

25 YEARS FREEDOM IN BULGARIA

CIVIC EDUCATION | TRANSITION | BERLIN WALL | PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA
| FREEDOM | 1989 | INTERPRETATIONS | OPEN LESSONS | MYTHS | LEGENDS | TOTALITARIAN PAST
DESTALINIZATION | BELENE CAMPS | GEORGI MARKOV | FUTURE | CITIZENS | EAST | WEST | SECURITY
SERVICE | ECOGLASNOST | CIVIL DUTY AWARD | ANNIVERSARY | COMMUNISM | CAPITALISM | ARCHIVES
| REMEMBRANCE | DISSIDENTS | ZHELYO ZHELEV | RADIO FREE EUROPE | VISEGRAD FOUR | HISTORICAL
POLITICAL STANDARDS | RULE OF LAW | FREE MEDIA | NOSTALGIA | REGIME | MEMORIES | RATIONALIZATION
| HUMAN RIGHTS | HOPE | NOW AND THEN | DISCUSSING | VISUAL EVIDENCES | REPRESSIONS | HERITAGE
| INTELLECTUAL ELITE | IRON CURTAIN | CENSORSHIP | GENERATIONS | LESSONS | TRANSFORMATION
| TODOR ZHIVKOV | COLD WAR | INSTITUTIONS | BEGINNING | INFORMATION | RECONCILIATION
FACTS | EXPERIENCES | CONSENSUS | DISTORTIONS | MARKET ECONOMY | REFORM | UNEMPLOYMENT
| THE BIG EXCURSION | IDEOLOGY | PUBLIC OPINION | NATIONAL INITIATIVE | TRUTH | ELECTIONS

25 years free Bulgaria is a civic initiative under the auspices of the President of Bulgaria, organized by Sofia Platform



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1.

25 YEARS FREEDOM IN BULGARIA



“**25 Years Free Bulgaria**” was an initiative under the auspices of the President of the Republic of Bulgaria Rosen Plevneliev, implemented by the Sofia Platform and supported by America For Bulgaria.

25 years ago, in November 1989 the Berlin Wall that materialized the bipolarity of the world and depicted a division between free and unfree, just and unjust, open and repressed, collapsed within a night. With it collapsed the communist regimes in a number of countries in Eastern Europe and its people looked forward with hope and enthusiasm to a unified Europe in which they have always belonged, both culturally and historically.

Anniversaries have a lot to do with the culture of remembrance. And while in other parts of Europe 2014 was marked by the 100th anniversary of the “Great war”, for us, Eastern Europeans the fall of the Berlin Wall was a good moment to draw a balance-sheet – 25 years ago a regime fell, which had enforced inhumane political standards, had led to social and economic catastrophe of whole regions and states. What went right and what went wrong in the years of transition from a totalitarian rule to pluralism and democracy?

While memory and interpretations, when not codified, tend to be subjective, we were privileged enough to be able to invite to this conversation about our recent past key figures, who took part in the events in 1989 and beyond. And although there are many personal stories, we tried to set a sequence of indisputable facts and key events. Because without rationalization of the recent history, we take a risk of mystifying the past and lose our guideline in the present and the future.

The ambition of this initiative and its side-events was while marking the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, to take another step towards restoring trust in the Bulgarian society, which has hardly been more polarized and the political debate more deprived of strategic perspective and basis for national consensus. Differentiating the democratic values and principles from the realities of the anti-humane communist regime is fundamentally important for united Europe. It doesn't matter if we look towards the past or in the future, where we stand in the political specter, what is our social status, what are our incomes and what is our way of living.

2.

REMEMBRANCE AND CULTURE FILMS

The initiative “25 Years Free Bulgaria” was launched with a public screening of the film “The Lives of Others”. It was showed in Plovdiv on 13th September 2014 and in Sofia on 20th September 2014.

The film “The Lives of Others” is the strongest artistic interpretation of the power of the Stasi (State Security of the GDR) over the lives of ordinary people. Containing elements of political thriller and love drama, the work of Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck is the most controversial attempt to tell the truth about the events of the recent past of Germany and of the societies trapped behind the Iron Curtain. “The Lives of Others” became mandatory for all members of the German Bundestag after its premiere in 2006. In the preparatory phase of the movie, the director and screenwriter Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck spends years collecting documentary materials, the most valuable contributions coming from interviews with victims and operatives of the Stasi.

Although it is a fiction, the movie tells a story very close to the Bulgarian reality and the time when the Bulgarian State Security had unrestricted access to the life of all citizens. “The Lives of Others” won numerous awards, including an Oscar for best foreign film in 2006. In Bulgaria, the film was showed only within the Sofia International Film Festival in 2007.

“There are still films that succeed in becoming a real public phenomenon.”
Webcafe.bg

“The state office for statistics on Hans-Beimler street counts everything; knows everything: how many pairs of shoes I buy a year: 2.3, how many books I read a year: 3.2 and how many students graduate with perfect marks: 6,347. But there’s one statistic that isn’t collected there, perhaps because such numbers cause even paper-pushers pain: and that is the suicide rate.”

~ Georg Dreyman, the character of the famous writer in “The Lives of Others”



Заповядайте на **БЕЗПЛАТНАТА** прожекция в рамките на инициативата

25 години Свободна България

ДАТА: **20^{ТИ} СЕПТЕМВРИ**
 ЧАС: **20:00ч.**
 МЯСТО: **БИВШИЯ МАВЗОЛЕЙ**

Мартина Гедек, Улрих Мюе, Себастиан Кох, Улрих Тукур

Филм на Флориан Хенкел фон Донерсмарк

ЖИВОТЪТ НА ДРУГИТЕ

DAS LEBEN DER ANDEREN

Филмът получава цял куп престижни награди. Между които наградата на Американската филмова академия “Оскар” за чуждозичен филм, седм от Германските награди “Лолита”, 3 европейски филмови награди – за най-добър филм, най-добър сценарий и най-добър актьор на Улрих Мюе и три Баварски филмови приза.

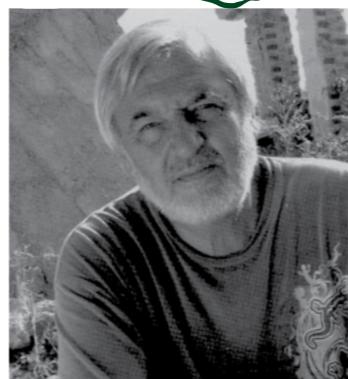
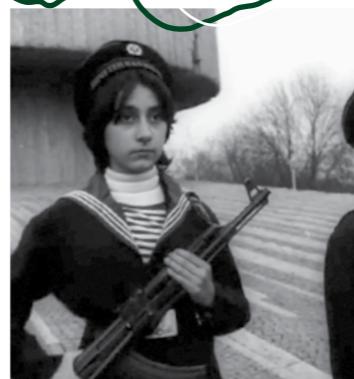
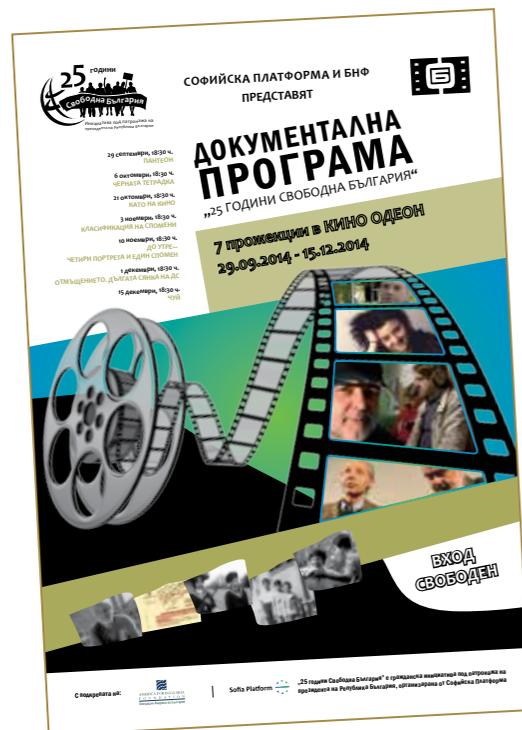
С подкрепата на:

Министерство на културата и националното наследство | Българска филмова академия | София Platform | “25 години Свободна България” е гражданска инициатива под патронажа на Президентството на Р България, организирана от София Platform

REMEMBRANCE AND CULTURE DOCUMENTARY PROGRAMME WITH "ODEON" CINEMA AND THE BULGARIAN NATIONAL FILM ARCHIVE



REMEMBRANCE AND CULTURE FILMS



In September and December 2014 we organized a series of documentary screenings in partnership with "Odeon" cinema and the Bulgarian National Film Archive. The programme included public screenings of seven Bulgarian documentaries on the communist past and the transition to democracy. Each screening was followed by a discussion with its authors.

Pantheon

(Bulgaria, 1988, 40 min)

Director and script-writer: Malina Petrova,
director of photography: Georgi Nikolov

The Black Notebook

(Bulgaria, 1995, 30 min)

Director and script-writer: Rosen Elezov, director
of photography: Venko Kableshkov

As in the Movies

(Bulgaria, 1999, 54 min)

Director: Juliy Stoyanov, script-writers: Juley
Stoyanov and Svetla Hristova, director of
photography: Ivan Tsonev

Memory Classification

(Bulgaria, 2010, 83 min)

Director: Kostadin Bonev, script-writer: Vladi
Kirov, director of photography: Konstantin Zankov

See You Tomorrow... Four Portraits and a Memory

(Bulgaria, 1989, 65 min)

Director: Stanimir Trifonov

The Vengeance. The Long Arm of State Security

(Bulgaria, 2013, 75 min)

Director and script-writer:
Atanas Kiryakov, director of photography: Ivan
Tonev

Listen

(Bulgaria, 2014, 76 min)

Director: Diana Ivanova, producer:
Albena Kovatcheva



REMEMBRANCE AND CULTURE SCREENINGS IN PARTNERSHIP WITH CULTURAL INSTITUTES



Together with the Polish Institute, the Czech Center and the Hungary Cultural Institute "Balassi", Sofia Platform organized a selection of screenings of feature films and documentaries on the subject of totalitarian repressions, the role of the authorities and the state apparatus, the denial of civic freedoms and the denial of basic human rights. The programme was called "The Totalitarian Past on a Reel" and included twelve films, screened in October, November and December 2014.

The World Is Big and Salvation Lurks Around the Corner
(Bulgaria-Germany-Slovenia-Hungary, 2008, 105 min)
Director: Stefan Komandarev, producer: Stefan Kitanov

80 million (Poland, 2011, 102 min)
Director: Waldemar Krzystek

Bulgaria Is One Big Mistake Too
(Bulgaria, 2014, 87 min)
Director: Stoyan Radev, director of photography: Vladimir Mihaylov

Walesa: Man of Hope
(Poland, 2013, 110 min)
Director: Andrzej Wajda, director of photography: Pawel Edelman

City of Dreams
(Bulgaria, 2012, 75 min)
Director and script-writer: Svetoslav Draganov

The Mole
(Poland-France, 2011, 104 min)
Director: Rafael Lewandowski, script-writers: Iwo Kardel and Rafael Lewandowski

The Color of the Chameleon
(Bulgaria, 2012, 114 min)
Director: Emil Hristov, director of photography: Krum Rodrigues

Citizen Havel
(The Czech Republic, 2008, 119 min)
Directors: Miroslav Janek, Pavel Koudecký, script-writer: Pavel Koudecký

The Boy Who Was a King
(Bulgaria-Germany, 2011, 90 min)
Director and script-writer: Andrey Paunov, producer: Martichka Bozhilova

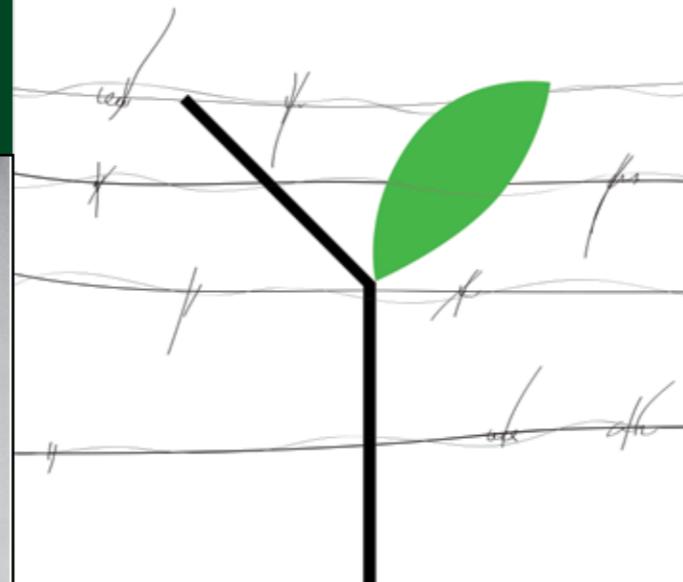
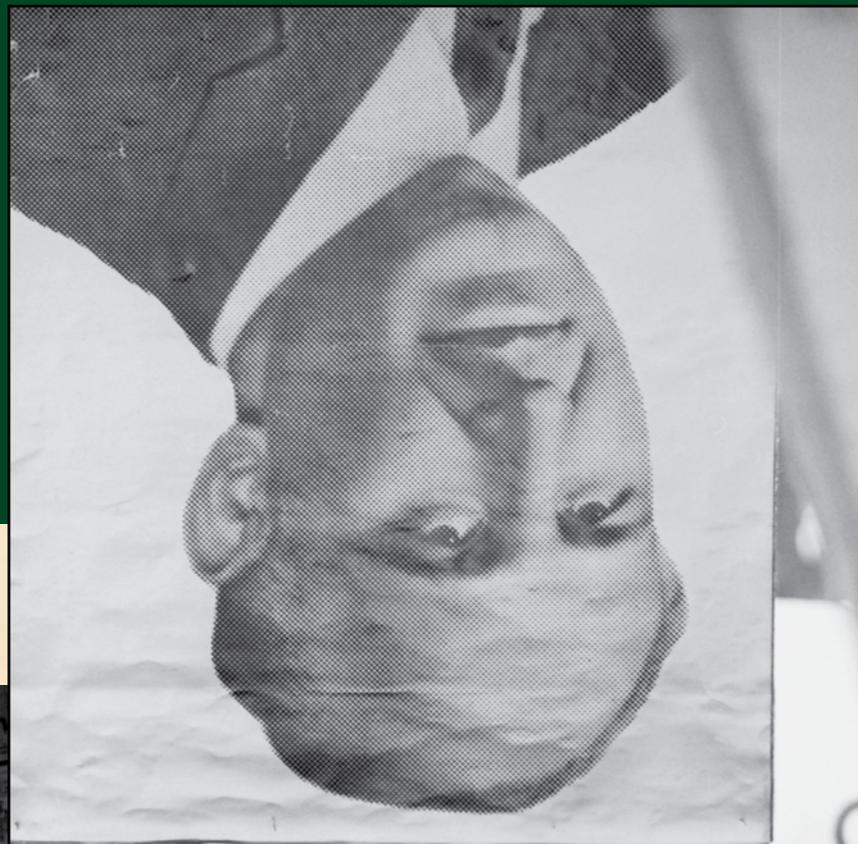
The Transition or What Has Happened to Us
(Bulgaria, 2013, 50 min)
Director and script-writer: Atanas Kiriakov, director of photography: Ivan Tonev

The Bridge East-West
(Hungary, 2010, 52 min)
Director: Gábor Zsigmond Papp

Behind the Camera
(Bulgaria, 2010, 107 min)
Director: Svetoslav Ovcharov, director of photography: Rali Ralchev



REMEMBRANCE AND CULTURE
EXHIBITIONS:
"1989: NOW AND THEN"



25 ГОДИНИ
СВОБОДНА
БЪЛГАРИЯ



25 ГОДИНИ СВОБОДА!



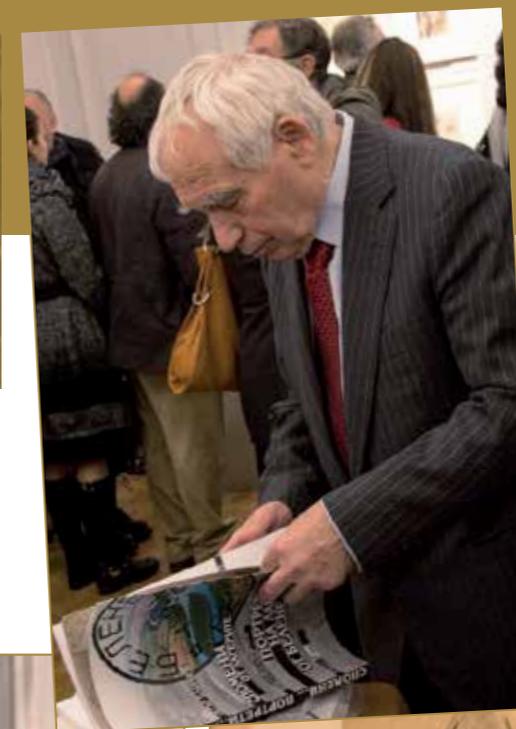
REMEMBRANCE AND CULTURE EXHIBITIONS

“BREAKS IN THE WALL: PORTRAITS OF PRISONERS FROM BELENE”

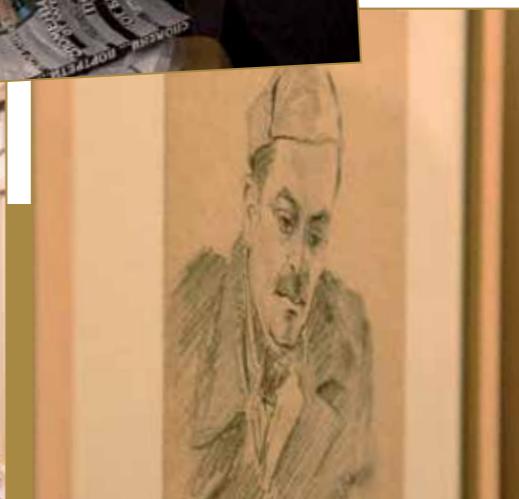
This exhibition featured portraits of Belene prisoners drawn in the period of 1948-1953 by their fellow inmate – Petar Baychev. The opening took place at the National Art Gallery on the symbolic date November 10th, which is considered as a start of the democratic transition in Bulgaria after the communist leader Zhivkov was displaced.

