US foreign policy played the pivotal role in the breakup of the USSR, citing the largest peacetime arms buildup in history, exemplified by the 1983 Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) also known as “Star Wars” and the US-backed CIA clandestine involvement in the Soviet-Afghan War from 1979 to 1989, known as Operation Cyclone. This perspective is quite a popular one in America and in parts of Europe, while it certainly has historical legitimacy, it can be critiqued due to the absolutist argumentation behind this approach and the impact of its political implications, which tend to focus solely on the role of the US.

The second (2<sup>nd</sup>) view maintains that the Cold War ended largely due to structural aspects in international relations rather than because of interpersonal relations between Reagan and Gorbachev. This school of thought views Reagan’s hardline policies of “rollback” as opposed to the traditional “containment” of Communism, as having restarted the conflict after the détente era of peaceful coexistence ended in 1979. These historians argue that the return to heightened Cold War confrontation evident in the infamous 1983 “Evil Empire” speech culminating in the NATO Able Archer Nuclear Scare, made it more difficult for Gorbachev to pursue improved relations with the West after 1985 and emboldened the Soviet hardliners to oppose and undermine his reformist policies, as eventually seen in the failed KGB coup d’état in 1991, shortly after which the USSR ultimately disintegrated. Historians of school view maintain, that the Cold War could have ended when détente was at its peak, with the Western world confronting the Communist



world based on human rights as evident in the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) which produced the 1975 Helsinki Accords. This view is the most common one globally, but can be criticized especially given that its assumption almost rests on a historical hypothetical scenario, although it is firmly rooted within a structural viewpoint.

The third (3<sup>rd</sup>) view is the opposite of the first view and maintains that basically the Cold War ended because the Soviet Union dissolved in 1991 at the behest of the its last leader, Mikhail Gorbachev. From this view, the Soviets themselves ended the Cold War. This school of thought does indeed emphasize both the foreign and domestic factors that contributed to the decline and disintegration of the Soviet system during the 1980s. Historians who hold this perspective tend to focus on Gorbachev's "new thinking" in foreign affairs and particularly, the well-known domestic policies of "*glasnost*" and "*perestroika*" from 1986 to 1991, as central in contributing to the end of the conflict, which they consider, the Soviet leadership ultimately decided it was time to do. While this view indeed holds historic legitimacy and is common around the world, it shares the somewhat absolutist tendencies of the first approach and can be quite problematic in its political and geopolitical consequences especially for Russia's role in the former Soviet space.

Although, this research dissertation's topic does not primarily concern the question of the conclusion of the Cold War and the assertion of its argument into the broader historiography is a peripheral matter that is indirectly addressed throughout this final chapter and will be more concretely tied up throughout conclusion.

The assessment on the role of American public diplomacy and propaganda in Bulgaria during the Cold War best falls within the 2<sup>nd</sup> school of thought that focuses on the 1970s era of *détente* and the broader long-term structural aspects of international relations.

Although aspects of this work's assessment on American public diplomacy and propaganda clearly falls within the 1<sup>st</sup> school of thought and an analysis of the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe, certainly confirms the 3<sup>rd</sup> school of thought on the end of the Cold War.

Although, the argument and analysis of this final chapter also demonstrate that the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> schools of thought are equally as relevant in regards to the short-term causes that directly led to the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe in 1989 and the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991. In fact, the 1<sup>st</sup> perspective is as significant as a cause for the 3<sup>rd</sup> perspective, since it is both true that the restart of the Cold War caused by the breakdown of détente, did allow for US foreign policy under Reagan to be successful in terms of forcing Gorbachev to respond and engage in serious diplomacy with the United States.

However, at the same time, it was ultimately the decision-making of Gorbachev, despite reacting to Reagan's policies, that was the actual cause for the fall of Communism and breakup of the Soviet Union, while the initiative to peacefully put an end the Cold War conflict, was pursued equally by both Washington and Moscow in the late 1980s.

Therefore, the viewpoint that the US won the Cold War with the USSR or that the Cold War era was not won as it was not a war but a contest, which the USSR wanted to put an end to, when Moscow decided to stop militarily projecting power and to ultimately dissolve itself and its sphere of influence in Eastern Europe, are both historically correct and both play a big role in the framework of understanding this time period. The viewpoint, that Washington's ability to project power through public diplomacy and propaganda in combatting and containing the Communist ideology contributing to the Cold War's conclusion is also a perspective that is addressed in depth throughout this investigation.

However, the contribution of this research to the debate over the conclusion of the Cold War, best fits within the perspective that although the role of decision-making by Reagan and Gorbachev is indeed critical from 1985 to 1991, the broader structural forces going back to the 1970s and 1980s are just as important in international relations.