Over the past 50 years there has been a tremendous gap in Bulgarian historical memory due to the lack of authentic visual evidences from the communist labor camps in the country. Despite their contribution to the remembrance of the communist past, the personal memories, archive documents, and retrospective reconstructions cannot replace the strong and immediate impact of an image. The communist regime has diligently destroyed all visual evidences for its repressions and day-to-day camp life. The exhibition “Breaks in the Wall” attempted to fill in this gap by making authentic drawn portraits of inmates available to the Bulgarian public, by telling through portraits their personal story of repression by the communist regime for political and biographical reasons, as well as sharing moments from their excruciating life at labour camps in Bulgaria. During his stay at Belene for a period of almost 5 years, the author Petar Baychev drew hundreds of portraits and sketches of his “colleagues by fate.” He has managed to preserve the integrity of his

“These pencil drawings, often done in the empty space of newspaper margins, present a shocking documentation of the fate of part of the political, military and intellectual elite of Bulgaria.” Trud daily



drawings and smuggle them out of the concentration camp, from which he was released in 1954. Today, thanks to the courtesy of his son Veselin Baychev and the Institute for Studies of the Recent Past, this extremely valuable visual heritage is made available to the public.



REMEMBRANCE AND CULTURE EXHIBITIONS

“DE-STALINIZATION – THE DILEMMA OF A CONTRADICTIONARY DECADE (1953-1964)”



The exhibition was realized as a joint initiative with the Committee for Disclosing the Documents and Announcing Affiliation of Bulgarian Citizens to the State Security and the Archives State Agency. The period of de-Stalinization is a dramatic part of the history of the Eastern bloc countries, when for the first time hope for a breakthrough in the Soviet model emerged, when the first acts of 'rebellion' against the communist regimes appeared and the first break of the Iron Curtain took place. The exhibition followed the local and international aspects of the de-Stalinization process in Bulgaria and the rest of the countries from Eastern Europe, disclosing historical documents that had not been publicly shown until this moment.



REMEMBRANCE AND CULTURE

THE CONCERT OF FREEDOM

1 ноември
Концерт на СВОБОДАТА
 18:00 ч., на площада пред „Св. Александър Невски“

25 години СВОБОДА България
 Инициатива под патронажа на президента на Република България

Космическите гласове на България
Владо Радулков и Венци Благоев
CRUSH
Дуо Валди
Ваня Костова и Боян Михайлов
Милена
Революция Z
Васко Кръпката и Подуене Блус Бенд

Падането на комунистическия режим върна свободата и правото на избор. Да слушаш Бийтълс вече не беше забранено, а музикалните концерти на 90-те се превърнаха в символ на промяната. Свободата да твориш без цензура и страх преобрази българската сцена.

www.25freebg.com

Сподарелата на: Sofia Platform „25 години Свобода България“ е гражданска инициатива под патронажа на президента на Република България, организирана от Софийска Платформа

The fall of the communist regime restored freedom and the right to choose. Listening to the “Beatles” was no longer banned and the concerts from the 90s turned into a symbol of this change. The newly-found freedom to create without censorship and fear transformed the Bulgarian art scene. “The Concert of Freedom” as the largest public event of the initiative was organized on November 1st, 2014 at the symbolic square of “St. Alexander Nevsky” cathedral, where the major concerts and protests of the democratic forces in the 90s took place. Performances were given by the Cosmic Voices of Bulgaria, the jazz duo of Vlado Radulov and Ventsi Blagoev, the youth bands CRUSH and Revolution Z, the well-known Valdi Totev, Vania Kostova, Milena and Vasko the Patch with his Poduene Blues Band.

“The word ‘freedom’ is key tonight. The freedom to choose, to create without censorship, to express one’s civic viewpoints. There was barely anyone who 25 years ago could have imagined that today we will be able to listen to whatever music we want, to travel freely to all destinations and to speak what we think.” Bulgarian National Television



3.

EDUCATION IN TRANSITION OPEN HISTORY LESSONS



The lack of knowledge about our latest history appears to be a considerable problem, especially among young Bulgarians born after 1989. An entire generation has been limited in its knowledge on the period of democratic transition in Bulgaria, because of the absence of a consensual historical narrative based on undisputed and systematically collected facts, as well as due to the temporal proximity of the respective events. Moreover, the communist regime is barely mentioned in history textbooks.

The educational strand of the initiative “25 years free Bulgaria” aimed to address this knowledge deficiency among youngsters and to attract their involvement in the reflections on the recent past. Nationwide, a team of renowned lecturers gave open lessons and discussed with both students and teachers a variety of historical topics of their interest and concern. The lessons shed

light on a diverse array of issues related to the communist period and the 25 years of transition in Bulgaria. Within three months we covered more than 30 destinations with lecturing styles differing among the speakers and ranging from more traditional narrative style to highly interactive formats. The sessions considerably increased the interest among students, teachers and school officials on the communist and transition periods. As a result, school communities responded very positively to a campaign for the incorporation of those periods of our recent history into a new history curriculum. The initiative received full support from the Ministry of Education, which assisted in arranging the visits to the selected high schools.

Facts: 31 open lessons in 31 different schools throughout the country. 24 towns covered in total. 644 questionnaires were filled in during the lessons. 65% of the students found the lessons “super interesting”; 53% answer that during the last two years they haven’t had guest teachers on similar topics (democracy, transition, civil society, political competence, etc.); 33% defined the lessons as “Very necessary as it is a shame not knowing our own recent past history”, 31% define them as “Necessary as we should know how our country and society is developing in the contemporary world”; 24% defined them as “Very necessary, because we need the historical assessment”.



4.

HISTORY

INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH

CONFERENCE

“25 years of changes – boundaries and periodization of the Bulgarian transition, institutions and quality of democracy”

Today, 25 years after the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, the complex trajectory of the Bulgarian transition toward democracy is gradually becoming a subject of research in various disciplines including history, politics, social studies, anthropology and economics. The actual definition of the concept and periodization of the transition itself is not yet certain, and remains a matter of interest for further research. Of course, the Bulgarian case cannot be considered in isolation. It is a part of a causality order, following on from Gorbachev's Perestroika and the state of international relations at the end of the Cold War. With this context the initiative organized an international research conference at the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" on December 13th -14th, 2014.

Among the topics of the panel discussions were:

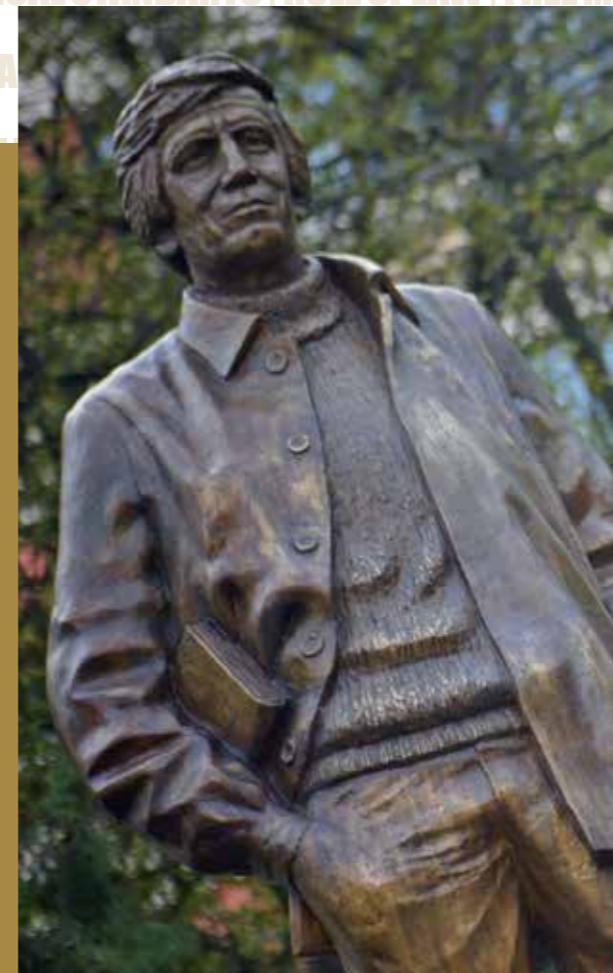
- Gorbachev's Perestroika and its impact in Eastern Europe;
- The world and international relations in the 1980s and early 1990s;
- The transformation processes in Eastern Europe;
- Definitions, boundaries and periodization of the Bulgarian transition;
- Formation of the political system in post-communist Bulgaria;
- Transformation processes in Bulgarian society;
- Economic, social and cultural dimensions of the Bulgarian transition.



HISTORY

MONUMENT, DEDICATED TO THE BULGARIAN DISSIDENT GEORGI MARKOV

The monument of the Bulgarian dissident Georgi Markov was unveiled on November 11th, 2014 in the presence of the President Rossen Plevneliev and the former Presidents Zhelyo Zhelev and Petar Stoyanov. Georgi Markov is a dissident author and journalist, who left Bulgaria in 1969 and started working for Radio Free Europe, Deutsche Welle and the BBC World Service. He was assassinated in London in 1978, as the assassination is widely suspected to have been the deed of the Bulgarian State Security. The unveiling of the monument, located at Sofia's Journalist Square, marked the 80th anniversary since the birth of Markov, who at the time of his murder was only 49. The monument was a joint project with the Sofia Municipality.



HISTORY

CIVIC DUTY AWARD

Bulgarian dissidents and individuals repressed by the communist regime were awarded the Civic Duty Award – first rank by the President Rosen Plevneliev. The awards were bestowed for significant contribution to the establishment and strengthening of the civil society, to the development of democratic institutions and the protection of human rights and freedoms in Bulgaria.

The event marked the beginning of a traditional annual ceremony to award distinguished Bulgarians with the Civic Duty Award on November 10th. This year the award ceremony honoured Bulgarians for their opposition to the totalitarian regime and work against the violation of civil rights and freedoms, i.e. individuals who have devoted their lives to the cause of defending the right of every Bulgarian citizen to develop one's potential freely and with dignity in one's own country.

The awarded individuals were: Alfred Foskolo, Sabri Iskenderov, Todor Tsanev, Georgi Saraivanov, Petar Manolov, Zeynep Kelesh, Blagoy Topuzliev (1946-2010), Vasil Uzunov (1947-1994), Stefan Valkov (1925-2012), Georgi Zarkin (1940-1977), father Dimitar Ambarev (1944-2014), Dimitar Vlaychev (1942-1972), Eduard Genov (1946-2009), Kostadin Sabev (1930-2014), prof. Yordan Todorov (1920-1996), Rumiana Uzunova (1936-1995), Nuri Adali (1922-Y004).

Among the awarded were the founders of the Movement for Self-protection and the Public Committee for Ecologic Protection of Ruse, who were also among the organizers of the first protest demonstrations in Bulgaria in the 80s: Albena Velkova, Todorka Bobeva, Evgeniya Zheleva, Stefka Monova, Tsonka Bukurova and Viara Georgieva (posthumously).



5.

INTERNATIONAL EVENTS

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE “DEALING WITH THE PAST WHILE LOOKING TO THE FUTURE”

The largest international public event that took place within the initiative “25 Years Free Bulgaria” was the conference “Dealing with the Past while looking to the Future”.

The first session, called “25 years later” was based on the results of a nation-wide survey, (The Transition: Myths and Memory 25 Years Later, presented in the National Public Opinion section) and framed the discussion of the upcoming two days. The debate brought in different perspectives on the following two topics: *Memories and myths, 25 years later; 1989: what beginning? and 25 years of freedom: generational and political interpretations.* Among the speakers at the panel were prominent analysts and political scientists, such as Edvin Sugarev (politician, poet, literary critic and journalist), Mihail Nedeltchev (Professor at the New Bulgarian University and President of the Union of Bulgarian Writers) and Petya Kabakchieva (Associate Professor and Head of the Department of Sociology at Sofia University).

As part of the media partnership with the Bulgarian National Television, Daniel Chipev, Head of Department “Information” at the television, moderated the session.

Two break-out sessions followed as the first one was entitled “Truth-seeking in Eastern Europe: What Do the Archives Have to Say?” and the second “The Western Balkans After 1989. What Transitions?”.

This first explored the impact of opening the archives for uncovering the truth about past regimes and forming a consensual societal position on their legacy that is well-grounded in facts and documents. What is the best way to open the archives? What do they have to say? Is opening the archives a pre-condition for subsequent social reconciliation? How can information from the archives help a society in transition evolve and overcome its past? What is the hidden detriment of not opening the archives in an adequate manner? Speakers were Evtim Kostadinov, Chairman of the Committee for Disclosure of Documents and the Announcement of Affiliation of Bulgarian Citizens to the State Security; Joachim Foerster, Head of the Department of Information, and Deputy Director at the Federal Commission for the Records of the State Security Service of the Former German Democratic Republic (Germany); Mária Palasik, Head of Department of Research at the Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security (Hungary); Milan Barta, Acting Director, Section for Research on Totalitarian Regimes at the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes (Czech Republic); and Paweł Ukielski, Deputy Director at the Institute of National Remembrance (Poland).

The panel was moderated by Momchil Metodiev, Editor-in-chief of the “Christianity and Culture”



INTERNATIONAL EVENTS
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
“DEALING WITH THE PAST WHILE
LOOKING TO THE FUTURE”



The second break-out session examined the transitions that Western Balkan countries have been undergoing since the end of the Cold War. Which was the watershed year that marked the beginning of transitions for the countries in the region? Can we speak of the Western Balkans' 89? What were the reform paths chosen by their governments and why are they different from the rest of Central and Eastern Europe? Speakers were Petar Stoyanov, President of Bulgaria (1997-2002); Stjepan Mesić, President of Croatia (2000-2010) and the last President of Yugoslavia (Croatia); Jovan Teokarević, Professor at the Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Belgrade (Serbia); Radmila Šekerinska, Former Leader of the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (Macedonia); Remzi Lani, Director of the Albanian Media Institute (Albania), as panelist and moderator was Ognyan Minchev, Executive Director of the Institute for Regional and International Studies.

The second day continued with the Presidential Session, entitled “The Path to Democracy: Are Transitional Experiences Unique or Transferable”. The President of Bulgaria Rosen Plevneliev and the President of Hungary János Áder gave their thoughts during a panel, dedicated to the fact that each transitional society has its own unique path to democratic transformation, determined by national peculiarities that favour certain choices and

developments over other. Therefore, it is important to pay attention to their different experiences. However, it is even more important to attempt to extract transferable lessons learned, with regard to both good practices and mistakes to be avoided. The session was moderated by Boyko Vassilev, host and producer of the weekly Panorama news talk show of the Bulgarian National Television.

The fourth session was entitled “1989 and the Culture of Remembrance: Many Stories and the Untold Truth”. The recent communist past is a topic that fundamentally divides Bulgarian society. It is often the subject of radical affirmation, rejection or emotional appraisals. We have a plethora of diverging stories, but no consensual evidence-based history. Common issues in post-communist societies are the recycling of elites and invisible networks that are rotted in the past, but influence the politics of the day. A lack of a culture of remembrance renders a society susceptible to mythologizing, nostalgic distortions of the past and partisan confrontation. How can we cope with such deficiencies, especially with regard to younger generations, who have no personal memories of the past? Answers to those questions were given by Dagmar Schipanski, Member of the Board of the Christian Democratic Union and President of the Studienkolleg zu Berlin (Germany); Janusz Bugajski, Senior Fellow at the Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA) (USA); Nassya Kravetska-Owens, Writer and Journalist (Bulgaria/ USA) and moderated by Martin Ivanov, Minister of Culture (2014) and Secretary of culture, education and national identity at the President's Office.



INTERNATIONAL EVENTS
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
“DEALING WITH THE PAST WHILE
LOOKING TO THE FUTURE”



The two following break-out sessions were entitled “Policies in transition: Democracy and the rule of law: Bulgaria and Central and Eastern Europe in Comparison” and “Economies in Transition: Market Economy and Energy Dependencies”. The first one started from the fact that 25 years ago Bulgaria went through a bloodless revolution, but then suffered under severe economic hardship. Nevertheless, we still managed to reach consensus on the currency board and on NATO and EU membership. Alongside critically examining what went wrong, and how, during the years of transition, the panel reflected on what went right, while also moving beyond the national context and looking at the wider Eastern European experience. The panelists were Georgi Pirinski, Member of the European Parliament, Minister of Foreign Affairs (1995-1996) and Speaker of the National Assembly (2005-2009) (Bulgaria); István Gyarmati, President of the International Centre for Democratic Transition (Hungary); Ján Čarnogurský, Prime Minister of Slovakia (1991-1992) and Chairperson of the Christian Democratic Movement (Slovakia); Philip Dimitrov, First democratically elected Prime Minister of Bulgaria (1991-1992) (Bulgaria); and Wojciech Przybylski, Editor of Res Publica Nowa (Poland). The session was moderated by Rayna Gavrilova, Open Society Foundation (Bulgaria).

The second break-out session focused on the moment when the Iron Curtain fell in 1989, after which many expected an order based on cooperation to unfold internationally, and liberal democracy, rule of law and market economy to flourish domestically. However, this was the case only partially and 25 years later we face the lasting effects of some of the dependencies, established prior to 89. So what have we as Europe learned from 25 years of freedom in economic terms? What lessons can be taken from how governments, business, and societies in CEE managed the periods of uncertainty, and how do they relate to our current time? Panelists were Daniel Dăianu, Professor of Economics, National School of Political and Administrative Studies (SNSPA) in Bucharest and ECFR Council member (Romania); Julian Popov, Chairman of the Board of the Building Performance Institute, Europe, Fellow of the European Climate Foundation (Bulgaria/ UK); Juraj Bayer, Member of the Board and Chief financial officer of ZSE Energia and ECFR Council Member (Slovakia); and Krassen Stanchev, Associate Professor at the Sofia University in Economy, Board Chairman, Founder and former Executive Director of the Institute for Market Economy. The session was moderated by Velislava Popova, Editor-in-Chief at Dnevnik daily newspaper.



INTERNATIONAL EVENTS
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
“DEALING WITH THE PAST WHILE
LOOKING TO THE FUTURE”



Although all of the Western Balkan countries are firmly on the path to EU accession, the news that there will be no progress on enlargement for the next 5 years caused frustration across the region, stated the sixth panel. It was entitled “Unfinished business in the heart of Europe I: Western Balkans”. The pro-EU protests in Ukraine revived the question of the EU accession perspective as a driving force for democratization and reform. So what is the role of the EU perspective in transition? What should be the next steps, in order to sustain the integration momentum in the Western Balkans? Answers were sought by Aleksandar Pejovic, State Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Chief EU Negotiator (Montenegro); Dimitrij Rupel, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs (1990-1992, 2000-2008) (Slovenia); Kristof Bender, Deputy Chairman of the European Stability Initiative (Austria); and Vedran Džihic, Senior Researcher and Lecturer at the Austrian Institute for International Affairs (Bosnia and Herzegovina). Moderator was Tim Judah, Balkans Correspondent at The Economist (United Kingdom).

The last session had the title “Unfinished Business in the Heart of Europe II: Eastern Neighbourhood and Russia” and focused on EU’s Eastern Neighbourhood and Russia from the point of view of the EU. How did the annexation of Crimea change the way Europe thinks of its neighbourhoods? Are we witnessing a revival of Cold War geopolitics and

is there a threat of drawing new division lines in Europe, 25 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall? Is the EU running a risk of losing its East and what would that mean for its own credibility as an inclusive union, and one that can handle its immediate neighbourhood? Does the fight for Ukraine remind us in the EU of the dilemmas ‘old Europe’ was facing with the post-communist countries post 89? Speakers were Craig Kennedy, President of the German Marshall Fund of the USA (1996-2014) (USA); Ghia Nodia, Political analyst and founder of the Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development (Georgia); Ion Sturza, Former Prime Minister of the Republic of Moldova, Founder and Chairman of Fribourg Capital, Council member of ECFR (Moldova); Ivan Krastev, Chairman of the Centre for Liberal Strategies and founding board member of ECFR. The panel was moderated by Vessela Tcherneva, Director of Wider Europe Programme, European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR).

The conference was done in partnership with the European Council on Foreign Relations and with the support of Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Hanns Seidel Stiftung and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

“The memory about communism is fading away, and it isn’t replaced by knowledge about the criminal regime, but by crawling mythologization and distortion. And the public nostalgia for the recent past seems like a reaction and assessment of the unsuccessful transition.” Capital Weekly.



INTERNATIONAL EVENTS

“LIMINAL CROSSING” BY ERGIN CAVUSOGLU



“Liminal Crossing” is the reenactment of moving a piano through the Bulgarian-Turkish border at the peak of the so called “Big Excursion” – the forced migration of Bulgarian Turks from Bulgaria to Turkey in the summer of 1989. Ergin’s two-screen video installation is made in 2009, 20 years later, on the same spot – the border crossing point Kapitan Andreevo, and comments on these events through the lens of contemporary art. Ergin Cavusoglu is one of the most interesting artists on the European cultural scene today. His biography and its Bulgarian dimensions can help us rethink some of the most controversial moments in the history of the previous regime. He is a significant author on the regional Balkan scene, his works has impact both in Bulgaria and Turkey, constantly interpreting the geopolitical clichés. Ergin studied art at the Sofia Art High school, and later in Marmara University, Turkey. Today he lives and teaches in London.

His installation was presented at the premises of and in cooperation with the Red House Centre for Culture and Debate.

INTERNATIONAL EVENTS

INSTITUTE FOR CULTURE, MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

The Institute for Culture at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Bulgaria has been a partner throughout the entire initiative.

The Tenth Annual Festival of Bulgarian Film in New York - So(fia) Independent - New York started on November 19th, 2014 at Tribeca Cinemas in Manhattan. The Festival was dedicated to the 25th Anniversary of fall of the Berlin Wall and the resulting democratic changes in Eastern Europe and Bulgaria. So Independent Film Festival - New York is organized by the Foundation for Bulgarian Culture Abroad, the Bulgarian National Film Center, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the support of Bulgaria - America Cultural Exchange, Inc. On 4th December in New York the Institute for Culture organized a discussion on the topic of cinema and changes after 1989 as a part of the festival’s framework and the one of the initiative “25 Years Free Bulgaria”.

6.

IN THE MEDIA

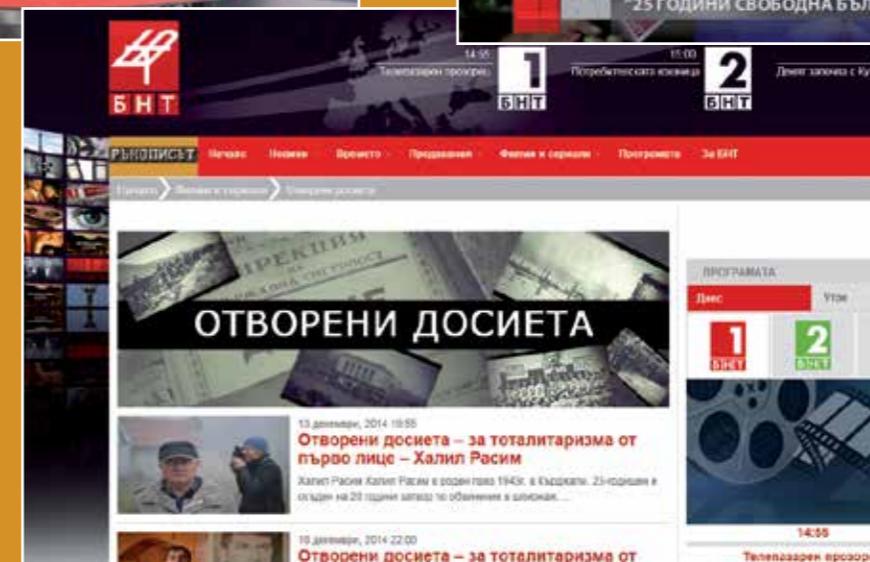
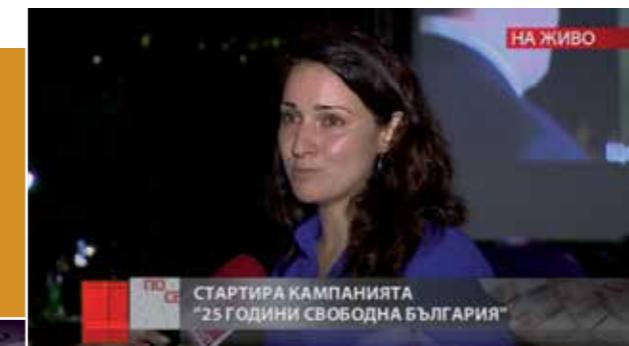
TRAVELING SUMMER CINEMA

In July 2014, the Bulgarian National Television (BNT) – the main media partner of the initiative “25 Years Free Bulgaria” – started a Traveling Summer Cinema with its own production movies focusing on the transition period. Under the brand of the initiative, the programme included the movies “Zift”, “Sneakers”, “Ave”, “TILT”, “Mila from Mars”, “Shelter”, and “Monkeys during the winter”. For the period of two months (July to beginning of September) the Traveling Summer Cinema had 32 screenings throughout the country with an estimated total of 10-12 thousands of viewers. In October-December 2014 BNT broadcasted the official video of the campaign “25 Years Free Bulgaria”, as well as the entire “Concert of Freedom”.

Within the framework of the initiative, BNT started a series of 6 documentaries entitled “Open files”, which presented the personal stories of repressed individuals from the years of totalitarian regime (Petko Ogoyski, Alfred Foskolo, Georgi Saraivanov, Katrin Makarov/Katia Lviov, Lachezar Zarkin and Halil Rasim). The project “re-constructed” their memories in an attempt to examine how the fate of the individual intertwined with the common one, how the regime pre-determined life-paths, what heritage was left by Bulgaria’s communist past and how it has influenced our transitional experience.

The documentary series “25 Years of Democracy” in turn, offered 6 movies screened by BNT, which studied the main trends and key events that left a lasting mark on the Bulgarian transition period.

The series “25 years of democracy” commenced with a special two-hour edition of the programme “History BG” on November 10, that offered a debate on the historical periods of the communist regime and the transition to democracy with the participation of the renowned historians Iskra Baeva, Andrey Pantev and Mihail Gruev, the writer Georgi Gospodinov, and the sociologist Boriana Dimitrova.



PUBLIC DEBATES

PREMIERE OF DR. ZHELYO ZHELEV'S BOOK "MYTHS AND LEGENDS ABOUT THE BULGARIAN TRANSITION"



ЖЕЛЮ ЖЕЛЕВ
МИТОВЕ и ЛЕГЕНДИ
ЗА БЪЛГАРСКИЯ ПРЕХОД



The official launching of the book by Dr. Zhelyo Zhelev, entitled "Myths and Legends about the Bulgarian Transition" took place in the Aula of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". The event was organized by the publishing house "Ciela". The author Dimitar Bochev made the introduction to the presentation and moderated the discussion.

With this book Dr. Zhelev aimed to accomplish a rather difficult task: to help detect the major truths about the Bulgarian transition by deciphering the lies, illusions and delusions. Building on a huge array of documentary resources and personal impressions, Dr. Zhelev painted the true face of Bulgaria as a country on the path to change whereby the future of our society depends on whether it will continue ahead or will get lost in a sea of myths and lies.

PUBLIC DEBATES

PUBLIC DISCUSSIONS "25 YEARS LATER"

Five public debates covering five different parts of the country were organized with the support of Friedrich Naumann Stiftung and local partners. The debates took place in September and October in five university cities of Bulgaria (Blagoevgrad, Burgas, Veliko Tarnovo, Plovdiv and Ruse) and discussed the results from the public opinion survey, called The Transition: Myths and Memory 25 Years Later.

Burgas, Free University of Burgas, 3 November 2014
"The paternalistic state – expectations and attitudes towards the role of the state"

Rumen Valchev, PhD, Coordinator of the UNESCO university departments; Lachezar Kostov, historian, active supporter of the Union of Democratic Forces in the 90s; Milen Baltov, Deputy President of Bourgas Free University; Katrin Lukova, journalist

Plovdiv, Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski", 31 October 2014

"Inclination towards breaking the law or not speaking out in cases of law violations (the rule of law state)"

Yordan Sokolov, former Chair of the National Assembly of Bulgaria; Katrin Sarieva, historian, co-founder of Sariev Contemporary art gallery; Viktor Yankov, festival director of the Night of Museums and Galleries in Plovdiv

Veliko Tarnovo, Veliko Tarnovo university "St. St. Kiril and Metodi", 29 October 2014

"Entrepreneurship, initiative and readiness to take risks – values and their perception in Bulgarian society"

Penka Angelova, PhD, Chair of the "Elias Kanetti" International Association; Genoveva Hristova, entrepreneur, CEO "Ligna Group" Ltd.; Vanya Kashukeeva-Nousheva, Programme Director, Transparency International; Iliya Valev, PhD candidate

Blagoevgrad, American University in Bulgaria, 20 October 2014

"Political Oppositions (between the left and the right) – roots and reference frame (Do value cleavages exist at all?)"

Kiril Petsev, publicist; Ventsislav Daskalov, physician; Diana Veleva, history lecturer; Mariya Boteva, AUBG student

Ruse, Ruse University, 15 October 2014

"Totalitarianism as an invisible threat (due to lack of history knowledge)"

Penka Angelova, PhD, Chair of the "Elias Kanetti" International Association; Miglena Voinova, TV editor; Milotin Barakov, student in 11th grade at English Language High School "Geo Milev"

8

PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY

“THE TRANSITION: MYTHS AND MEMORY 25 YEARS LATER”

The national representative public opinion survey “The Transition: Myths and Memory 25 Years Later” was conducted among 1200 Bulgarian citizens over the age of 16 through direct interviews at their homes. The interview included a stratified group by type of settlement with sample quota on the main socio-demographic indicators - gender, age, education. The survey was conducted by Alpha Research agency.

The research team agreed on the conclusion that retrospection about communism and the transition could not be put an end to, and is not limited to the collective memories and expectations in one specific time frame. This could be achieved only when doing a complete and comprehensive analysis of all archive documents from that specific period: the judicial, legal, constitutional and economic model, the cultural layers, media and others, an analysis which is yet to be done. The main aim of the survey is not to tell the ‘truth’ about the transition, but to reveal the ‘white gaps’, the contradictions and differing versions of our newest history, which are looking for an explanation and raise urgent questions.

MAIN CONCLUSIONS:

- Twenty five years after the beginning of the democratic changes in Bulgaria, the collective memory for socialistic Bulgaria gradually fades away, and the knowledge for this period has started to disappear. 94% of the youngest population (16-30 years) share that they hardly know anything about this period. 40% of them cannot identify if the end of the communist regime was marked by the fall of the Berlin, Moscow, Sofia or the Chinese Wall. 92% don't know either in reality, or in metaphorical sense, the borders of the Communist Bloc. The knowledge about the communist era is based on personal impressions and conversations. The amount of people who have gained knowledge about communism from books is very insignificant: 10% from TV programs, 16% from school and 10% from university.
- The lack of debate in the media and the public, as well as the abdication of the cultural and educational institutions from the topics related to this period, deprive the new generations of knowledge on the ideological and political identity of the communist regime, its scope and collapse. That is how communism is forgotten, and the failures of the transition idealize it. For a big portion of Bulgarian citizens, the key political figures and events of the 90s – Thatcher, Cole, Gorbachev, Walesa, and the fall of the Berlin Wall have been removed from social changes. At the end of 2014, the society is wandering between the idealization of the years of youth, “work for all”, “free healthcare”, and the realization about the “travel restrictions”, the memories about the “manifestations”, “the product deficit”, “lack of freedom”, and “the repression against the people who had different opinion”.



- 25 years after the end of socialism, its evaluation is highly polarized and determined by people's beliefs. For example, people with left political views see in this period, above all, ease and security. The lack of unemployment, free healthcare, good education and the industrialization of our country are the strongest arguments for the positive assessment of this period. Mainly this is the opinion of the elderly people, whose political views are predominantly left. In contrast with the left, the right political specter's understanding of communism is much more critical, but also more heterogenic: restriction, lack of justice, lack of freedom, dictatorship and censorship were its basic elements. For people with right political views, this was a political structure, which limited the basic human rights and freedoms, period of utopia and common misunderstandings. While the left assessment didn't see any shadow on socialism, the right assessment acknowledged the success of some social achievements – affordable healthcare, achievements in education and science, low unemployment, social tranquility and others.
- As time goes by, the retrospection about the development of Bulgaria in the period between 1944 and 1989 is sliding on the “quicksand” of nostalgia and reassessment. The failure of many hopes for the transition “rewrote” the assessment of Bulgarian citizens for the period of 1944-1989 and for the last Secretary General of the Central Committee of the communist party – Todor Zhivkov in the 90s and today. Two years after the fall of communism, while the memory about living in this time was still alive, 76% of the people in the survey, give a negative rating of Todor Zhivkov. Today we see a sharp shift in this attitude (55% positive marks). Besides the personal memories, the nostalgia for the lost tranquility and fading knowledge of the dark sides, communism gradually loses its political assessment, continuing to feed on old and new myths.
- The reconstruction of today's point of view on the question “where to after 1989?” clearly defines the five circles of ideas of freedom and developing Bulgaria – opening the borders (30%), increase in income and welfare (27%), development of the market economy and new job opportunities (20%), more human rights and freedoms (19%), return to private ownership (18%), free elections (15%). Even though, objectively seen, more of those expectations are a fact – Bulgaria is a member of the European Union and NATO, we travel freely, private ownership is back, we have a multi-party system and free elections, the subjective feelings are that expectations and reality meet only in three directions – EU membership, freedom of traveling and private ownership. Only 2% think that the expectations of justice have been met, 5% – that we have democratic institutions, 10% – that we can freely elect our politicians in a democratic way.
- The attitude towards communism is being polarized and strongly marked by individual biographies and political orientations, while the retrospection for the period after communism is more unified and with a stronger negative sign: 50% from the population over 60 years find the development of Bulgaria after 1989 unsuccessful, against 10% who have the opposite opinion. Meanwhile, the assessment from personal point of view is more pessimistic – 29% think that they have lost during the time of transition. We see a very clear tendency – the more specific the scope of the assessments is, the less the differences. People identified the negative and positive sides in their lives. Just the opposite, the higher the level of summary, the stronger the blame for failure on the Bulgarian transition.
- One of the biggest problems we face after 25 years of changes is why people in personal respect make a more coloured retrospection, identifying positive and negative aspects, while in a more common public respect see only failures? The answer, said in everyday language, could be seen in the way Bulgarians identify achievements and failures of the transition: with the opposition “politicians vs. ordinary people”. In other words, no matter the change in the social structure in the last 25 years, this opposition is not economic, not generational, ethnic, but purely political – it gives out the impression that the higher social class has been created very quickly and is excluded from any rules or laws. Those people can never meet with the lower level of society, where rules and laws are being obeyed. With this society shows its discontent and feelings about the fundamental problems of the transition – failure of the rule of law, ineffective and corrupted institutions allowing abuse with power.
- The mass negative reaction to the transition is not a denial of the purposes of the process. The research clearly shows that people would not give up the achievements that marked the last 25 years. People have discovered the core of the problem – they don't blame politicians or the government, left or right political views, but the poorly functioning institutions, which had been focused on extracting resources from society, rather than improving the mechanisms, guaranteeing the rule of law, professionalism and loyalty. That is how, after 25 years of changes, the Bulgarian society is in front of yet another political challenge – creating effective and transparent institutions, guaranteeing the rule of law which will not encourage power abuses but limit them.

9

ADVISORY BOARD



Chairperson: Zhelyo Zhelev (1935 – 2015), President of Bulgaria (1990 - 1997)

He was born on 3 March 1935 in Veselinovo, Shumen. He was head of the department “Culture and Personalities” in the Culture Institute. In 1965 he was excluded from the Communist party as an anti-Marxist. In 1982 he published the book “Fascism”, which was forbidden because it highlighted similarities between the socialist and the fascist regimes. He initiated the creation of a Club for Glasnost and Democracy. He co-established and was the first head of the party of the United Democratic Forces. He was appointed as a president of the Republic after the resignation of Petar Mladenov. In 1992 he became the first democratically elected president of the Republic of Bulgaria. In 2001 he became chairman of the Balkan Political Club. President Zhelev died on 30th January 2015.



Co-chairperson: **Todor Kavaldzhiev**, Vice President of Bulgaria (1997 – 2002)

He was born on 26 January 1934 in Glavan, Stara Zagora. He was imprisoned in Belene twice. He was member of the 7th Grand National Assembly. He was secretary of the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union.

Deputy Chairperson/ Secretary General: **Rumyana Kolarova**, Minister of Education (2014) and former secretary of the President of Bulgaria. She is the Head of the postgraduate program “European Integration” in Sofia University. She teaches comparative politics and European Integration. Since 2011 she has been chairwoman of the Managerial Council of the Center for Women’s Studies and Politics. Since 2000 she has been a member of the Council of Media and Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe. She has written extensively for academic publications.



Anastasia Mozer is a Bulgarian politician, daughter of G. M. Dimitrov, Secretary General of the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union and a member of the parliament. She was born on 30 June 1937 in Sofia. She emigrated in the US in 1962. She has a Ph.D. in philology from George Washington University. She was an associate at the World Bank and the Center for Hellenic Studies. She was an editor, speaker and author of “Voice of America”.



Blagovest Sendov is a politician, diplomat and an academic. He was born on 8 February 1932 in Asenovgrad. He was a professor of Numerical Analysis in the Sofia University. He is the author of more than 200 academic publications, 7 treaties and 30 textbooks. He was Head of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences from 1988 to 1991. He was a candidate for the post of President in 1992. He was Chairman of the National Assembly from 1995 to 1997. He was an ambassador to Japan from 2004 to 2009.