## CONCLUSION

The broader purpose of this dissertation has been to explore a number of themes and topics that concern the role of US foreign policy as public diplomacy and propaganda in the realm of ideological and information operations in Eastern Europe during the course of the Cold War and its conclusion from 1989 to 1991. This is a significant contribution to the historiography, since the way by which the different angles approached in scholarly and politicized narratives today address the events that resulted in the Cold War's conclusion; how and why it ended the way it did, is indeed consequential for how the US and the former USSR view themselves in the current world order, over three decades later.

Historians have established the high degree of success that US foreign policy had in achieving its objectives in Eastern Europe and around the world during the Cold War, with public diplomacy and propaganda efforts successfully challenging and containing the Communist world ideologically and geopolitically. Although, debate within historiography will remain as to the narrative of global dynamics and sequence of events which caused the competition between the US and USSR during the Cold War to ultimately come to an end, nevertheless, it is widely acknowledged that the United States was able to promote its foreign policy interests much more successfully than the Soviet Union was able to by the 1980s and 1990s. As a result, the notion that the Soviets lost and the Americans won the Cold War is one that is widespread especially in the US, as ultimately while the Soviets did certainly lose the socio-economic and ideological contest, the geopolitical process that led to the disintegration the Soviet Union and the effective end of the Cold War conflict, was one that was made by Gorbachev in Moscow. Although, the approach toward the

Soviet Union pursued by the top decision-makers in Washington, namely by Reagan especially between 1985 and 1989 is critical to how the Soviet-American relationship unfolded through that quite critical but relatively brief window of opportunity.

Thus, while part of the dissertation's argument does certainly concern itself with the conclusion of the Cold War confrontation, the broader narrative in regards to US foreign policy emerging from World War II is also one that shows the rapid rise of the United States as a superpower of both hard and soft power diplomacy, evident from the efforts to combat and contain Communism as part of the Cold War. In a sense, this bipolar era, is what allows for the formation of the American superpower in practice and purpose, which emerges as a global hegemon once the competition ends in 1991, and the world order becomes unipolar. The way by which the American superpower is exercised goes beyond military and economic power, but rather the ability to ideologically persuade the rest of the world to support its own values and interests while promoting a big idea, as "freedom."

In that historical time frame of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century referred to as the Cold War, however, the research conducted by this dissertation more concretely addresses the measured effectiveness by which various methods and strategies of American public diplomacy and propaganda efforts to counter adversarial Soviet public diplomacy and propaganda efforts in Eastern Europe. Of course, it might be obvious that it did not necessarily require American public diplomacy and propaganda to convince Communists and those living under Communism, that their centrally planned socio-economic system was not as working well in terms of economic prosperity as the free market system, but what the information operations did effectively is to be able to create a continued strategy of reinforcing those opinions over a long period of time, continually pointing out the

problems that everyone was aware of and exposing why and how they happened, all while seeking to persuade people to quietly resist their regime's propaganda upholding its legitimacy, and also in edifying underground dissident movements with a source by which they can be connected to the West and hope for a better future in their own countries.

If the main goal of Cold War American foreign policy was to counter Soviet-styled Communism by all means necessary as advanced by the 1947 Truman Doctrine, then US-backed broadcasting through the VOA or RFE/RL would be its ideological component. This goal was to counter Soviet propaganda through Western radio broadcasting which basically attempted to spread truthful information about the state of the world, while also maintaining a positive image of the West and in particular the United States. In this approach, negative news developments concerning the US could be rationally explained while more positive news could be emphasized and elaborated on while simultaneously, all negative aspects of the Communist regimes, would be continually critiqued by voices who would have held some form of authority, such as respected figures in society, who by their own free will moved to the West, and there, embrace the West with all its flaws and contradictions, and then denounce the Communist system from which they escaped.

Furthermore, the formation of such government-sponsored information operations, including the radio broadcasting programs and the book exchange programs were a byproduct of strategic thinking that involved vast expenses, in order to have the long-term impact that they were ultimately designed for. These American efforts to change public opinion across Eastern Europe and specifically, in Bulgaria on the topic of the Soviet (Russian)-Bulgarian special relationship were examined in detail during the research and analysis of this dissertation. Although a comparative approach between Bulgaria and other

satellite states in the Eastern bloc is utilized throughout the dissertation's narrative, it is not possible to have examined all the other four foreign language broadcasting services, therefore the findings can be based on the archival data found concerning only Bulgaria which from the start has served as the case study. However, based on RFE/RL internal reports which track comparative data of all satellite states, it appears that RFE itself considered their efforts at Bulgarian broadcasting to be much more mixed compared to the other satellite states, where more time and attention was directed toward, anyways.