Deyan Kyuranov is a human rights activist, a member of the Board of “Ecoglasnost”. Born and based in Sofia, Bulgaria. Holds PhD in philosophy, Sofia University (1986). He has worked as Assistant Professor at the Sofia University 1980-1984; interpreter (English, French, Russian, 1984); manual worker (mining brigade, 1985-1986). Co-founder of opposition groups (1986-1989). Beginning of 1989 he designed and directed polls and surveys in political anthropology for Bulgaria and the Balkans; continues same currently as Program Director at the Center for Liberal Strategies, Sofia. Director of Research at the European Roma Rights Center, Budapest, 1998-1999. Director of the Belarus Project of the Open Society Fund, 2002-2012.





Edvin Sugarev is a poet and a politician. He was born on 27 December 1953. He taught Bulgarian literature at Sofia University and at Plovdiv University. He was an editor of "Most" and "Literaturen Vestnik". In 1989 he was an activist of Ecoglasnost. He was also a member of the parliament. Since 2002 he had been a research fellow at the Literature Institute at Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. He left in 2010 and started teaching at the New Bulgarian University.



Evelina Kelbecheva. She teaches at the American University in Bulgaria and is an initiator of Movement for Teaching Communism as Part of History at School. She has published works on Bulgarian history, including the Communist era. Her interests include Bulgaria since it has been an independent country, what happened with the Bulgarian intellectuals between the two World Wars, the Cold War at the Balkans and the period of regime transition. In 2013 she lectured at the Library of the Congress, the Bulgarian Embassy in Washington, the University of Harvard and the University of Princeton.



Evtim Kostadinov is chairman of the Committee for Disclosing the Documents and Announcing Affiliation of Bulgarian citizens to the State Security and Intelligence Services of the Bulgarian National Army. He was born on 11 November 1959. From 2005 to 2007, he was Member of Parliament from BSP, elected from the region of Dobrich.



Filip Dimitrov. He was born on 31 March 1955 in Sofia. He was the chairman of the Board of UDF. In 1991 he became a Prime Minister of a minority Cabinet. From 1997 to 1998 he was representative of Bulgaria at the UN. Up to 2001 he was the Bulgarian ambassador to the US. In 2010 he was appointed to run the Permanent Representation of the EU in Georgia.



Georgi Bliznashki is Prime Minister of Bulgaria (2014). He is a professor of constitutional law, former politician of BSP and its coordinator for Sofia region at the early 1990s. At the moment he is not a member of a political party. He was born on 4 October 1956 in Skravena. He specialized in the UK and Russia. He was a lecturer at the Law Department of Sofia University. He is the author of books and academic articles. He was a member of the Board of BSP and a MP at the European Parliament.

Georgi Lozanov is a Bulgarian expert in media and journalism. Currently, he is chairman of the Council of Electronic Media. He was born on 26 April 1958 in Sofia. He was deputy editor-in-chief of "Kultura" and editor-in-chief of "Pet Zvezdi" and "Egoist". He ran the Department of Print and Publishing at Sofia University. He has been a member of the Bulgarian media regulator since its establishment. He is the chairman of the jury of the Helikon Prize for contemporary Bulgarian prose and the jury of the festival "The Eight Muse". He is a member of the jury of the "Vik" prize and many others.



Georgi Pirinski is a Bulgarian politician of BSP. He was born on 10 September 1948 in New York. In 1947 he joined the Ministry of Foreign Trade. From 1990 to 1996 he was deputy chairman of BSP. He was deputy PM at Georgi Atanasov's Cabinet and the second mandate of Andrei Lukanov. He was Minister of the Foreign Affairs and chairman of the National Assembly.



Georgi Saraivanov received death sentence by the Communist regime in 1954, when he was 23, for sabotaging the regime. His sentence was changed to 20 years of which he spent 9 in the prison. Afterwards he made four attempts to run away from Bulgaria and he succeeded at the fifth. He lived in West Germany for 24 years with his family. Afterwards he came back to Bulgaria.



Hristo Hristov is an investigative journalist, author of books about State Security, awarded with many prizes. From 1991 to 1997 he was judicial journalist. In 1997 he became head of the Department of Internal Information and in 2000 – special correspondent of "Democracy". Up to 2009 he was an investigating journalist at "Dnevnik". In 2011 he founded the website www.desebg.com. He specialized at "Guardian" and the International Centre for Journalists in Washington.



Ivaylo Znepolski is a philosopher, culturologist, politician, and film critic and university lecturer. He was born on 5 August 1940 in Sofia. In 1971 he acquired a PhD in art studies. In 1982 he acquired a PhD in philosophy. He was a lecturer at Sofia University and a guest lecturer in Paris. In 1999 he co-founded the Musee de l'Europe. He is a member of the Senate of the European Cultural Parliament. He is a member of the Council of Europe and of the project Link Diversity. In 2005 he founded the Institute for Studies of the Recent Past.





Koprinka Tchervenкова is editor-in-chief of “Kultura” newspaper. She was born on 18 October 1947 in Sofia. She has been working at “Kultura” since 1975 and she has been its editor-in-chief since 1990. She is a member of the Club for Glasnost and Democracy. She took part of the breakfast with President François Mitterrand.



Krasen Stanchev is an economist, university lecturer and former MP. He cofounded the Institute for Market Economics. He has helped a great deal in developing the market reforms in Bulgaria. He is a member of the Bulgarian Macroeconomics Organization. He was an active member of Ecoglasnost.



Lilyana Drumeva is the chairman of the Union of the Repressed by the Communist Regime “Pamet”. She comes from a family repressed by the communist regime which rules out an academic career. She graduates in philology. Ms. Drumeva works her way up from a teacher to an advisor to a Head of Directorate at the Ministry of Education. She was an advisor to the caretaker Minister of Education in 2014.



Maksim Minchev is the director of the Bulgarian Telegraph Agency. He has worked in “Narodna Mladezh”, “Bulgarski Voi” and in the Military Department of BNR. In 1992 he became director of the press of the Atlantic Club. He is the author of more than 1000 publications on the Atlantic integration of Bulgaria. He has taken part in the saving of the Bulgarian physicians from Libya, the world meetings of Bulgarian media abroad, the visit of Pope Joan Paul II in Bulgaria and the first visit of an American president in Bulgaria.



Mihail Gruev is a Bulgarian historian and lecturer in contemporary Bulgarian history and ethnology at Sofia University. He was born on 25 October 1971 in Sofia. He was a professor at the Department of Bulgarian History at Sofia University. He is Head of the Department. He is a guest lecturer at Plovdiv University. He has also been guest lecturer at Munich, Saarbrücken and Belgrade.

Mihail Nedelchev is a Bulgarian scientist, historian, literature critic, culturologist, and politician. He was born on 17 July 1942 in Sofia. He was editor of “Literature Front” and “Rodna Rech”. He had worked at the Department of Literature Heritage of the publishing house “Bulgarski Pisatel”. From 1999 to 2010 he was Head of the Department of New Bulgarian Studies at NBU. Since 2010 he has been honorary professor at NBU. He was guest lecturer at the University of Saint Petersburg. He is chairman of the Union of Bulgarian Writers. He was a member of parliament at the 36th National Assembly.



Ognyan Minchev is Bulgarian political scientist, doctor of Sociology, director of the Institute for Regional and International Studies and chairman of the Management Board of the Bulgarian division of the organization “Transparency International”. Author of numerous analyzes of domestic and international policy. He was born on December 2, 1958 in Varna. He is a lecturer in Theory of the International Relations in the Department of Political Science at Sofia University. From 1999 to 2008 was the head of the department. He is chairman of the Institute for Regional and International Studies and head of the Board of the Bulgarian “Transparency International”.



Petko Ogoyski is a writer and politician. In 1950 he was sentenced to five years in prison for “hostile poems and conspirational activity”. He served that sentence in various prisons and concentration camps in Belene. He started studying at the History and Philology Faculty of the SSU, but another two years sentence in 1962 put an end to his studies. He was a member of parliament of the UDF (the quota of Bulgarian Agrarian National Union N. Petkov) in the VII Grand National Assembly. He is the author of essays, short stories, articles and aphorisms.



Petko Simeonov is a scientist and a politician, co-founder of the Union of Democratic Forces. He is a member of the Club for Glasnost and Perestroika, created on November 3, 1988. He took part in the Round Table. He was the first director of the newspaper “Democracy.” He was a UDF MP in the Seventh Grand National Assembly, where he founded and chaired the Committee on Demographic Policy, obscured by the next National Assembly. He left UDF in July 1991 with the first wave of “flaking”. He founded the Bulgarian Liberal Party. In 1996 he retired from active political activity.





Petar Stoyanov, a lawyer by profession, a politician and the second President of the Republic of Bulgaria (January 22, 1997 - January 22, 2002). He was born on May 25, 1952 in Plovdiv. He was a spokesman for the UDF in Plovdiv (1990), and a deputy Minister of Justice (1992). He was MP in the 37th National Assembly. During his presidential term, Bulgaria submitted its formal application for membership in NATO and began negotiating for EU accession.



Petya Kabakchieva holds a Ph.D. in Sociology at Sofia University; she is a Professor of Sociology, Sociology of Politics, Sociology of Inequalities. She researches communism and nationalism. She was born on September 20, 1956 in Sofia. Since 2007 has been head of the Department of Sociology in the Sofia University. She specialized in Germany, Belgium, Ireland, France and Austria.



Radoslav Yankulov, General Director of BNR. He was born on February 11, 1953 in Sofia. He has been working at BNR since 1976. He was head of "Express" Radio, Radio "99" and press service of the BFU. He was the director of the sports department of BBT. Since May 2013 he is Director General of BNR.



Svetoslav Ovcharov is a director and screenwriter; professor at the National Academy of Theatre and Film Arts since 2008; member of the European Film Academy. He was born in 1957 in Provadia.



Solomon Passy, Minister of Foreign Affairs (2001 to 2005); Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the 40th National Assembly of Bulgaria (2005-2009); MP from the National Movement for Stability and Progress (2005-2009); Chairman of the transparency and accountability of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly; Founder and President of the Atlantic Club in Bulgaria. He was born on December 22, 1956 in Plovdiv. He was a research fellow in Mathematics and Computer Science at Sofia University and BAS (1984-1994).



Stefan Komandarev is a director, writer and producer. He is the director of "The World is Big and Salvation Lurks around the Corner", the Bulgarian nomination for foreign language film at the Academy Awards. He was born in Sofia in 1966.

Vessela Tcherneva, political secretary of the Bulgarian Embassy in Washington, USA in the period 2000-2003, Wider Europe Program Director at the European Council on Foreign Relations, London (2013 -), a spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2010-2013), member of the Board of the Foundation "Sofia platform". From 2004 to 2006 she worked as secretary of the International Commission on the Balkans. She has been a referent for Germany at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



Vladimir Levchev is a Bulgarian poet, novelist, journalist, politician, activist at Ecoglasnost and professor at the American University in Blagoevgrad. Before 1989 he was editor of the publishing house "National Culture" and issued the illegally printed in that period magazine "Voice". He is the author of 14 books of poetry and four novels published in Bulgaria, as well as 5 books of poetry, published in the United States. From 1991 to 1994 he was deputy editor of the "Literary Gazette". He was a lecturer of Literature and Writing at the University of Maryland, Montgomery College, George Washington University, American University (Washington) and the American University in Blagoevgrad.



Vyara Ankova is a television journalist and current CEO and chairman of the board of the Bulgarian National Television. She was born on February 5, 1966. She has been working in Television since 1991. She specialized in BBC and worked as a correspondent for CNN. She became news presenter in 1994. She is the 21st General Director of BNT. She was re-elected to the post in 2013.



Yordan Sokolov is a lawyer, politician and statesman, Minister of the Interior, MP in the 37th, 38th and 39th National Assembly, chairman of the 38th National Assembly. He was born on January 18, 1933 in Sofia. From 1956 to 1958 he was Secretary to the arbitration. He was a member of the Lawyer Council for seven terms. He is a member of the Executive Committee of the Union of Lawyers in Bulgaria. He was legal adviser to President Zhelev. He was appointed Minister of the Interior in the government of Philip Dimitrov. In 2004 was one of the MPs who founded the Party DSB, which he left in 2011.



Yordanka Fandakova (repr. by Todor Chobanov), has been the Mayor of Sofia since 2009, which made her the first woman at that post. She was born on November 23, 1962 in Samokov. She was a teacher and director of the school "Vladislav Gramatik" in Sofia. In 2005 she became deputy mayor of Sofia. In 2009 she became Minister of Education and Science. She won the elections for mayor of Sofia in 2009 and in 2011.



10. ESSAYS

Boyko Penchev

Dimitar Botchev

Evelina Kelbecheva

Evgenia Ivanova

Evtim Kostadinov

Georgi Gospodinov

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Jorge Fuentes Monzonís-Villalonga

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Nikolay Nikolov

Nina Khrushcheva

Ognyan Minchev

Stephen Grand

Vedran Dzihic

Vladimir Levchev

Wojciech Przybylski

Yordan Sokolov

LANGUAGE AND THE STATE

By Boyko Penchev

A quarter century after the events of late autumn 1989, it is harder than ever for Bulgarian society to reach a common understanding of what has happened to us over these years. We call them “the Transition,” but above all we remember them as a cascade of crises. There is no other similar case in our most recent history. Bulgaria has faced many challenges, but it has never lived with the perception that it has existed in a historical hole for 25 years. The crisis has devoured our horizon in its entirety. Bulgarians, be them ‘red’ or ‘blue’, protesters or counter-protesters, are indeed united. They are united in the feeling of failure. We only fight about the reasons and who the guilty ones are.

Instead of analyzing for yet another time the dynamics of Transition, let us look closer at something seemingly more neutral.

What happened to our language during these 25 years?

Not with language in general, but with the words through which we describe ourselves as a society with a common past and future. In what way have the social changes settled in our language? The first thing, which can be noticed immediately, is that all the words which express this ‘civilizational choice’, which we allegedly made after 1989, turn out to have already been loaded with negative connotations. They have become pejorative, as linguists like to say. Let us start with ‘democracy’ – the password from the beginning of the changes. Obviously, the word itself is so powerful and inspiring that the dissidents from the Club in Support of Glasnost and Restructuring changed the name of their organisation to the ‘Club for Glasnost and Democracy’ almost immediately after November 10th. A little later, the newly formed opposition named their newspaper ‘Democracy’. It is no accident that later attempts to revive the newspaper using the same name turned out to be, generally speaking, unsuccessful. From the beginning of the 1990s we witnessed a growing tendency for the word ‘democracy’ to be used ironically, knowingly raising a few eyebrows. The *Starshel*¹ newspaper used to publish caricatures with the slogan “Without words,” meaning that the situation was self-explanatory. Every time we witness a scandal today, instead of applying the label ‘without words’, we call it ‘democracy’.

This degradation has been most obvious in the emergence of variations on ‘democracy’ with openly derogative content, such as ‘demoshitting’, ‘demosteal’ and ‘democroak’.² Likewise, most of the other words we used to define the steps towards dismantling the totalitarian system were discarded.

¹ Starshel (‘Hornet’ in English) is a Bulgarian satirical newspaper.

² All words are puns combining the word ‘democracy’ with other Bulgarian words.

Restitution gave birth to 'restitute'³; 'reform' was pronounced in a heavy provincial accent to become 'rlform', underlining that it is not what it should have been. The heralds of reformist policies were not spared either – equating them negatively with homosexuals and pedophiles coining the terms 'SDS gay',⁴ and later 'libero-gay' and 'tolero-gay' (usually combined with 'Sorosoid'⁵).

Language outrage over democracy and market economics also happened on the geopolitical level. The terms 'colonialism' and 'imperialism', which were almost extinct during the late socialist period, were revived at the beginning of the 21st Century. What is more they were not used ironically, but just as Vladimir Ilyich Lenin had wanted them to be used. We saw the introduction of newly coined words of contempt, such as 'Euro cabbages' and 'Euro gay'. And for suspected local accomplices of imperialist robbers, a pseudo-Botev lexical layer was reactivated where one could discern such literary gems as 'lickspittles', 'national apostates', and 'matritraitors'.

One could object that this is the language of a politically-biased periphery, whose place is in the pub and its virtual cousin is the internet forum. Jokes about Brussels flora and fauna are far from being Bulgarian specialties. The problem though is whether there is a public sphere here in Bulgaria which would be able to sustain this new Bulgarian nihilism in the zone of the emotional discourse and public behaviour. Put simply, can swear-words remain swear-words and politics remains politics?

Obviously not, if one judges by the success of Slavi Trifonov's talk show which for so many years has mixed entertainment and political tirades. There are plenty of satiric broadcasts in the world which make fun of politicians, but nowhere else, as far as I know, do scriptwriters stand as a moral and intellectual tribunal passing judgment on the burning political issues of the day to the extent that Trifonov's scriptwriters often do.

Associating negative language with 'democracy' and everything related to it is a symptom of a serious deficit in Bulgarian society. The biggest problem is that language in our public space is schizophrenically divided into a high Eurocentric norm, paradoxically represented most clearly by Lyutvi Mestan, and a low idiom, sunken in the body-physiological, and according to which everything is reduced to the domination of possession and to be understood economically and sexually. Let us remember how for two months, the media and politicians described the potential ruling coalition with the language of weddings. Democracy is a system in which all that happens is that one person takes another one for a ride. In this sphere, high and low appearances fuse.

³ Restitution was the process of restoring property that had been seized by the communists after 1944 to their original owners or their heirs. Some people resented the sudden wealth these owners received, and so referred to them as 'restitutes', a play on the word 'prostitute'.

⁴ SDS is an abbreviation of UDF (Union of Democratic Forces, which was one of the first opposition parties in Bulgaria after the Fall of the Berlin Wall)

⁵ 'Sorosoid' is a derogative term for Bulgarian protestors, who were accused by left-wing politicians of being sponsored by Hungarian-born American business magnate George Soros.

Of course, some may be outraged that, taking into consideration the country's missing billions, we are preoccupied with language and the way we speak. Still, language is a mirror, and what the mirror tells us is that the alleged consensus in Bulgaria regarding democracy, market economics and European orientation is actually false, hollow and made of cardboard. On the one hand it is a declarative, dolled up euro-jargon and on the other, macho mockery and folk-style humour. Why do we wonder that politicians cannot lead meaningful dialogue between themselves? Have we seen such dialogue in the public space?

Of course, our language is not to blame. People are justifiably right to be unhappy with what they went through during the Transition years. It is natural that social convulsions, during which there were both winners and losers, should have an impact on the linguistic image of 'democracy'. The strange element is the alternative that is gradually gaining popularity. For many the crisis could be fought not by addressing it head on, but by winding the clock back. Nostalgia for Zhivkov's socialism has various dimensions, one of which is linguistic. Is it an accident that recycled linguistic fossils are to be found spinning around the public space? Socialism is in fashion. Martin Karbovski has called his broadcast 'Fatherland Front'⁶, and the new season of Celebrity Big Brother is entitled Exemplary House⁷. We could just say that this is a media trick, but on what kind of attitudes does this trick rely? Is it not the astonishingly significant majority of people, who agree with the pathetic argument of the anonymous internet forum-writer, who wrote: "What has the eu dun for me, which todor zhivkov wouldn't of done anyway?"

It is clear from the spelling of this post, but where does the 'grammar', of such a mentality come from? From some kind of natural unpreparedness for democracy on the part of the Bulgarian man!? This is doubtful. Most likely it comes from an unfortunate combination of two factors. The first is a conscious brainwashing carried out by the architects and builders of Transition. Bulgarian society had to be persuaded that incomprehensible forces, but not the Bulgarian Communist Party and its formal and informal derivatives, had brought about our difficult situation. The culprit is called by different names, but all of them signify one and the same thing: imperialists, the 'Rand Plan', neo-colonialists and their Bulgarian servants – these are the villains who destroyed Zhivkov's prosperous state and just socialist society. If we can brag about something unique from the other countries from the former Soviet bloc, it is that in Bulgaria the communists ruled the country for such a long time after the fall of the Berlin Wall that they have had to convince us that it has been someone else governing us since 1989. By the way, the more stubbornly the renamed Communist Party failed in government the more popular the idea became that we had fallen victim to international imperialism, corporations, and Soros etc.

⁶ Before 1944, this was a coalition of extreme leftwing parties. After 1944 it continued to exist as an umbrella group, dominated by the Communist Party.

⁷ Homes were expected to meet certain standards of cleanliness and sometimes even devotion to communism (statues of Lenin in the backyard were encouraged), so a commission awarded 'Exemplary House' status to well kept and well politicized homes.

During the 1990s such fables could only be read in the *Bulgarian Writer* newspaper, published by the Union of Bulgarian Writers and presided over by Nikolay Haytov. Later, they were taken up by Volen Siderov and now we can hear them everywhere.

The other problem is the mistaken vision for statehood and order, which the majority of Bulgarians share. Bulgarian society does not remember any other 'order' but that of the totalitarian state. It was an order imposed by a multitudinous and privileged police-bureaucratic apparatus. The privileges for members of the apparatus were the main reason for discontent during Zhivkov's time. However, now the privileges have been forgotten and what is left is nostalgia for the security – a security ensured by a state of policemen and bureaucrats. Obviously, it is still difficult for us to imagine the possibility of a state which is not based on the police-bureaucratic model of the Eastern dictatorships. The idea that there could be a different type of order, based on personal responsibility and civil participation, is still a little alien to us. But if we are not ready to invest our efforts in the construction of this type of modern state, then we deserve the state in which we currently live.

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PRAISE OF INSECURITY

By Dimitar Botchev

In the eve of the 25th anniversary of democracy in Bulgaria, the arguments surrounding what we have gained and what we have lost by the overthrow of communism are increasing. This is, of course, natural. If you want to be not only resident, but a citizen, then a personal view of the current political situation is an absolute necessity. What seems unnatural to me is that there are still people who believe that a communist society is preferable to a democratic one. But the fact that these people do not just exist, but that they are in the majority in Bulgaria is absolutely dreadful. Statistics have consistently show that only a minority believe that they live better now under a democratic system, than they did in the depths of communism. Even assuming that this is the minority of the intellectual elite, it is a discouraging picture. This fact demonstrates that slavery is no less characteristic of human nature than freedom, and that the masses often feel a need to put civilization to one side and masochistically choose a tyrant.

It is self-evident that the past is always idealized by the present, but this statement is not enough to explain the mass nostalgia for the most demonic dictatorship of our history. The communist past would not appear so attractive to Bulgarians if their lives today were better. Instead people intuitively blame democracy for their current social deprivation. This shifting of blame is natural because if you cannot blame external conditions, you have to blame yourself. Nations avoid this kind of self-blame, especially those nations that are still politically immature. In all cases it is more convenient and less painful to blame an external factor, than to blame yourself. These people forget George Bernard Shaw's warning that no democracy is able to rise above the level of its own voters. Democracy reflects the qualities and defects of its voters. If the defects dominate the qualities it is not enough to blame democracy or the political class - we must all accept the blame.

The most compelling argument made by those who are nostalgic for communism is the social security it provided. These veterans remember not only the free healthcare and cheap holidays on the Black Sea, but also the security on the streets. Technically they are right, but if we look more closely at the facts we see that the surface masked a deeper insecurity. It is true that in the sterile communist society our housing blocks and Trabants remained unlocked for weeks, but this security was deceptive. If petty crime was almost non-existent, it was only because political criminals ruled the country. With its unlimited, absolute power, unrestricted by either law or morality, the Communist Party was a

bigger, more powerful and much better organized criminal than any amateur street thug. A single whispered political joke or a critical word about the Party leader could easily result in arrest, beatings, or incarceration in camps in Belene and Lovech. Every socialist citizen was very careful about what he said. He had to be alert at all times. This self-censorship is not a symptom of security, but of non-security, fear, and a 'spy-mania' that infected the whole country. It follows therefore, that totalitarian societies are the least secure and the most crime-ridden. Furthermore, when we talk of the free healthcare, education and other public goods, we must remember that they did not come as gifts from the Party chiefs, but were all paid for by the people.

We must not forget that a state that can give you everything can just as easily take everything away. Absolutely everything, including what is most important: freedom. As Oscar Wilde said, if you want to attain freedom, you must first accept the element of insecurity that comes with it. And a legendary American president taught us that those who sacrifice their freedom for security end up with neither. And so we had neither freedom nor security under the communists. For nearly half a century we sacrificed freedom for this 'security', which in reality was a form of slavery.

Dimitar Botchev is a dissident and writer. He studied Philosophy in the Sofia University. He has been repeatedly arrested by the State Security. In 1972 he receives political asylum in the German Federal Republic. He is a programme editor of the Bulgarian section of the "Free Europe/Liberty" radio in Munich since 1975. In 1976 he is sentenced to 10 years in prison in Bulgaria as this sentenced is ruled out by the Supreme Court in 1992.

“AND THEY WILL ENTER A CHURCH TO MAKE THE SIGN OF THE CROSS, SO THAT THEY REMAIN IN POWER...”

By Evelina Kelbecheva

“When the communists came to power, they first had to enrich their own partisans, which is an old practice. And this is why, they were first taking our property away, this is how Hitler chased away the Jews, too, by taking their property away. It was normal for them to confiscate everything, but the bourgeoisie was not very rich. This is why they encroached on people's bread, and the Bulgarian people's bread was the earth – they took it away from them. And when they ate everything and when they saw that nothing was working out, they began taking loans. Who could lend them money? Naturally, the capitalists – they will not even ask what do they need this money for. But when they see that the communists cannot pay the interest, they will ask for the interest of the interest, and for the capital, too. And because they will not be able to pay, they will have to go. And you will see, they will enter a church to make the sign of the cross so that they remain in power.

And as far as the Bulgarian man's land is concerned, when one finds out that nothing is working out there, too, they have to return it to him, but there will not be anyone to return it to. Then a seven-year-old famine will come.”¹

With these words, exactly a century ago, a Bulgarian man foresees the last years of the communist regime, day by day. His words contain the space and the time, in which he has lived and made sense of the turning points of our newest history.

But in what kind of space and in what time is our thinking about communism being settled?

The first space of the present day is the one of the well-organized ignorance, which could be quickly and effectively overcome. This is why, of course, one needs, above all, political and intellectual will, which lacks at the present moment.

The second space is the one of the perfidious academic “normalization of communism”, which actually produces a long-lasting and scientifically legitimized falsification of history.

The third space is the space of the lowbrow party propaganda, which is brilliantly represented by the agents from 6th Division of the State Security Services.

The fourth space is the one of the shame(less) in their deceitfulness memories of age, mainly by the

¹ An interview with Spas Temelkov, 1962, Sofia. It is recorded by Spas Stoyanov. Spas Temelkov is a wealthy tradesman. After being expatriated from Macedonia after the Second Balkan War he becomes the main informer of the Carnegie Commission on the Balkan Wars. In Sofia, he develops construction and entrepreneurial business. He was repressed after September 9, 1944.

ones of high-standing party leaders, who glorify in one voice their statesmanship “in the name of the people.”

The fifth space is the one of emotional testimonials of the terrors of communist crimes by the people, who have experienced the camps, the prisons, the expatriations and the banishment.

And at last, the last space, which almost did not exist until 10 years ago, is the creation of positivist-objectivist historiography after the so-called archive revolution.

If liberal democracy and civil and human rights and freedoms are taken as points of departure when assessing communism, then it stands out as the most atrocious regime and the most dangerous dictatorship ever imposed in Bulgaria. Every other axiological section is criminal relativism.

I accept the theory that a regime manifests itself in the best way after it falls. Much of this, which is today's Bulgaria, is a direct consequence from communism: cynicism, arrogance and greed are explained by the social and economic failures, which are also part of our “wonderful heritage” from the previous period. Who understands the spiritual poverty of communism and the criminal incompetence of its leaders? Who will forgive the crimes, which no one punished? Who will return to Bulgaria the children, who did not want to live in a country governed by the children and the grand-children of the ones that devastated it? This is what we are asking ourselves – a little more than 10% of the Bulgarians today.

But almost half of our fellow-citizens approve of communism.

It is not important what has happened – it is important what you think has happened...

The lack of knowledge and historical reflection debases and contracts the memory for communism to the popular, anecdotal and everyday level. Don't we remember the words of Todor Zhivkov: “Under sovereignty the Bulgarian man understands what does one have to eat” or the popular phrase of the representative of the new generation of communist functionaries, Filip Bokov, when the crimes of the Bulgarian Communist Party were concerned, that it takes the guilt only with the appetizer...² The nostalgia over communism is dominated by the absurd myths that education and healthcare were “free of charge”, that there were jobs and ease for all. It was not for all, comrades! The story of communism was extremely well replaced by the same post-communist elite, which dominates the public space and interrupts the real knowledge and assessment channels from the newest Bulgarian history.

And the word “freedom” has just disappeared... But Dzhendema used to sing:

“The freedom, brother, is something relative”.

However, the big question is which is the main reason for this popular approval of communist

dictatorship in Bulgaria? Is it the cleverly shaped media policies, which slowly, gradually and invariably abandoned the communism issue in Bulgaria, is it the “original sin” – not only the conservative, but the directly regressive educational politics and history books, is it the ageing, the tiredness and the disappointment of the generation, which went through that period, is it the misunderstood “Bulgarian tolerance,” which will bury again the opportunity for historical assessment of our newest history? The socialist-party historiography, fruit of the political situation, with a directly commissioned character, had and has enormous circulation. Besides, the most contemporary critical historiography remains closed in the academic discourse and cannot influence the popular knowledge.

The people cannot be blamed for not knowing or for being ignorant – both of them are a result of well-thought politics of manipulation on the side of ideologists and official historians of communism, who have to historically legitimize post factum a criminal regime, part of whose main functionaries still, publicly or behind the scenes, govern our country. We still remember how radical and timely the demands and the suggestions of some of the educational reformists of the party elite, such as Nikolay Vasilev, were. At the very first opposition manifestation, on November 18th, 1989, he asked for a “Nuremberg trial” for the communist elite, but we also remember how quickly he forgot about it!

Last, but not least, non-communist circles could not create serious and coherent strategy for learning about this past or for wide diffusion of knowledge about it. The result is that the Bulgarian man today sees clearly neither the economic nor the social or cultural-psychological consequences of communism.

When in 1919 collapsed Bulgaria was looking for the reason for the catastrophe, all scourges were taken by the elite – the political and the intellectual elite. And then Vazov just says – “Let's work!” If we begin working in a wiser and faster way, there is a possibility we do not miss the last historical chance to change the dreadful distortion of public knowledge about communism and its mimicries in Bulgaria.

Evelina Kelbecheva is teaches at the American University in Bulgaria and is an initiator of Movement for Teaching Communism as Part of History at School. She has published works on Bulgarian history, including the Communist era. Her interests include Bulgaria since it has been an independent country, what happened with the Bulgarian intellectuals between the two World Wars, the Cold War at the Balkans and the period of regime transition. In 2013 she lectured at the Library of the Congress, the Bulgarian Embassy in Washington, the University of Harvard and the University of Princeton.

LIBERATION IS NOT A POLITICAL EVENT, BUT A STATE OF MIND

By Evgenia Ivanova

What November 10th means to you? What is the most important date of the last 25 years?

In the beginning it was, of course, euphoria. But for me it began before November 10th. Perhaps it began on November 3rd, when that *Ecoglasnost* rally took place, when the people asked loud and clear for 'Democracy' for the first time. It was intoxicating. Then we sobered up, but you did not ask me about what happened later, did you...

What is the most valuable feeling for you from those dissident times?

Feeling that I no longer lived in a lie. And the feeling of a happy community, that evaporated too soon.

You are of the founder of the Club for Glasnost and Perestroika, but your participation in politics ended with the dissent and opposition. Why? Haven't you ever been tempted to be in power? You can use it for quite meaningful things.

I am not good in politics. And I do not perceive my participation in the Club as political, but as the recognition that it was impossible to live 'that' way – in silenced dissatisfaction and self-imposed censorship. As for the temptation of power – I saw too quickly how it changed the people from the 'happy community', how it made them dependent. I still think that the smartest decision in my life was not to participate in power. I'm not sure what I would have become...

You studied the Bulgarian Turks and the Pomak people¹. You probably have impressions of the first Turkish organizations and DPS. What is DPS? A guarantor of ethnic peace orientated towards the Euro-Atlantic sphere, or a party with networks of companies, police and deals in the dark?

DPS is probably all of that. At first it seemed (or was presented?) as a guarantor for ethnic peace. Then it started feeling as if it were the ruler of ethnic peace, the one whose bidding would decide if that peace would be saved or collapse. This way the ethnic peace became meaningless as a value. Therefore DPS is no longer ethnic, but just an ordinary oligarchic party.

Who, in your eyes is Ahmed Dogan²? The curse of Bulgaria, the smartest and most insightful politician, the man with the most power, or the ambitious boy from the village looking for revenge on all those who have tried to pull his strings?

It seems as if Bulgarian society shows a strong tendency to satanize: a Satan is pointed out and he is to blame for everything. So it was with Alexey Petrov, so it is now with Tsvetan Vasilev. Unfortunately, the demonization of Dogan (and that of DPS) affected Turks and Muslims in general. Maybe it's time to realize that Dogan is just a politician – a little more cynical (and thus more honest) and smarter than the others. It is true that behind his philosophical games lies 'the boy from the village', but how many Bulgarian politicians can say that does not happen to them?

Is there a politician of the past 25 years that deserves a monument?

If any, he should be ashamed of the thought to be portrayed by a monument. I have to say that the most original monument I have seen is in Radomir – a monument of the unknown "bozadzhia"³.

Did we manage to become free?

Liberation is not a political event, but a state of mind.

What are you fighting against today?

I should already feel tired of fighting. But I still cannot stand the prejudices, the clichés and the simplicity of some people. And the attitude of 'nothing depends on me'. It seems I am not tired, unfortunately...

*Evgenia Ivanova founded the Club for Support of Glasnost and Perestroika before the crash of the totalitarian regime in 1989. She was repeatedly detained by the State Security Services. Today she is a Doctor of Sciences and Professor at the New Bulgarian University. Some of her research projects, such as the attitudes of the Muslim population in Bulgaria, have provoked outrage and caused her to be labelled a 'threat to national security'. She is the author of numerous monographs, including, *The Balkans: coexistence of centuries*; *Study on the (non)-existence of Balkan modernity*; *The 'Rejected unrejected' or the process called 'Revival'*; and *Bulgarian Dissidents*. Her latest book came out a few days ago: *Islamized Balkans: The dynamics of the stories*. Not only an ethnologist and a Balkanist, Ms Ivanova also writes fiction. She is the author of the novels *Photo Stojanovic*, *Deafening White* and *The Plan: Constantinople*.*

¹ Pomak people are a conservative Muslim population in the southeast of Bulgaria, mainly in the Rodopi region.
² Former leader of DPS

³ A craftsman that produces 'boza', a typical sweet beverage made from fermented wheat that is very popular in the Balkan countries, especially in Bulgaria and Turkey.

THE CURTAIN IS LIFTED

By Evtim Kostadinov

When long and intense political consultations culminated in an agreement to collect and preserve the written legacy of the former Bulgarian secret services for history's sake, under a policy of open and free access, many were skeptical. Domestic audiences were unimpressed with what they believed to be another attempt to dull the collective consciousness and memory with short-lived legislation. The law was pronounced dead at conception, and the general opinion was that it would soon be repealed as a failed piece of law-making.

Today, there are hardly any skeptics left to doubt the effects of this action. Within its competence, the Committee has succeeded to effectively and strictly implement the Law on Access to and Disclosure of the Documents and Announcement of Affiliation of Bulgarian Citizens to the State Security and the Intelligence Services of the Bulgarian National Army.

Access to the secret world of classified documents is no longer an illusion, but a reality. While some were greatly disappointed with their affiliation to the communist secret services being publicly announced, justice was finally restored for others who had been victims of political repressions and persecution.

While the truth hurts, acknowledging the truth in its entirety is the best way forward and the only credible instrument to examine past events as objectively as possible. Society's best hope for a better future lies with its ability to engage in an in-depth reflection on its history, analyse and learn from the past.

From the beginning of its mandate, the Committee refused to live up to the expectations to be a judge or a critic. It had the specific task to pull back the curtain and report the truth as it happened. It was left to the audience to choose whether to cheer or jeer the actors dancing on the strings of their SS puppet masters. The curtain is lifted. Government is more transparent now; backstage bargaining of the past takes place less frequently. Members of our society are free to make choices while staying true to their moral compass. What is more democratic than that?!

Evtim Kostadinov is chairman of the Committee for disclosing the documents and announcing affiliation of Bulgarian citizens to the State Security and intelligence services of the Bulgarian National Army. He was born on 11 November 1959. From 2005 to 2007, he was an MP from BSP, elected from the region of Dobrich.