However, even in a comparative context, with Bulgaria being unique as the most pro-Soviet satellite state of the Eastern bloc, there can be found a surprising degree of success. This is demonstrated in how despite not having a developed domestic dissident movement, a small but significant number of public intellectuals who initially supported the Communists, defected to the West and began working for these Western radio broadcasters with a strong sense of impact, so much that two of those persons, were targeted for assassination while living abroad, and one was in fact, was ultimately killed. To an extent, the assassination of Georgi Markov, in itself goes to show the effectiveness of RFE Bulgarian broadcasting department in being elevated to the top ideological threat against the Communist regime led by Todor Zhivkov and in turn resulting in a dramatic increase of listeners tuning into RFE broadcasts into the 1980s. The RFE Bulgarian service adopted a more nuanced approach after the 1978 assassination and during the peak of Bulgaria's cultural diplomacy in 1981 also created a situation in which its Bulgarian broadcasters had to embrace the essence of the national jubilee celebrations while also critiquing the Communists who organized them in such a successful way, which benefited the state in its goal of rebranding parts of its national identity on the world stage.

Therefore, the trajectory of the tone about Bulgaria's place in the world, set by these events that occurred toward the fall of Communism has persisted, long past the geopolitical constraints of the Cold War. For Bulgaria, which resembled the "16<sup>th</sup> republic of the USSR" even during the transition time period of the 1990s, the broader result is also quite mixed in comparison to the rest of the Eastern bloc, as evident by the generally negative political processes that have unfolded in Bulgaria since 1989, especially during the 1990s.

This raises further questions as to how has the image of the United States and the West improved since the end of the Cold War relative to other former Eastern bloc satellite states? and more importantly, has the US goal of aligning Eastern Europe closer with Western Europe, and distancing away from Russian and Eurasian influence been achieved across most of Bulgarian society, beyond joining NATO and the EU during the 2000s?

Although, American public diplomacy and propaganda via radio broadcasting was not the only factor in "winning hearts and minds" for the West, certainly, other economic and cultural forces such as Western entertainment and technological advancements appealed to people in Eastern Europe beyond government-coordinated information operations. However, the information strategies employed by the US-run broadcasters certainly did play a significant role in clarifying socio-political positions before the Iron Curtain was dissolved. These political positions developed in different directions than expected once the totalitarian regime transitioned into an imperfect democratic society.

The theme of propaganda and public diplomacy as a political purpose is an important topic that is explored throughout the dissertation, highlighting the critical place of storytelling in shaping national identities and how those identities as national brands can be changed based on shifting geopolitical circumstances. A popular and prevailing



narrative about a nation and its past and present situation can sometimes be changed, based on the way that the nation's national self-interests and circumstances change, but those changes are not always indigenous, sometimes they are part of a strategy that can be either domestic or international, as in Bulgaria's rebranding as part of the cultural diplomacy of the 1970s and 1980s, and how Western radio broadcasting had to respond to that.

Lastly, another theme that is explored throughout, is how the role of radio technology as a platform allowed for information to be disseminated across the Iron Curtain despite the limited ability in jamming the radio waves by electronic interference, on the other side. This strategically organized flow of information through radio directed at the masses as well as by means of book exchange programs, surely had a political purpose, one that can certainly be considered as a success for US foreign policy. However, these types of things also have unintended consequences, in that, seeds are sown ideologically that cannot always be controlled, in the shape that they manifest in a given society.

This is evident in how RFE/RL initially supported successful independence movements in the Baltics which triggered the disintegration of the Soviet Union, but also the unintended legacy that those independence movements had in reawakening national disputes and creating frozen conflicts as with Armenia and Azerbaijan, and most notably between Russia and Georgia and Russia and Ukraine. In the Eastern bloc, RFE/RL support for the peaceful "Velvet Divorce" in Czechoslovakia can be contrasted to the disastrous breakup of Yugoslavia, where RFE/RL had no presence, and which was considered to be among the most successful socialist societies in the world due to its position in the Non-Aligned movement. In retrospect, the breakup of Yugoslavia and the interethnic conflicts

and civil wars out of the 1990s are considered to be among the worst consequences of the end of the Cold War in Europe, having a long-lasting impact on Russia's view of the West.

Additionally, how the post-Communist transition to Capitalism during the 1990s played out in shaping the domestic political discourse between the left and right within the former East Germany as well as Poland, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria and others, is still consequential to this day, even as these nations now firmly stand within the EU.

The impact that Western broadcasting together with the free flow of mass media after the disappearance of the Iron Curtain as well as the influx of global corporate investment alongside the emergence of non-government organizations and non-profit organizations across Eastern Europe, had in shaping the direction of civil society or in some cases, becoming itself the top target of powerful populist political forces, is also a very relevant development in the past decade, that deserves its own separate investigation.

Although Bulgaria has theoretically functioned as a democratic society since 1989, multiple problems have persisted stemming from the legacy of Communism and its connection to the Soviet Union. Over the past 3 years (since 2021) Bulgaria, remains in a political crisis due in part to shifts in domestic attitudes about how to handle endemic corruption and the more recent catastrophic effects for the whole of Europe and even more so for Eastern Europe, resulting from the Russian war in Ukraine since 2022.