1989 – THE OTHER DATES

By Georgi Gospodinov, from the book "The Invisible Crises", publishing house Zhanet 45, 2012 (abridged version)

On November 10th, it was announced on television that we were free. The passive voice here is important. It was announced to us. The same way that they used to 'release' oranges, red peppers and lady pads into the market. You wait and wait and then one day someone announces to you that they have been 'released'. November 10th turned out to be very similar to the occasion of receiving the registration plates for your vehicle, or to be the next in line for an apartment after a long period of waiting. An award for exceptional patience. Remember that after the announcement on that late November afternoon no-one took to the streets to express their joy. The day before in Berlin, in front of the Brandenburg Gate, it had been packed with bodies. But those bodies had been rehearsing every Monday for a year in front of St. Nicholas' church in Leipzig. Despite the law enforcement officers. The Bulgarian body is a bit slower and more cautious. Yes, the system is falling apart, yes, Zhivkov has been deposed, but ... How do you know that it's not a trap? Or a mistake that will be fixed the next day. I am not blaming anyone, I was not celebrating in the square myself but still, it feels weird now and I have to spell it out. It really is not easy; for 45 years a person can become alienated from a lot of things. You cannot break free in one night if you have not been free for so long. Even more so if you have not had such a great desire for freedom. And after so many years there is not even the memory of it left.

But, thank God, this is not the entire picture. Still, there were other more meaningful dates during 1989. It is those that I would like to speak about as they have been slightly neglected.

Some time ago I came across a few-minutes long video of the procession from November 3rd, 1989. The material was broadcasted on television around 1991-92 on Panorama with Boyko Stankushev. It was certainly not filmed with the cameras of Bulgarian National Television. Then, I remember, there was no footage in the evening news, just a very short message which went along the lines of: "A group of citizens, who delivered a petition on hydraulic projects with the permission of the capital city's People's Council." Such amazing language, how could we forget it. Anything can be made harmless with a few empty words. A little specialized vocabulary: hydro... what was it, with the permission, a group of citizens... What is important is to avoid being concrete. In "particular regions of the country" among "small groups of the population, encouraged by foreign forces, tension has been created", said Zhivkov earlier in a speech in May 1989...

I was watching the somehow surviving video recording of the procession on November 3rd and I clearly remembered the cordon of people with cameras and video recorders, who were standing on the side and in a very relaxed, not to say cynical, manner were documenting each face. Actually, this tape was most probably recorded by exactly such a 'cameraman.' Immediately, it becomes clear why the camera does not have the journalistic concern to capture the entire procession, to give a broader picture of the gathering. The camera in this case has a different type of professionalism – it captures faces close up, articulates them clearly so that they can be identified one by one later on. Even I recognized myself – for 3-4 seconds at 21. And I recollected with clarity the whole joy, fear and awkwardness of the body, moving among other bodies – awkward in their own right, joyful and a bit fearful. I look around, move my head around, I see that others do so as well. As if each of us has the need to see that the rest are still there. Now I realize, as I hardly did then, that the body has its own memory and that our bodies lacked the memory of resistance.

And so on November 3rd, 1989, be it timidly, under the pretext of ecology, still, what had been missing in the important chain of years 1956-1968-1980, was happening. Whether it was innocent and safe or not could not be known at the time. As Timothy Garton Ash writes, let us not forget that this was the year of 'Tiananmen'. We should also take into consideration the possible complications that did not but could have happened in 1989.

If I had to choose between 3rd and 10th November, I personally would chose the first. Because there was awareness at that time at least. A negligible amount of awareness from today's point of view, but a shaking of our own bodies chained by the lack of freedom. Those I am not sure how many meters of garden behind the Central House of the National Army next to the National Assembly, had to be walked. I would not substitute that short and silent procession even for the first free procession on 18th November.

The oblivion of some dates at the expense of others is a weird phenomenon. Similarly, it is weird that the Dimitrovdan on 26th October that same year, with the petition and beating of the people gathered in the garden in front of Kristal, has been forgotten. Someone was narrating how Stambolov was shouting from the mini-van: "This is not a movie, they really beat people."

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HISTORY LESSON

By Georgi Gotchev

I wrote this to support Prof. Evelina Kelbecheva's idea that communism should be studied in school. I believe this is a sine qua non for our freedom, existence and awareness as a society today. What I have written is a more a personal story than an objective historical essay. Therefore I am the sole person responsible for the fairness and truth of the judgments and qualifications in this text.

The year was 1990 and I was 9 years old. It was the watermelon season, in the middle of August. My father, who was in his forties, was going to take me and my mother for a vacation in Bankya. When I finally found Bankya on the map, it looked like it belonged in Sofia's backyard. "Many foreigners go there so you can update your collection of cigarette boxes", my dad said to make me feel better. "The water there is healing" my mom added.

Healing or not, we had been visualizing our vacation on the beaches of Golden Sands¹ until the first days of August. But no! The vacation in Bankya had already been assigned to the journalist from the "Dimitrovgradska Pravda" newspaper (my father), and the long desired coupon for a vacation in Golden Sands had gone to the head correspondent of "Rabotnichesko Delo". At that time I was not familiar with the privileges of communism and could not understand how this quite stupid and lazy man, no more than 1.5 meters tall and nicknamed Inch Height, was more privileged than my tall, clever and motivated father. I was also incapable of understanding why my father couldn't just slap this short man in the face, thereby solving the problem the mature and manly way.

The hotel we ended up staying in was almost empty: Just five members of staff and two or three Bulgarian families but not one foreigner. As for the healing water, it came and went but it was dusty and dirty when it was available. The feeling was one of dilapidation and of someone having taken something away from reality. Our room was dirty and run down: there was hair on the bathroom floor, the sink was missing and the doors of the closet were just about ready to fall off. The mattresses were torn and the wallpaper was peeling so badly it was as if the walls were sticking their tongues out. The front yard, which used to be beautiful, was covered in bushes. The scent of humidity and decomposed meat was everywhere. The stone swimming pool was filled with leaves, under which frogs and lizards were hiding.

¹ Beach resort on the Bulgarian Black Sea coast.

The food was not better than the place itself. For breakfast we would have two slices of bread, margarine and a spoonful of jam. Lunch consisted of vegetable stew. For dinner we had a 'paving slab' of pasta. Todor Zhivkov was so keen for Bulgaria to be the 16th republic of the Soviet Union, that he had said that people understood their sovereignty as if it were an abundant banquet. This great philosopher must have been right, because while we were sitting in the dining hall eating lunch, we felt depressed, unfree and dependent on our miserable portion of food.

Even worse, the amount of food decreased rapidly until on the third day it just disappeared. We were left without breakfast and lunch, and as an answer to the question, "When are we going to eat?" the staff would just shrug. Nonetheless, around 4pm they called us into the dining hall and formally gave us cold tea and a package containing something heavy wrapped in a napkin. "It was like a memorial service", my mom said. The napkin turned out to contain a slice of bread and a 20 centimetres long slice of salami. I will never forget that grey-pink slice of salami and the dry piece of bread. It was as if a cynic had cut out the reproductive organs of communism and given them to us so that we would never forget where we came from.

After a quick look at the content of the package my dad got up from the table and took us outside. He looked angrier than he ever had before, smoking cigarette after cigarette and shivering a little. I wanted him to explain to me why we hadn't had lunch and why instead we had had that salami, but he just stood there silently without answering my questions. We walked through the yard of the hotel, through the city park and all the way to the edge of the city. The path we took slowly began to climb and we were surrounded by flowers and trees. Behind a large blackberry bush we saw a large herd of sheep and a white building.

My father walked through the blackberry bush, and my mother and I followed behind him. Suddenly all three of us were standing in front of a green dip, surrounded by pine trees. At the bottom of the dip, around 200 meters in front of us was the white building. It had several wings and looked both like a modern cathedral and an open fridge. It was one of the twenty residences of Todor Zhivkov, where he lived the last years of his government, mourning the death of his daughter six years previously.

My father stood still for several minutes, standing straight in front of the white building, and suddenly started to swear. He swore at all the mothers of the communists, their fathers, their aunts, their children, grandchildren, Inch Height, Pravdata I Deloto, Zhivkov, the National Republic of Bulgaria, the Soviet Union, the Central Committee, Marx and Engels, Lenin, Stalin, Krushchev, Breznev,

Andropov and Gorbachov, the Peristroiki and the April Lines, "Kinteks" and "Corecom", the Secret Service Agency, Libya, the Libyan dollars and again Zhivkov and his whole family. He started swearing at Peko Takovci, Boyan Bulgaronovci, Milko Balevci, Pencho Kubadinovci, Dobri Dzhurovi, Stoyan Todorovci, Grisha Filipovci, Mircho Spasovci, Dimitrov and Jurgov, Tsola Dragoicheva, Chervenkov, Lilov, Mladenov, Lukanov. He swore without stopping to take a breath – the same way a man vomits after a long, sleepless night of drinking.

That very moment I looked at my father and I felt sorry for him, but I also listened very carefully to what he was saying. Now, 25 years later, I think that he was reacting to the carrots and sticks that the regime had used to control people, but that he also felt guilty because he had supported the regime through his writings. He had been disappointed more than once when he had been exploited by more determined 'slaves'. Now, 25 years later, I realize that in that moment I saw his safe and silent revolt, his moderate but internally over-rehearsed outrage and, most of all, his guilty conscious.

However, I see something else too. The only natural way my father could have shown his freedom was to stand in front of this disgusting tall white temple of communism and swear at everyone and everything. That way he managed to save for me, his son, a piece of reality where there were no compromises and no lies. A piece of Bulgarian reality where he was a strong, brave and decisive father.

For him to swear at all the communists must have been the only way to teach me a history lesson, to defend our national identity and not to let my sense of a free person to be born without a sense of justice. This was all because he had predicted that over the following years there would be no responsibility for any of the crimes committed by the communists, that the secret service archives would not be opened and that many names from the regime would be forgotten.

While my father was still shouting, an old lady came close to us. I did not know where she had come from, but she just appeared a few meters away. She looked like a newly retired schoolteacher. Maybe she was a professor at one of those labor schools or something like that, because her bearing was upright and domineering. Her hair was tied up, her lips were red, her cheeks were pink and she was walking slowly. Unless she was deaf she must have heard my dad's swearing.

I was sure that she would have started a fight with him, or at least said something – women like that always say something. On the contrary, she paid no attention to my dad, who continued to swear but with a little less enthusiasm. The teacher stood next to me, looked me in the eye, smiled with all the disapproval she had, and said:

- Sir, you are not a Bulgarian.

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25 YEARS OF FREEDOM

By Jorge Fuentes Monzonís-Villalonga

I. The XXI century begun in 1989 with the fallen of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Iron Curtain. The deep transformation of the communist countries lead, in the following years, to a total modification of the European landscape.

- The Soviet Union breaks into 15 new republics, three of which –the Baltic states- join the European Union and NATO. All of them adopt a western democracy as a new formula of political and economic life style.
- The totality of the remaining Warsaw Pact countries, integrate the Euro-Atlantic institutions, so that in 2007 the frontiers of these organizations reach the limits of the former USSR.
- Some of the countries of the ex Soviet Union (specially Ukraine, Moldova and the three Caucasian countries) have also pro western aspirations even, so far, they have not materialized in specific results. The case of Ukraine is particularly shocking even is still premature to advance the final course it will take.
- Two other countries of the region –Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia- equally split giving birth to nine independent states, four of which –the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia and Croatia- are already members of the EU and NATO. The remaining ones shall follow the same path as soon as possible, and it is so even the Union is crossing one of its most critical moments in its 58 years of life.

II. The enlargement of the EU that took place between 2004 and 2007, that admitted all the European members of CAME, apart from being the largest in all the history of the Union (up to that moment, the Union used to admit between one and three countries each time), is the one that brought most serious doubts to Brussels since it had to accommodate to the *acquis communautaire* a group of countries with totally different economies from the ones of the old partners, what would imply logical difficulties of adaptation. Without forgetting that all of them had GNPs much lower than the Union average which would demand strong transfers of structural and cohesion funds to reach a satisfactory balance among the whole members. In fact, and in the best of cases, the convergence would need some decades to be reached. In the worst scenario, it would never take place.

Due to these circumstances, some of the old members of the EU were afraid that the enlargement to the East would bring very negative consequences to the Brussels institutions that perhaps would be unable to assimilate.

However, the economic crisis that took place in the EU, did not happen because of the enlargement of the new members but for the miscalculations and the fragilities shown by some of the old members, for the squander, the corruption, the financial and bank anomalies, the lacking in forethought and finally for the fact that the EU is still not sufficiently constructed in the political, military, fiscal and bank aspects and all these insufficiencies became suddenly evident in our organization.

III. The deep transformation known in Central Europe, from Poland to Bulgaria, have no precedents. The transition from totalitarian regimes monitored from Moscow to western democracies brought many pros but also some contras. The advantages are obvious and would not need to be mentioned: attainment of real independence, approach to other European countries with a common History, openness of its frontiers to the world, freedom to participate in the political life, possibility to improve the private economic situation. The democratization and integration of the countries of the region in general and the one of Bulgaria in particular had also some inconveniences that should not be neglected.

- The fracture of COMECON meant a dislocation in a market that based upon the international division of labour, brought with it, specialization and full employment. Big factories failed and had to be either transformed or abandoned.
- The lack of freedom in communist times and the rigid police control meant as well a considerable people's security even it was often based upon injustice. With the arrival of democracy, the equation freedom-security moved in detriment of the latter and derived in the growth of criminality.
- The approach to the market economy brought with it the raise in the cost of living to a higher rhythm than the increase of salaries. Only the younger and more dynamic group of society was able to accommodate favorably to the new situation. State pensioners and elderly workers were the victims of the change.
- The economic structure based upon privatization and incomplete liberalization had as a consequence job destruction, unemployment growth and emigration of 1.5 million Bulgarian people shrinking the population of the country from 9 to 7.5 million people.
- Political freedom led to very frequent changes in the Government with the birth of new parties, in many cases little operative.

IV. The balance of the change in Bulgaria as much as in the other neighboring countries is, in spite of the mentioned mistakes, very positive having into consideration that the alternative would have led to isolation and progressive impoverishment. Within the Warsaw Pact and COMECON there was no future for the member states. The direction the countries are following now is the correct one even it will be necessary for them to rectify certain policies:

- To procure a certain economic convergence with the EU meaning that if the average yearly growth of the countries of the Union is 1 or 2%, Bulgaria should grow the 2 or 4%.
- Though the integration in Schengen and the Eurozone, is the final objective, for the time being is preferable not to be in a hurry since it would imply the necessity of monetary adjustments and high degrees of inflation that would impoverish additionally the pensioners and unemployed persons.
- Strong migrations are to be deplored for the social cost they imply and also because they force the departure of the youngest and most dynamic members of the society. However, in a short and medium term the migrant remittances help the recovering of the country. This has been the experience of all the nations that in a moment or another of their History, suffered strong emigrations.
- It is necessary to break the equation higher freedom=lower security. It may favor the conviction that "With Dictatorship we lived better".
- Tough there have been countries like Italy where frequent changes in the Government have not impeded its prosperity, it is more advisable serenity in the political changes to allow every team the necessary time to implement its program.

Evidently the former remarks are easier to be stated than to be implemented. Let us trust that the global crisis will be surmounted, the EU will recover and that Bulgaria and the countries of the region will progress correctly under the umbrella of the new bonanza that should reappear.

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25 THINGS WE LOST FOR 25 YEARS

By Julian Popov

After the fall of Todor Zhivkov's regime, some of my friends - Solomon Passy, Vladislav Todorov, and two or three others - and I decided to create a Committee for the Inventory of Communism. The idea was that once the communist system had gone, all of its art should be carefully described, numbered and stored in a safe and isolated place. This would have enabled the people to be healthily rid of communism. Without this process, we feared that the works of communism would begin to break down and small particles would be dispersed, thereby infecting more people, and they would never be able to rid themselves of Communism.

Our program would not only include monuments, but also various other works and institutions such as the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance and the Warsaw Pact. The inventory began solemnly with the monument of Lenin in downtown Sofia. In front of a camera crew from *Panorama*, one of the most popular television programs at the time, I glued a sticker to the monument with the words: Inventory number 1. Newspapers, television and radio news programs were interested in what we were doing. But people thought it was all a big joke, the full inventory never took place, and as for the infection, I do not know. But here are 25 things (in no particular order) which could be in the front pages of the Inventory catalogue, and the memory of which, at least on the surface, we lost in the last quarter century.

- **Sofia Residence.** Anyone who is under 25 or 30 years old does not know what Sofia Residence¹ was. The reason why this is an unknown phenomenon is because it led to many sad and comic marriages. Parents today avoid talking about it in front of their children.
- **Exit visas.** Bulgarians may now travel anywhere, even though a decade ago it was difficult for them to enter many countries. However, a quarter of a century ago, they needed permission from their own government to even leave Bulgaria, with the exception of a few hundred thousand citizens who were persistently asked to go away.
- **Running away abroad.** If a Bulgarian left the country and did not return at the expected time, he or she automatically became a fugitive or a citizen without any right to return (there is a slight difference between the two). Even their relatives could not accompany them or meet them anywhere. They were officially deemed to have escaped abroad.
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¹ In communist Bulgaria, it was not possible to move to a new city without the Party's permission unless you married a citizen from that city. Sofia Residence was a special permit that allowed non-Sofians to settle there.

- **Full turnout without mandatory voting.** Voting was never mandatory, but around 98% of the population expressed their right to vote. Polling stations competed with one other over which one would be the first to have a full turnout. Everyone was happy, music was played and people danced. Elections were not the depressing event that they are today.
- **Vacation coupons.** For 22 or 34 leva people could receive a coupon for a 'Vacation Home'. There they could spend two weeks together with their colleagues and families, and relax in bikinis and shorts. They would also be surrounded by 'responsible' people, who monitored their behaviour and listened to their conversations. If a Bulgarian was not allowed to take a business trip outside the county they would never be told why, but one of the reasons could be a slight joke made about the regime or a skeptical comment questioning the progress of socialism uttered while on vacation. The exact cause would remain a mystery.
- **News of the harvest.** Who knows why, but the headline news was constantly informing us about the harvest, planting and plowing. Everything was going well. There were no drought or flooding, any wheat or pig diseases.
- **American films at Easter.** Whoever tells you that he was suppressed because the state did not allow him to go to church is talking nonsense. People did go to church but various methods were used to turn them against religion. One of the most intriguing of these was the broadcast of an American film at midnight on Easter Sunday, to distract people from attending mass. Every other day however the television broadcast would end at 22:30 with a Russian film or news (about the harvest).
- **Prefabricated apartments.** Or rather the construction of flatpack apartment blocks. For many years, most buildings were 'constructed' in factories for prefabricated structures then assembled on site, so that first workers, then everyone else, could be happily housed. Today, 700,000 apartments built this way are still standing and no-one really know what to do with them.
- **Gift aggregate.** This was a very interesting approach for manipulating the simple economic principle of supply and demand. For example, if you wanted to buy or export aged plum wine, it would be accompanied a book by Krum Kyulyavkov and a vial of rose oil, all presented in one beautiful package labeled 'gift aggregate'.
- **House manager.** Every apartment building had a president, who was elected, and a house manager, which was a constant position. This house manager reported on the residents, so if your file contained positive comments about how you went about your daily life, it probably meant that you had good relations with your house manager.