There have been without a doubt, a number of positive socio-economic developments despite still unresolved problems, over the past three decades that have certainly contributed toward affirming Bulgaria's identity in alignment as a permanent part of Europe after being accepted into the European Union (in 2007), over 17 years ago.

Pax Americana has characterized most of the world since the end of the Cold War, best evident with the enlargement and expansion of the Western Euro-Atlantic structures of NATO and the EU, over the past 30 years, however the uncertainty of the current ongoing conflict in Eastern Europe and the escalated conflicts across the Middle East have raised questions if the “post-Cold War era” has indeed ended or is currently ending?

Such speculations on the decline of the American superpower were raised throughout the Cold War time period especially in the 1970s and even after, when the US was at its peak as a unipolar hegemon, during the 1990s and even more so, the 2000s, which began with the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, and the subsequent Global War on Terrorism across the world, between 2001 and 2021.

Over the past decade, the multipolar era in international relations which has been gradually emerging involves not only America but also Europe, Russia and China among others, and has been referred to as a “New Cold War” era of “Great Power competition.” Whatever this new 21<sup>st</sup> Century epoch of confrontation between “autocracy and democracy” will be called by historians in the future, it does not at least currently, structurally and ideologically resemble the confrontation between Capitalism and Communism embodied by the US and USSR during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, although the socio-political atmosphere in relation to how American public diplomacy and propaganda is playing out across the global media information space, does hold some shared similarities.

For one, the past decade has certainly caused the United States to restart and re-expand its news information operations including Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty which began in the same region (of Eastern Europe), where the original epic contest of the Cold War, which in effect made the American superpower, began over 75 years ago (as of 2024).

## APPENDIX

### 1A: Map 1 - Modern Bulgarian Nation-State



<https://www.flickr.com/photos/rfmcDonald/8508341679>

A map of the Balkans of Southeastern Europe, and of the borders of the modern-nation state of Bulgaria after its liberation from the Ottoman Empire according to the terms of the March 3, 1878 Treaty of San Stefano annulled at the Congress of Berlin on July 13, 1878. This resulted in an independent Principality of Bulgarian and Ottoman-ruled autonomous Eastern Rumelia until September 6, 1885 when both were unified into one quasi-independent Bulgaria, before September 22, 1908 when the Third Bulgarian Kingdom was officially proclaimed and recognized as independent.

This development at failed national unification was the driving factor in Bulgaria's Balkan foreign policy from 1878 to 1948.

### 1B: Map 2 - Bulgaria during the Balkan Wars



[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Second\\_Balkan\\_War.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Second_Balkan_War.png)

A map of the Balkans of Southeastern Europe, and of the borders resulting from the First and Second Balkan Wars of 1912-1913 known as the “first national catastrophe.”

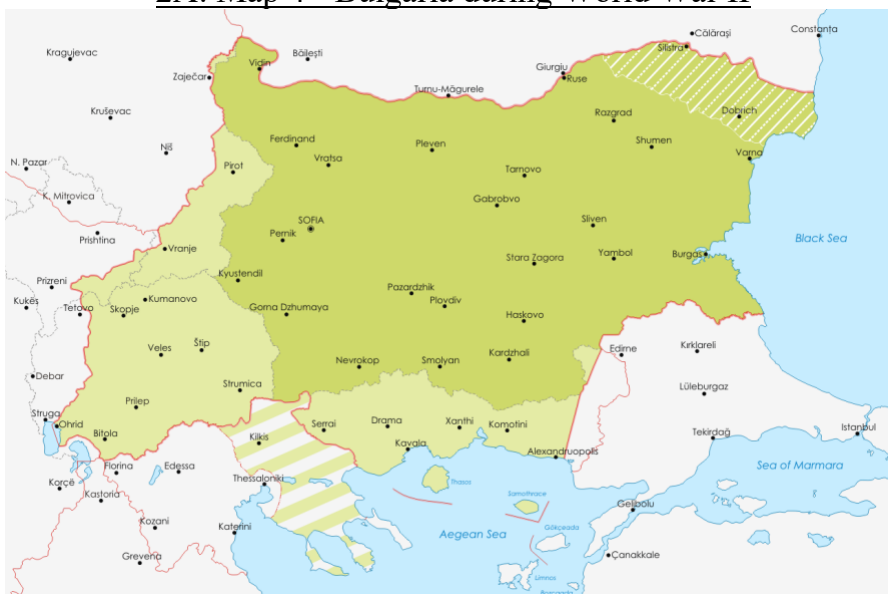
### 1C: Map 3 - Bulgaria during World War I



[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bulgaria\\_during\\_World\\_War\\_I.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bulgaria_during_World_War_I.png)

A map of the Balkans of Southeastern Europe, and of the borders resulting from the First World War of 1914-1918 known as the “second national catastrophe.”

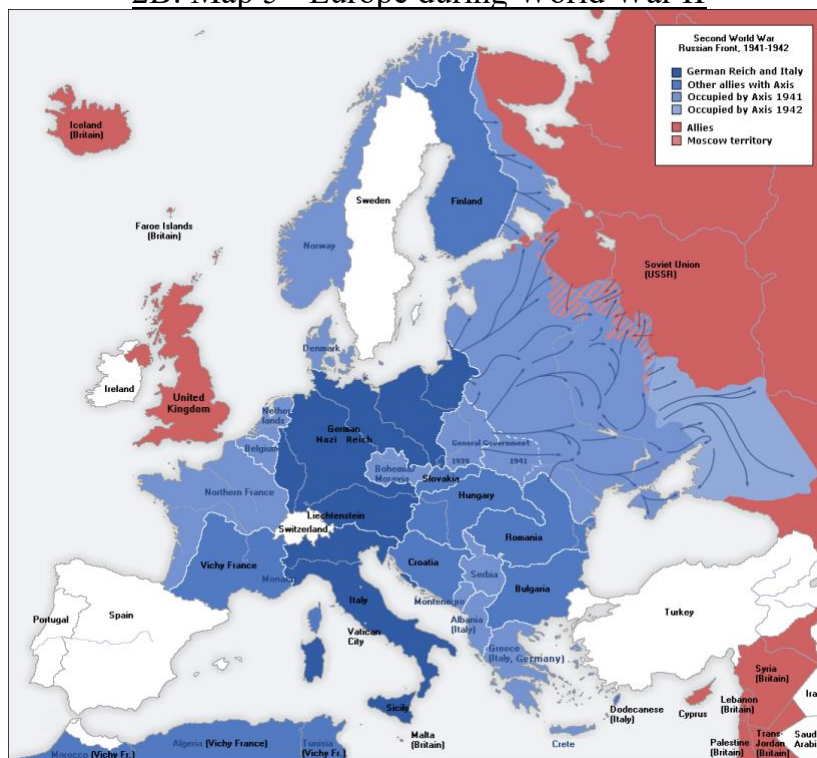
## 2A: Map 4 - Bulgaria during World War II



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bulgaria\\_during\\_World\\_War\\_II#/media/File:Map\\_of\\_Bulgaria\\_during\\_WWII.png](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bulgaria_during_World_War_II#/media/File:Map_of_Bulgaria_during_WWII.png)

A map of the borders of the Third Bulgarian Kingdom resulting from the Second World War of 1939-1945 in which Bulgaria is allied to the Axis Powers.

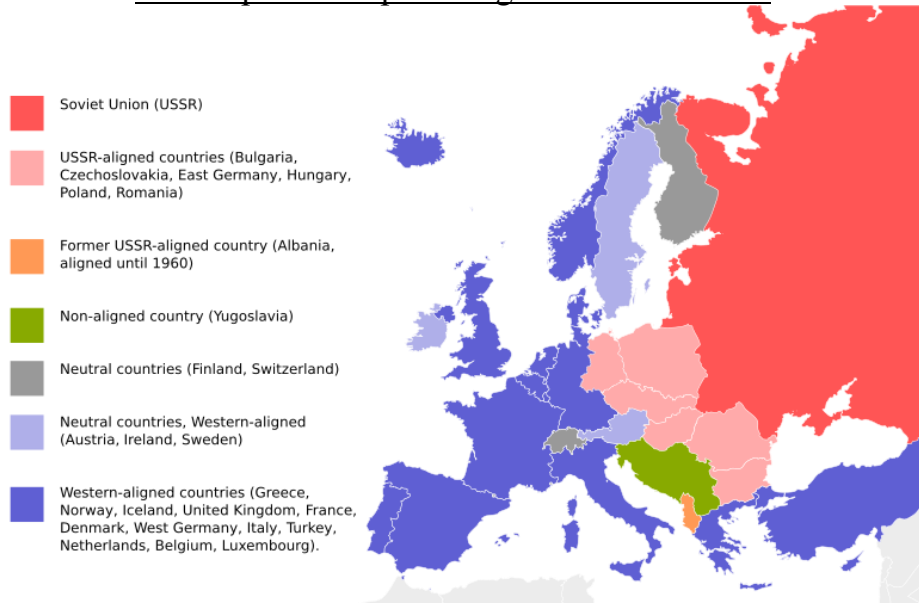
## 2B: Map 5 - Europe during World War II



[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/7e/Second\\_world\\_war\\_europe\\_1941-1942\\_map\\_en.png](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/7e/Second_world_war_europe_1941-1942_map_en.png)

A map of Europe during World War II (1939-1945)