- **AFAFC.** An Active Fighter Against Fascism and Capitalism (the two went together) was a particularly privileged character enjoying special perks such as vacation homes and other public luxuries. The most valuable of these was the official preferential marks given to the children of AFAFCs when they applied to university or language school - a fixed rate that was added to their GPA and was visibly recorded on the noticeboard alongside their test scores (something akin to corrupt police officers recording the amount of money they have secretly received). The question of 'who' in this sense had a very clear answer, which perhaps was why people did not protest.
- **Games of marbles.** This was the way most boys spent at least half of their time, until they discovered girls who, hitherto, had been playing dodge ball.
- **Groups of Russians.** If Bulgarians could not travel abroad, then Russians could not travel at all. They would come to Bulgaria only in groups, usually formed in distant Asian collective farms. In other words 'Russian' was a generalized term for any Soviet citizen. Russian groups were a constant target of sarcastic comments, and even pity. There is an urban legend (so I am not sure if it is true) of a Bulgarian tour guide showing around a group of 120 Russian tourists who had never seen a teabag before. On being introduced to them for the first time by the guide, they were curious to know how they worked. Unable to resist the temptation, the guide told them to place the bags in their mouths, with string and label hanging out, and slowly sip hot water. The 120 Russians dutifully complied. The guide lost his job, but said that it was worth it for the view.
- **Corecom.** This was a specialty store reminiscent of the duty-free stores at the airport. You could buy whisky, cigarettes and cheap West German chocolate, all, of course, with dollars. How to get hold of dollars, on the other hand, was another story.
- **Yugoslavian television.** Or Serbian Television. Yugoslavia was a Western country. Everything was so free there, or so it seemed from Bulgaria as Serbian music flowed from the television set. Living in Kyustendil or somewhere in the Tran region had its privileges. People were divided between those who had Serbian antenna (so called "Do you have antenna for Serbian channels?"), and those who did not.
- **Short-wave radio.** There were radio stations which were banned because either they were playing the Beatles or they were talking about democracy. Short waves still exist, but no one listens to them anymore.
- **Radio Free Europe** (and, of course, Voice Of America and the BBC in Bulgarian). These were the short-wave stations. The most bizarre was Radio Luxembourg, or "Lakseberg" which only broadcast pop music and where words crackled and nothing was particularly comprehensible. People were divided between

those who had an antenna for the Serbian channel and those who listened to Radio "Lakseberg". Today the children of those who watched Serbian television vote GERB and the children of those who listened to Radio Luxembourg vote Reformist Bloc.

- **Labor troops.** If there was a phenomenon that came closest to the concept of 'Turkish slavery' it was the 'labor' or 'building' military units. It was 'slavery' because people would work there for two years without payment; and 'Turkish', because it was where the state would send all the Turks. Thus the state killed two birds with one stone: on the one hand, the Turks, our dangerous enemies from *Under the Yoke*, needed to be dealt with; on the other, hard-labor projects required conscripts. (Those interested in the roots of the 'Movement for Rights and Freedoms' party should investigate this phenomenon more deeply.)
- **Coffee shops.** Interesting institutions that sold cakes, lemonade and a fermented wheat drink known as boza. But not coffee.
- **Pubs.** Another specific institution. People would drink there, standing at the bar. Such places had no food.
- **Council of State.** Also a very important institution, but no-one knew precisely what it was for. Much like most institutions of this kind.
- **Udarnik.** This was a special kind of labor hero who would weave on many looms simultaneously or pour more concrete than any other worker. They received special recognition and frequently appeared on television, in parades and at schools, where they would talk about labor heroism.
- **The Committee on Prices.** It closed in 1988, and a year later the whole regime collapsed.
- **Program Knowledge.** Every day the radio broadcast Soviet 'Knowledge Programs'. We were treated to various lectures on physics, chemistry, geography and suchlike. There were few lectures on the arts, in other words, the program was not particularly ideological. Instead, tens of thousands listened and learned about carbon dioxide, Euglenoidea and the Mariana Trench.
- **Cinema preview.** Before any film was shown viewers would enjoy a 15-minute information program, usually reassuring them that everything with the harvest was going well, workers were weaving on ever increasing numbers of looms, and concrete production was at an all-time high. After a short pause the movie would start. Tickets were 20, 25, 30 or 35 cents – for as Lenin used to say: "For us, cinema is the most important art." It is debatable if ever there was a sentence, thanks to which so many resources were directed to one particular genre.

Many people miss these things now. It is very difficult to judge exactly who misses what, but the degree to which they miss the peculiarities of communism inform the way they vote today.

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COMMUNISM DEMOTES THE INDIVIDUAL

By Kalin Yanakiev

It is interesting to talk about the metastasis of communism today. However, I would like to mention three or four basic, fundamental features of Communist totalitarianism. Although many attempts have been made to outline the face of this marvelous phenomenon of the twentieth century, we still - maybe just because of the multiplicity of the prominent features - have not managed to build a composite image of the regime.

I think the first main feature of communist totalitarianism is the basic deprivation of life as a right.

This does not mean that the life of any individuals who obeyed the communist dictatorship could be taken away. The question was that the basic human right - his life - during the communism became a resource that the state rather than a human right on its own. Life became a property not to the one whom it was given by god, but to the state.

Human life is a resource owned by the state. Everyone is permanently mobilized in communist terms. All in all was mobilized in favour of the state. In exceptional cases, tragic moments any normal country could mobilize the lives of its citizens - for example, to protect the national community. But no country in history has achieved total and permanent mobilization of people's lives. No country had ever allowed to make the life of people its own resource, and its own possession. This is a basic feature of communist totalitarianism.

Not just life as a fact, but all its sectors was mobilized by the Communist state and were considered a resource. The main living resource of a man was - his work, his work was not as in normal social systems of property rights, which he carried out his self-expression, his well-being and his dignity. No, the communist state labour and work were a service.

Significantly the politically correct language of Communism talked about service and commitment to labour rights. Everyone was mobilized on the job front. And when it is said that under communism there was no unemployment, we must, at all costs, see what the other side. Any lack of desire to work was criminalized and was considered a failure to fulfil the requirements of the regime. You should never be fooled that such mobilization has not been recorded in the constitutional and legal documents of the state. Even though labour was not recorded, everyone had to work, especially the once who got paid by the state.

Even though everyone under communism was born in his/her family, but he didn't belong to his family. From the very beginning he was born in his family as a possession of the state. No parent could decide not to send your son or daughter to pioneer, to the Komsomol and other organizations.

The individual belonged to the regime from the very beginning, he was theirs.

All material property of the citizens was mobilized, at a later point of time. In normal countries have one home. Home did not exist under communism, there was a residential area, owned by the state through the Fatherland Front organization, for example. This residential area was precisely mobilized the same way they mobilize technical equipment. It was a constant mobilized state resources, which the state could have when it wanted.

Further – the famous right of women to work, and indeed their obligation not be a housewife, namely that's how men and women were becoming alienated from one another. They could, they would been allowed to share only those reducible functions that the state, however, could not take away from them, namely reproduction. Husbands and wife did not belong to each other, but to a different division of the labour army. It was usual that the words 'husband' and 'wife' were not widely used if one wanted to be politically correct.

Communists didn't have their husband and wife they had their comrades

Universal mobilization of everything and everyone was the first feature of communist totalitarianism. It brought incredible anthropological, ontological deviations in the society.

The first one of them was that private in all its branches, the private life is not the first reality, as it is in normal societies, but a deviation of publicity. Private in a state of general and permanent mobilization is the place where one can defect – potentially dangerous, potentially antisocial place, where one can get out of their mobilization.

And for this reason, any private part of live was under suspicion

Brighter clothing was an expression of demonstrating its alienation from the legal self-determination to the state. To such extend that even the person who in terms of the classical Christian, European sense is the entyleheia, the colour of human nature, was considered a place of danger.

Personality is where a person cannot be restricted, place of non-subordination. Therefore, communism did not like bright personality in all its manifestations.

Spartakiad was perhaps the aesthetic ideal of communism – faceless, poorly dressed, non-erotic, immersed in the generic face of a person.

Reversing the order of public and private, turning private, which was reported, in a society deviation publicity caused extremely serious anthropological implications. Personality became something you had to hide, something that should be reduced because it was normative to be self-belonging, to be completely devoted as resources to the one who owned everything of everyone, the totalitarian state. This is the first feature of communist totalitarianism, which I think is fundamental.

The second feature results from the first – to maintain such a general mobilization, similar conversion of life, and ultimately from the first and ultimate law to a resource, it should be nurtured and a continuous heat-sacrificial heroic ethos should be supported.

Ethos of sacrificial heroic acts dominated the ideological communist regime. The whole story in all its three dimensions was stylized in this ethos. The past always was a territory of the never-ending battle ontologically divided by a barricade, and everyone who lived in the past was always situated on one or other side of this ontological barricade.

None of the actions carried out in the past, could not be neutral. The whole society – from its very creation until the coming to power of the Communist state – is a territory of permanent war, it is an area that cannot be settled by neutral people, but only by heroes or bastards ... If this was all past, the time of the Communist victory was a fateful moment when the age-old battle is won and it must be brought up. Which justifies the general mobilization in the future.

This heroic and sacrificial ethos also led to an incredible anthropological deviations. In the 60s, 70s in Bulgaria there was a real epidemic of so-called multi-camp weavers, and no one could truly understand what is the reason for such a foolish and pointless self-exhaustion. The point is, however, that it had to be maintained at all costs in order to justify the first feature – universal mobilization, as the condition requires the introduction of a sacrificial-heroic ethos.

The third feature – the introduction, kindling and simulation of such sacrificial heroic ethos required something that is very thin, it is

The ideology of the communism

Communism had some special theatrical youth. The young, reckless, heroic young man was the main character of communism. Communism was gerontocratic only at its sunset, at the beginning, especially in the early years of the Soviet Union, communism is clearly bastardy.

It is symptomatic that when we destroy, we destroy the old and build new, simply because it is new. Fathers and sons are opposed, the same way retrogrades are opposed to innovators. This particular was purely ideological, because the society cannot be populated only by young people, and is not

naturally the young man to be the master of your life ... And as a young, radical, capable of continuous-heroic sacrificial ethos cannot complete the whole society alone, its place is occupied by an adult who has the qualities of a reckless young man that is a fool. Which means that communism was the society of structural nonsense normative ideological idiocy.

These three features of Communist totalitarianism might not be bright enough, but they have led to incredible anthropological deviations. I will conclude with another - after these three traits are strong enough embedded in society, Communism faced the temptation to make radical destructive actions of the type of final decision.

Just because the state was seen, for the first time in the history, as an owner of everything of everyone all, it was tempted to make things that no other country would ever allow itself to do. Such a radical action led to the undermining of society. In the early Soviet Union, when Leon Trotsky was still a leading figure in the Communist Party, he had the following idea for a total transformation of society - to increase the efficiency and mobility of labour, Trotsky decided he must at all costs delete the underlying retrograde evidence that people live in certain places, in villages and towns, in constant agglomerations. Why is this necessary when the whole Soviet country could be surrounded by wires similar to those of power, on them trolleys could be uploaded, which would have beds, one table and a few chairs, and thus generalized Soviet population could be converted to radical mobile workforce. Where a need arises, the state would unload most of the people, would begin to build and operate, and then they would concentrate somewhere else. Thankfully, this project was not implemented, but it shows in a similar resource the idiocy that government and regime could reach.

The most important thing is that if this project or similar projects could have been carried out, they had just undermined the very reason for which such work could be performed. Well, I ask, the entire population will be converted to a luggage that will be clustered, concentrated and deconcentrated in order to increase production efficiency? But I ask who would benefit from this increased production efficiency? Isn't the last recipient of the production the population and the people? If you had turned the people and the society into a carriage luggage, why would you need to raise the production efficiency? Who will this increased efficiency work for, for the idea itself? You would no longer have people, no cities, you will no longer have permanent communities and agglomerations. They would all be converted into a carriage load; they had all been converted into minimum skilled workforce.

Such a temptation of radical-scale actions deconstructing traditional society could lead to absurdity. In history communism is a reduction to absurdity

Historical reduction to absurdity

If these could be three of the main features of Communist totalitarianism, we are liberated from communist totalitarianism? Yes, we already live in such a society. And we must all pay tribute to all those who can might not have fought actively enough, but managed to contribute to this sinister phenomenon disappearing from the face of the planet. We are no longer mobilized, our life is not a resource. We are no longer forced to live in a sacrificial-heroic ethos. We have even reached the other extreme - super individualism and hedonism. Nobody makes us perform theatrical and polished tics. We can be peaceful and ascetic and erotic, our streets are filled with beautiful faces.

Yes, communism has its metastases

These metastases should be investigated. We have to see today the people who turned our lives into a resource and what they have turned into. But we must fight with them, but we should also have confidence. We managed to free ourselves from totalitarianism. We are fighting with the mafia, the oligarchy, with devious people, the rear detachment of the communist masters of informers, with the officers of the State Security, but we are not fighting with totalitarianism anymore. I say this, risking provoking the discontent of some of you, but I say it because the low confidence we have bothers me. Communists continue to rule us, we continue to be their victims, we continue to be pariahs of the previous regime. This is not good for our confidence. We cannot fight with this mode of metastasis, if we continue to see ourselves as victims, if we continue to see ourselves as people who have done nothing. No, we have done. Many of us in this room have also done a lot so we should not forget that.

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THE ROAD TO A BETTER FUTURE

By Nassya Krlevska-Owens

“Twenty Five Years Free Bulgaria” is an inspiring title for the multiple initiatives organized under the patronage of the President of the Republic of Bulgaria, Rossen Plevneliev, marking the twenty-fifth anniversary since the collapse of the communist regime in our country.

I like it because I often ask myself why the fact that Bulgaria is now a free country is seldom discussed in public discourse, and is pushed to the background. Once our forefathers uttered the words “Freedom or Death” as a sacred oath and had given their lives for it. Today this human blessing - freedom - is taken for granted, and its importance is under-valued. Have we forgotten so quickly that for forty-five years, under communism, freedom was banished from the Bulgarian soul?

It was impossible during that time to express the slightest criticism of the inhumane system or to show your disapproval of it. Neither in words nor in writing. Neither publicly nor in a narrow private circle, because as we understand now in free Bulgaria, our society was riddled with informers and agents of the repressive secret services.

There was no way during communist times to freely cross the state boundary, neither to live in the city that you wanted, because for this you needed “a residence permit” – things that the majority of young Bulgarians never heard. Few of them know that the communists ran concentration camps until the early 1960s, in which you could find yourself if you listened or danced to Western music, wore capitalist style clothing, or talked to foreigners from enemy countries.

During the red regime, freedom of choice was a forgotten concept. Civil rights – an anachronism. The privileges of the communist elite – unchallenged rules. The inferior study and work opportunities of the non-party members – unwritten law.

All of this happened during the years of “developed Socialism”, following decades of bloody mass terror upon both the urban and rural populations of Bulgaria...

Today it is different. We enjoy the freedom to say what we think, to write what we believe, to criticize whoever we want, to vote for our choice of candidates in free elections, to study whatever and wherever we choose, to travel and even live abroad.

But is our freedom complete?

Do we have at our disposal a free media, an independent judicial system, and uncorrupted institutions? Did the citizens of Bulgaria have equal opportunities to participate in the free-market economy as some henchmen of the communist regime who started their businesses with assets stolen from the state? Did a single national traitor or concentration camp sadist from the communist era answer in court for his/hers crimes?

There are many questions waiting for answers. That is why I am grateful to be part of the high level international conference “Dealing with the Past while looking to the Future”. Without hesitation, I will say: the only way to look at the future with hope is to know the truth.

The truth – cleansed of partiality or prejudice, family history, financial interests, and all kinds of subjective considerations, which cast shadows on it. We have to learn the truth about pre-communist Bulgaria, the truth about the essence of the communist regime and the damage that it did to our state and our nation, the truth about the years after the fall of our “Berlin Wall” – the removal of the dictator Todor Zhivkov.

The facts about the history of Bulgaria during the 20th century should no longer be manipulated and hidden. It should not be known just by a handful of people. Everybody in the country needs to be knowledgeable about the truth, especially the young people. That is why it should be taught, repeated, circulated, spread by parents, teachers, university professors, journalists, and public figures. Only then – with the truth about our recent history – pure and whole – will we start living in a really free Bulgaria, sharing common national values, having shaken off the lies imposed on us since the time of the communist dictatorship.

I like to believe that this conference and its accompanying events will create the basis for an honest, open and objective dialogue about our near past. And help us to move ahead as an united nation to a better future.

Nassya Krlevska-Owens is the author of numerous editorials, articles, columns, and interviews published in Bulgarian newspapers and magazines; editor of several books; and translator of novels, plays, short stories, and poetry from German and English to Bulgarian. She holds masters' degrees in German Philology and Journalism from the Sofia University (Bulgaria). She studied journalism on a UNESCO scholarship in Germany and England, and she worked in Sofia as an editor. Since 1985, she has lived in the USA.

DO YOU LIKE THIS FREEDOM?

By Nikolay Nikolov

I had recently received the book *The Little Prince* by mail. It seemed to have crossed at least one ocean to reach me, just as the Prince appears unexplained in the story. The way this book found its place somehow changed its identity for me, as though it had been written in a new language, the language of adult children. One of the questions I had while I was reading the book was: "What language do the Prince and the narrator speak?" With time, the answer to this question became clear.

"Before the Prince accidentally landed in the Sahara Desert, I was living alone without having anyone to truly talk to." Until this moment the narrator is struggling to adapt to the 'wise' life of adults, who are trying to convince him that a painting of a boa constrictor swallowing an elephant is just an image of a hat. "It is very tiring when adults do not understand things on their own, and have to explain them all over again to children."

How is it then that the Little Prince, an embodiment of the essential problems of being human - loneliness, isolation, fear and insecurity - immediately recognizes the elephant in the boa's stomach? The answer is simple: He and the narrator share the same language-thought process. This is also the role of the desert as a space where real conversations can take place, "one thousand miles away from any populated area", where nothing really matters.

The book waiting patiently on my night desk underneath *The Little Prince* is a collection of travel diaries and feuilletons by Aleko Konstantinov, published in 1967. The introduction to this particular edition stresses the fact that Konstantinov was a Russophile and that his travel diaries were a sarcastic expression of the author's discontent with the "bourgeois-capitalist reality in which predatory and dark people thrive." What would Konstantinov have thought if he had read this introduction? Would this be an appropriate way to remember him?