### 3A: Map 6 - Europe throughout the Cold War



<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Europe-blocs-49-89x4.svg>

A map of Europe throughout the Cold War (1945-1991)

### 3B: Map 7 - The Soviet Eastern Bloc



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet\\_empire#/media/File:EasternBloc\\_BasicMembersOnly.svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_empire#/media/File:EasternBloc_BasicMembersOnly.svg)

A map of the Soviet Eastern Bloc of satellite states (1945-1991)

4A: Image 1 - Soviet-Bulgarian Relations, Stalin and Dimitrov 1



<https://www.vagabond.bg/index.php/who-was-georgi-dimitrov-1135>

A painting of the Soviet Politburo, Soviet Premier Jozef Stalin (1929-1953) and Georgi Dimitrov, Director of the Communist International (1935-1945)

4B: Image 2 - Soviet-Bulgarian Relations, Stalin and Dimitrov 2



<https://svobodennarod.eu/gledischa/edno-pitane-po-brzata-procedura>

A 1940 photograph of the Soviet Communist Party General Secretary Jozef Stalin (1922-1953) and Georgi Dimitrov, the first post-war Bulgarian Premier (1946-1949)



4C: Image 3 - Soviet-Bulgarian Relations, Khrushchev and Zhivkov



<https://www.diomedia.com/stock-photo-nikita-khrushchev-visits-bulgaria-1962-image20275648.html>

A 1962 photograph of the Soviet Communist Party First Secretary Nikita Khrushchev (1953-1964) and Bulgarian Communist Party First Secretary Todor Zhivkov (1954-1989)

4D: Image 4 - Soviet-Bulgarian Relations, Brezhnev and Zhivkov



[https://www.rferl.org/a/Remembering\\_Bulgarias\\_Palace\\_Revolution/1873558.html](https://www.rferl.org/a/Remembering_Bulgarias_Palace_Revolution/1873558.html)

A 1971 photograph of the Soviet Communist Party General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev (1964-1982) and Bulgarian Communist Party First Secretary Todor Zhivkov (1954-1989)

5A: Image 5 - Soviet-Bulgarian Relations. Propaganda 1



<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/92/>

The\_Soviet\_Union\_1961\_CPA\_2652\_stamp\_%2815th\_Anniversary\_of\_Bulgarian\_People%27s\_Republic%29.jpg

A 1961 Soviet propaganda post stamp commemorating 15 years of the establishment of the People's Republic of Bulgaria in 1946.

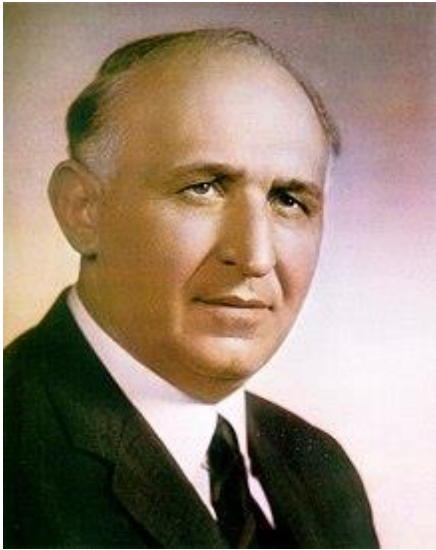
5B: Image 6 - Soviet-Bulgarian Relations, Propaganda 2



[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/1d/The\\_Soviet\\_Union\\_1969\\_CPA\\_3769\\_stamp\\_%28Hands\\_holding\\_torch%2C\\_flags\\_of\\_Bulgaria%2C\\_USSR%2C\\_Bulgarian\\_arms%29.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/1d/The_Soviet_Union_1969_CPA_3769_stamp_%28Hands_holding_torch%2C_flags_of_Bulgaria%2C_USSR%2C_Bulgarian_arms%29.jpg)

A 1969 Soviet propaganda post stamp commemorating 25 years of the "September" Socialist Revolution in Bulgaria in 1944.

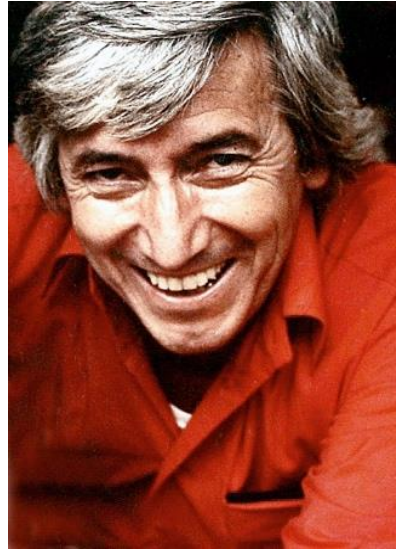
6A: Image 7 - Todor Zhivkov



<https://www.marxists.org/archive/zhivkov/index.htm>

Bulgarian premier  
Todor Zhivkov (1911-1998)

6C: Image 9 - Georgi Markov



<https://unredacted.com/2010/07/16/document-friday-the-poisonous-umbrella-and-the-assassination-of-georgi-markov/>

Bulgarian dissident  
Georgi Markov (1929-1978)

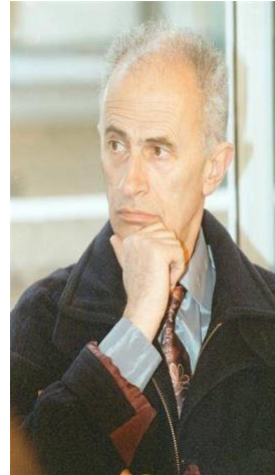
6B: Image 8 - Lyudmila Zhivkova



<https://www.znamenamira.bg/en/banner-of-peace/about-the-founder>

Bulgarian minister of culture  
Lyudmila Zhivkova (1942-1981)

6D: Image 10 - Vladimir Kostov



<https://www.24chasa.bg/ozhivlenie/article/11680148>

Bulgarian dissident  
Vladimir Kostov  
(1932-present)

6E: Image 11 - Dimitar Bochev



<https://balkansbg.eu/en/inquiries/469/dimitar-bochev.htm>

Bulgarian dissident  
Dimitar Bochev  
(1944-present)

7A: Image 12 -  
State Security



<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/07associated-with>

The emblem of the Bulgarian Secret State Security Service (Committee for State Security)

7B: Image 13 -  
13 Centuries Celebration 1



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medal\\_%221300th\\_Anniversary\\_of\\_Bulgaria%22#/media/File:Ostrhodopen\\_PD\\_2011\\_3201.JPG](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medal_%221300th_Anniversary_of_Bulgaria%22#/media/File:Ostrhodopen_PD_2011_3201.JPG)

The main medal award commemorating 13 Centuries of Bulgaria in 1981

7C: Image 14 -  
13 Centuries Celebration 2



<https://www.greyscape.com/when-the-message-a-symbol-changes-what-should-bulgaria-do-with-the-buzludzha-memorial-house/>

An original photograph of the opening ceremony of the Buzludzha monument in the Balkan mountains as part of the 1981 national jubilee celebrations.

7D: Image 15 -  
13 Centuries Celebration 3



<https://www.researchgate.net/profile/AnetaVasileva/publication/338570709/figure/fig1/AS:84713159421132@1578983319769/Monument-1300-Years-Bulgaria-and-the-National-Palace-of-Culture198 C-ATRIUM-Archive.png>

An original photograph from 1981 of the official opening ceremony of the National Palace of Culture (NDK) in Sofia, Bulgaria.

8A: Image 16 - RFE/RL 1



<https://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/forensisches-hoeren-alternative-fakten-1.4040345>

Radio Free Europe original headquarters in Munich, West Germany (1950-1995)

8C: Image 18 - RFE/RL 3



Radio Free Europe/  
Radio Liberty  
original logo (1950-1995)

8B: Image 17 - RFE/RL 2

**“A Voice of the Free World”**

The Free Europe Committee (FEC), parent organization of Radio Free Europe, was founded in 1950 in a private, non-profit body dedicated to the principle that the people of the Soviet satellite nations have a right to governments of their own choosing.

Since 1950 the Washington-based Committee (FEC) has been associated closely with the Free Europe Committee, parent from Belgium, Denmark, England, France, Italy, The Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and West Germany. The Free Europe Committee is supported by contributions of United States citizens to the Radio Free Europe Board of Directors in the United States for the benefit of Radio Free Europe.

Radio Free Europe, the Committee's chief means of reaching the Soviet satellite nations, has more than 10 million people. At the time the nation consisted of a 700,000 person transmitter broadcasting only two hours a week.

Today RFE is a network of five radio stations located in Poland and broadcast through a group of more satellites from a variety of 20 transmitters in West Germany and Europe. Its program air on the air 24 hours daily in Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland, and is broadcast daily in Bulgaria and Romania - and are broadcast only in the language of those countries.

Each of the five stations is headed and staffed by natives of the country in which it broadcasts. They write and broadcast RFE's programs, and are chosen for their professional skill in news, economics, management, culture, performance, sports, labor, agriculture, history, science, recreation and related fields. These staffs operate work closely with the American management of RFE, which supervises the overall operation.

About 1,200 people, representing 30 nationalities, work for RFE in Munich. Americans make up less than 10 per cent of the staff.

By means of its private management and financing, Radio Free Europe differs from all other radio services. It is owned by the Free World nations. The Voice of America, for example, is the official station of the United States Government. It broadcasts publicly in 30 languages and has almost only a limited amount of time each day to the Free Europe Committee. RFE concentrates on the free world countries a program format of far wider scope (see table below).

Thus the transmitters which provide the stage of freedom democracy through and over the Iron Curtain. To accomplish this work, RFE makes use of the best available technological equipment but is in the spirit and tradition of its own and means which fit the Free World's existing in all Radio Free Europe "A Voice of the Free World."

COUNTRY	STATION		
	RFE	BBC	VOA
Belgium	35	10%	12%
Czechoslovakia	138.61	14	14
Hungary	122.58	14	17%
Poland	127.55	17%	14
Romania	35	12%	8%

RFE transmitters in Western Germany and Portugal broadcast to the approximately 150,000 people of Central Europe Europe.

<https://histories.hoover.org/truth-as-a-weapon/>

“Why Radio Free Europe” RFE/RL 1970 pamphlet.

8D: Image 19 - RFL/RL 4

**HELP TRUTH FIGHT COMMUNISM**

RADIO FREE EUROPE      RADIO FREE ASIA

A campaign prepared for the Crusade for Freedom by The Advertising Council, Inc.

A PUBLIC SERVICE PROJECT  
THE ADVERTISING COUNCIL

<https://histories.hoover.org/truth-as-a-weapon/>

“Help Truth Fight Communism”  
FEC 1951  
propaganda poster.

9A: Image 20 - Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty 5



<https://branding.rferl.org/>

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty new logo (1995-present)

9B: Image 21 - Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty 6



<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/21/world/Russia/Russia-rfe-rl-navalny.html>

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty  
new headquarters in Prague, Czech Republic (1995-present)

10A: Image 22 - Voice of America 1



<https://www.voanews.com/a/voa-headquarters-honored-as-historic-site-in-journalism-/7468874.html>

Voice of America headquarters in Washington, DC (1954-present)

10B: Image 23 - Voice of America 2



<https://www.insidevoa.com/p/5829.html>

Voice of America original logo (1950s-1990s)

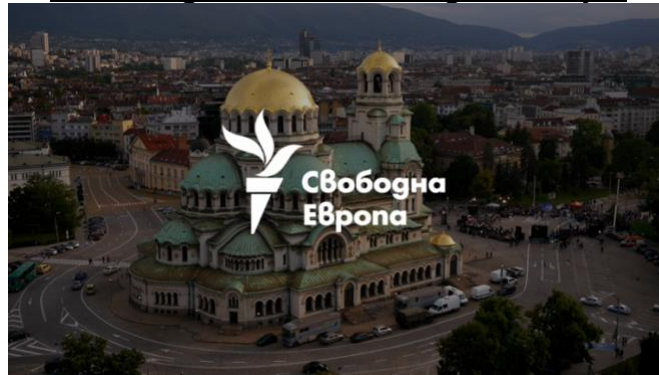
10C: Image 24 – Voice of America 3



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Voice\\_of\\_America#/media/File:VOA\\_logo.svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Voice_of_America#/media/File:VOA_logo.svg)

Voice of America active logo (present)

11A: Image 25 - RFE in Bulgaria today 1



<https://about.rferl.org/service/bulgarian-service/>

Radio Free Europe’s Bulgarian broadcasting service logo (restarted since 2019)

11B: Image 26 - RFE in Bulgaria today 2



<https://www.rferl.org/a/bulgaria-sixth-election-ukraine/33004101.html>  
[radev-elections/32881136.html](https://www.rferl.org/a/radev-elections/32881136.html)

RFE/RL reporting on the Bulgarian political crisis (started since April 2021)

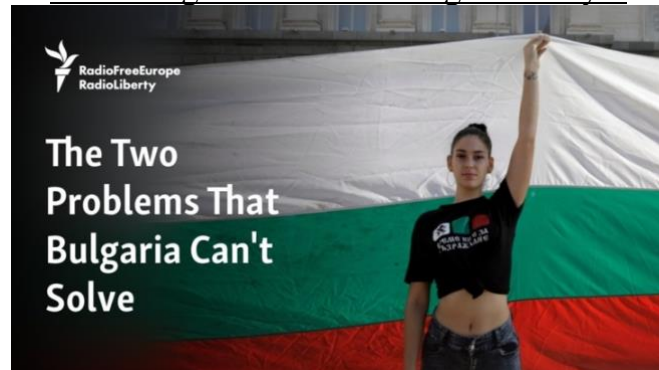
11C: Image 27 - RFE in Bulgaria today 3



[https://www.rferl.org/a/bulgaria-nato-radev-glavchev-russia-](https://www.rferl.org/a/bulgaria-nato-radev-glavchev-russia-ukraine/33004101.html)

RFE/RL reporting on Bulgaria represented at the 75<sup>th</sup> NATO summit in Washington, DC (July 2024)

11D: Image 28 - RFE in Bulgaria today 4



<https://www.rferl.org/a/bulgaria-corruption-russian-influence-elections/32919014.html>

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