Is it possible for the same pages of the same book, written in the same language to send different messages, both that of the comrade responsible for the introduction, and also the authentic words of Konstantinov himself? Is there a connection between the two interpretations, with different social, political and cultural perspectives informing their choice of words?

And the most important question of all: What language am I speaking when I choose particular words, and to whom am I speaking it? What meaning does 'post-socialism' provide for those of us who live in

a 'post-socialist' world? Do we really know what it is to be free? Are we in a desert, dehydrated from lack of thought?

Their freedom and our freedom

"I cannot positively define freedom," says Prof. Kalin Yanakiev after an interview lasting nearly two hours.

Two coffees, a hot chocolate, a vase containing an artificial flower and an ashtray, overflowing with Kent and Lucky Strike cigarette butts, maintains an elusive sense of belonging between us. Up to here we see a hat. How can we see an elephant?

Freedom seems to be something that only makes sense to a person when they feel its absence. And if they do not know exactly what freedom is, at least they can be certain of what it is not. So, the question for Prof. Yanakiev is: Are we freer today than we were yesterday?

"As for the present and the peculiar misuse of the past for the present, young people today are often told: 'Now you have a freedom that you did not have before. Do you like this freedom?'"

The professor continues:

"Under such freedom you cannot be sure of anything. Anyone can deceive you, overtake you unfairly or not give you the chance to develop. This is "freedom". Now once we did not have freedom, but do you know what we did have? We had a security that you do not have now. A German politician once said: 'Freedom without security is the freedom of the jungle; security without liberty is a cage in the zoo'. Both are therefore reduced to an absurdity. The freedom of the jungle is not freedom, and security of the cage is not security.

"We did not have security during socialism for the simple reason that when something is mobilized for the sole benefit of the state, there is absolutely no security. What security could you possibly have? That what has been in the past will continue to be so in the future? We did not have this kind of certainty - a student would start university, reach the third semester, then suddenly be sent to work on a large building project because, in the eyes of the state, they were no-one, they had no choice. As another example, no-one could be certain that they would not suddenly have to accommodate a complete stranger in their home. This is fraudulent security. There was only one apparent certainty: That by following the rules laid down by the state and not manifesting any kind of individualism or personality, it was possible to have a better life of the kind we now take for granted in Bulgaria."

I return to my thoughts and wonder if someone who had not lived during those years could truly imagine

such a reality. I personally do not think that they could, although I feel a deep sense of resentment and fear when it comes to events 'before 1989'. Suddenly we, the people who are not able to remember communism, cannot see the elephant under the hat. We lose perspective and everything becomes black and white. But our lack of knowledge or memories of communism gives us the feeling that we are not free.

The question that follows: "What should be done and what is the approach in such a suffocating situation?" For me, these questions often end with "Dad?", as I wait to hear his story. What I learned from him is that in situations of non-freedom, opposition can take on a very simple material nature. For example, a pair of blue jeans is a symbol of the freedom to be different, loaded with aesthetic and ideological meaning. A few days ago I received a more specific answer from my father, who said:

"I was about 14 years old. The puppet theater in Zaimov Park was performing the story of the Treasures of Sylvester. In the middle of the performance, the puppets danced The Twist for two minutes. I stayed to watch the show ten times purely to see the dance again. "

Freedom as a two-minute dance of dolls...

According to Prof. Yanakiev, the deliberate deprivation of liberty was one of the core characteristics of the Bulgarian totalitarian regime. For nearly 50 years, human life, a fundamental right of the individual, became a resource of the state. "Mobilization of everything for everybody", says Prof. Yanakiev, but what exactly does that mean?

It means that private, personal space disappears and everything becomes public, that is, it belongs to the state. One no longer has himself, his family, or his property. They exist only through the arbitrariness of the state.

"Children were not born of the family, although they were born in their families. Once they were born they belonged to the Pioneers, Komsomol or Fatherland Front. Parents did not have the freedom to decide whether or not their children should join these organizations - they were simply resources to be mobilized at birth.

"Husbands and wives did not belong primarily or exclusively to each other, rather they belonged to different branches of the Labor Front and shared only what was impossible for the state to take from them: partnerships between men and women. The political vocabulary of communism did not include 'husband' or 'wife', so people had 'companions' or 'friends'; which meant that while they may have been comrades, primarily they belonged to the state. "

Today we do not live in such a system. So why, you might ask, is it important to know what has changed,

and how, in Bulgaria since 1944, especially for those who did not experience the period of non-freedom? As explained by Prof. Yanakiev, the metamorphosis of the foundations of society caused such "profound damage" that the effects still reverberate today.

"To understand why not everything runs smoothly today and why some people still struggle, we need to look back and examine the genesis of the conversion of totalitarian power into the system of political-economic oligarchy."

But I think there is a much more important moment that should not be overlooked. Not how cruel the regime was, but that blue jeans, The Twist and The Beatles were possible despite the cruelty. The language and the voice were not silenced. The affirmation that 'You are nobody' did not come true, and our parents do have the language to tell us the stories of resistance and struggle for the preservation of the individual. We should try to understand this - perhaps the inexplicable force of bright clothing in a gray Bulgaria.

Why is this actually so important? Simply, because the easiest way to realize who you want to be, is to be faced with what you do not want to be. In this particular case a person is not willing to accept that the boa constrictor and the elephant are a hat, or that $2 + 2 = 5$, even though the totalitarian regime tries from above to impose 'hat' and '5' as the truth. Prof. Yanakiev reminds us that by refusing to admit that falsehood, "You express, albeit passively, a departure from the political order, a diversion from mobilization."

If you are against 'the reasonable people', as the narrator has struggled all his life against the 'mind' of his elders, you are taken to represent the opposite of mind - that is, madness. That one word is an infinitely sad and short guide to freedom under communism. In the words of Georgi Markov:

"The most stupid thing to do would be to lie, that things are not as they are. The most unforgivable thing would be to shoot yourself. The answer is very simple: we have to continue to be exactly what we were - crazy. Because it is a form of life that best suits us, because we were born for it, because it is the highest privilege of nature - DO NOT be like them. And I think that all the beauty of life lies in the insanity of those who are insane."

Children of Liberty

Who are we from? Where are we going? What should we do? Where are our jeans? Do we even need them?

After a few more similar questions, Prof. Yanakiev answers:

"I am no oracle. But I could express my personal opinions and other people could argue for them." Again, we rely on empty glasses and full ashtrays to maintain the sense of belonging. The conversation is long. We might have asked the wrong question. What is the appropriate language? What is the hat or the elephant for? What is sense and what is madness? Why do we not understand each other? For Prof. Yanakiev, the meaning is divided between our generation and his because "I cannot make anyone feel strongly about something they never experienced".

Actually we, the children of freedom, have been plucked from the black-and-white reality of our parents, children of non-freedom. For them, there was only one choice, either 'for' or 'against' the regime; reconciliation with non-freedom and bowing to the realization that you are part of a herd, or trying to discover who George and John are in the Beatles song 'Taxman'. However, it was not all long hair and The Twist. The elephant had already been eaten by the boa. But the important thing was to be different, to be mad. Madness is a culture from which language comes. This difference, this marginality eventually undermined the regime by refusing to recognize the 'hat'. According to Prof. Yanakiev:

"Marginality was a virtue, a political virtue, an anti-virtue. I want to be marginal, I do not want your positions or your career or your 'proper art'. I do not want your 'correct taste', I do not even want an ordered family life - this all came from the 1968 generation, the so-called 'hippies'. There is nothing left today from that time."

Why is nothing left? Because, unlike communism, post-communism is not based on a principle of society or a driving force for change. Under communism, when there was a minority who fought to keep their personality, thereby paradoxically maintaining diversity under the lid of totalitarianism, there was a clear division between 'us', Comrades, and 'them' - 'hippies' at best and 'enemies of the people' at worst. Today this dualism does not exist. Meaning has been lost because now the madness is no longer madness, just delusion. There is no 'us' and 'them', because there are different languages through which to view the picture of the hat / elephant. There is a desert in the minds of the current older generation, which holds their memories of 'what was back then'. This is post-socialism: Something that was broken from the beginning!

It is no coincidence then that there is no positive definition of our freedom, and no wonder George Gospodinov has described the last 25 years as a chronic existential crisis, with some periods of recession. It does not matter whether we see a hat or an elephant swallowed by a boa constrictor, because nothing matters in the desert.

According to Prof. Yanakiev the post-socialist generation has an important role to play here:

"We do not need to throw our hands up dismissively and say that nothing can be done. I personally have

confidence that an awakening of young people can come about not necessarily through direct political messaging, but by connecting to their innate thirst for life. Many young people today are bored with the life-path laid out for them, leading them through higher education and careers in the jungle of life. They are looking for something deeper, a 'vita maxima' and for people to tell them things that fire their interests. "

This freedom is mine and I can share it.

What is this 'something deeper'? Not metaphysics or religion, of this I am sure. And why should it be a vita maxima exactly - isn't that very extreme? The only difference between 'us' and 'them' - the generation of Prof. Yanakiev and our parents and of the "marginal" - is that they rely on the language of negation. I do not want such a life! I do not agree. My generation have the opportunity, freedom, and even requirement to do more and not tolerate nihilism. We should leave our comfort zones by making perhaps a more difficult request for freedom, and try to define what it is, where it is, and how it is achieved.

How correct is this advice? It is very correct because no matter how rotten our democracy or how uncivilized our statesmen, this is not about political freedom, about which we may not have much to say, but about cultural freedom.

It is good to remember that large, permanent changes are mainly achieved through political protests and revolutions. The fact that a given population does not have the life horizon to make comparisons with the past does not mean that it does not want to know what preceded it so that it may influence the present. The Beat Generation of 1950s America arose from the unwillingness of a group of writers at Columbia University to settle for the literary status quo, from Kerouac to Ginsberg, and Bob Dylan to the Beatles (the name 'The Beatles' was deliberately written so as to embody the meaning of the Beat generation).

The Beat Poets altered the language and meaning of their generation. The American dream continues to stand for a set of possessions, a career and a family, but for these poets, the dream was the release from property and wealth, and the ability to travel aimlessly and to feel. This feeling was transferred to their verses and the paper in their books, free of syntax, censorship or form. Their discontent and unwillingness to settle with the status quo became the greatest muse to touch our generation. Who has not heard Bob Dylan or read *On the Road*?

Our generation, even if it does not have a common identity, has biography and shared memories. The question is how, in what way and who to pass them on to? To a large extent, it will depend on how we approach the understanding and discussion of post-socialism. Why do we not try to move the conversation away from 'Do you like this freedom?', a freedom understood as a dream of democracy

that never came true, and say instead, 'You know, yes, I do like this freedom' because it is my freedom, and now I can share it.

To create a culture, we need to stop filling the hole of post-socialist reality with nostalgia for communism and far-right renaissance patriotism. In this sense, there is depth to it. Because elephants should gradually outweigh hats, and post-socialism should acquire a meaning and identity not through its connection with the past, but through its modern mirror and future perspective.

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NATIONS LOST AND FOUND

By Nina Khrushcheva

The dramatic events of 1989 hinged on choices taken in Moscow. Mikhail Gorbachev changed the world when he decided against sending Soviet tanks to Berlin on November 9. A believer in free choice, he followed his conviction that the Soviet Union should no longer keep Eastern Europe under its thumb. He would not follow the precedent of his communist predecessors—Nikita Khrushchev in Hungary in 1956 or Leonid Brezhnev in Czechoslovakia in 1968. At least, Khrushchev—an imperfect reformer of the Thaw and de-Stalinization and a retired Soviet premier after 1964—lamented the brutality of the Prague events, “It has been twelve years since Budapest and we still haven’t learned the better way.”

Indeed, only Gorbachev’s reforms two decades later fully liberated the Soviets from the straitjacket of Marxism-Leninism. They also released the national aspirations of people from the Baltics to the Bering Sea, those who had been trapped behind the Iron Curtain. In 1989, countries of Eastern Europe—Bulgaria, Poland, et al.—were free from communism, and two years later the Soviet republics, including the Russian Federation, began to seek the same freedom for themselves.

Bulgaria’s example was particularly important for the Russians as in socialist Bulgaria domestic policies had been closely modeled on the USSR’s example. On every level Bulgaria served as an echo chamber, standing by the Kremlin against the West. It was often called the “sixteenth Soviet republic,” or as the Russian saying went at the time, “Chicken is not a bird, Bulgaria is not abroad.” In fact, in 1963 communist leader Todor Zhivkov proposed to Khrushchev that Bulgaria be incorporated into the USSR. The Soviet premier didn’t take up Zhivkov on his offer: Bulgaria was already fully in the Kremlin orbit. In retrospect, Bulgaria should thank its lucky stars. Instead of being a Russian satellite it is now part of the European Union.

Regrettably, in the two and half decades that have followed, Russia has been largely aloof from the liberalizing tide of history. Russians have never accepted the narrative of being an “empire diminished.” In 2000, the country, once the center of the Soviet-ruled universe, elected as president (prime minister from 2008 to 2012, and now president again) former KGB operative Vladimir Putin. One of Putin’s central promises was to restore the national self-respect that had been shattered by the apparent loss of great-power status. When in 2005 he announced that “the collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century” and “a genuine tragedy” for the Russian people, Gorbachev—though not mentioned by name—was his target of blame.

A decade later in 2014 attempting to rectify this “tragedy” by reuniting some parts of the Soviet empire Putin took Crimean peninsula away from Ukraine citing the will of the people: “In people’s hearts and minds, Crimea has always been an inseparable part of Russia.” This time he was less kind to his other Kremlin predecessor, Khrushchev, who transferred the peninsula’s jurisdiction to Kyiv from Moscow in 1954. In Putin’s words, Russia was not “simply robbed, it was plundered” by the former Soviet premier.

In the last 15 years Putin’s project to safeguard “great national Russian identity” has involved numerous throwback policies from the communist era—such as attempting to pressure Europe into submission by increasing prices or limiting access to Russian oil and gas, and flexing Russia’s military muscle, as in the war with Georgia in 2008 or in developing a new frozen conflict in East Ukraine. The world has been witnessing Russian fighter jets and submarine incursions into European water and air space, as a tactic of intimidation.

It has been a quarter century since the Berlin Wall fell, yet Russia refuses to accept the loss of its imperial power. And unlike other former communist states, Russia’s own 75 years of captivity to Soviet ideals cannot be blamed on the despotic nature of its former Bolshevik leaders. Neither closed borders nor the Berlin Wall, can imprison the Russian mind more than the idea of a Great Russia. As the saying goes, “Every nation deserves its government.”

Russians fully deserve Putin’s illiberal leadership, whose popularity consistently rates at more than 70 percent. It is the reform leaders who have tried to change our imperial mindset, especially Mikhail Gorbachev’s liberal ideals, that we have never deserved.

Nina L. Khrushcheva teaches international affairs at New School University in New York. Her latest book is “The Lost Khrushchev: A Journey into the Gulag of the Russian Mind.”

DE-COMMUNIZATION IN BULGARIA FAILED TO KEEP UP WITH CHANGING NATURE OF THE COMMUNIST ELITE

By Ognyan Minchev

“In the process of de-communization in Bulgaria, there should have been more discretion, but without political experience this is hard to achieve. That way we would have seen how the communist elite was mutating or changing, and been able to restrict it,” says political analyst, Professor Ognyan Minchev. In response to a question by *desebg.com*, asked during the public discussion on “25 years of transition - hopes and reality” , on whether the country only experienced a half-democratization rather than full-democratization, Prof. Minchev answered: “You can attack a position that is empty or half empty of content, and not see the other extreme position offered by the representatives of the communist regime,” adding, “For me, the main problem was that the strategy for the transformation of the former communists into a ruthless oligarchic capitalist elite was detected too late to be prevented.

“De-communization outside the ideological sense of the word, requires safeguards to prevent the conversion of political power into economic power. Done properly, economic power would in turn be used to curb political power in other ways. This process was underrated and omitted.”

Russia’s role in the destruction of the Bulgarian national elite

In answer to another *desebg.com* question on whether he thinks that Russia still has political intentions in Bulgaria, which may put obstacles in the way of the country’s democratic and European development, Prof. Minchev responded:

“There is no doubt that Russia’s role in the recent history of Bulgaria has been dramatically important. First, Russia, which in its former role as the controlling power in the USSR, helped destroy the Bulgarian national elite. There is no other country in Central and Eastern Europe whose social elite was destroyed to such an extent as in Bulgaria. Russia’s goal now, however, has little to do with communism. It is an imperial goal informed by the legacy of Soviet imperialist attitudes. Russia first tried to influence Bulgaria after they helped liberate us from the Ottoman Turks at the end of the Nineteenth Century. However, this influence was resisted by Bulgarian leaders such as Stefan Stambolov and Zahari Stoyanov. This spirit of resistance remained within the Bulgarian elite which is why it was destroyed with such relentless consistency after the Russian invasion of September 9, 1944.

“I believe that this lesson remained in Russian minds well after 1989. Even though Russia’s status as an international power was greatly weakened, it continued to wield influence through its energy resources, and also through its strategy of corrupting the post-communist Bulgarian elite. This put us in a position of chronic dependence on Russia. ”

In Prof. Minchev’s words, the influence is used for new political designs. “In Bulgaria, money is Russian, apart from the official European subsidies”. According to him, Russia has the possibilities and confidence to try out many different ways to promote its political interests in Bulgaria. “Examples include the pro-Russian nationalists, led by the Attaka party, and some elements of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (party representing ethnic Turkish interests). From Russia’s point of view it is good to maintain ethnic conflicts. Russia also benefits by supporting the fifth column of the Bulgarian Socialist Party.

Bulgarian elections

Prof. Minchev specifies that over the past 25 years, Bulgarians have had Europe as their first choice. They have chosen democracy, NATO membership, a market economy and economic freedom as the only possible way to ensure stable national security.

“Despite intense ideological debate and protests by opponents, these core values and goals have been adopted by Bulgarian society.” says Prof. Minchev.

Real threats

According to Prof. Minchev, the polarization of Bulgarian society has reached its peak, creating the basis for an ideological turnaround towards the view that the transition has been a failure. Advocates against EU and NATO membership have been at the core of this ideological debate. “If you pay close attention to the debate, you can see that at its heart it is between those trying to protect the liberal system and those trying to shut it down.”

These anti-EU voices proclaim that Europe brings us insecurity, instability and crisis. “Those people believe that we make our payments to the EU, but that the EU simultaneously stops our subsidies. It is also said that Americans continuously benefit from us without giving us anything in return, that our democracy has collapsed, and that membership in the Eurasian Union and closer relations with Russia would have been a better choice for Bulgaria.” says Prof. Minchev.

“The problem is that because these arguments are at the centre of public debate they attract attention. However they do not express the true political competition, and are relatively peripheral to the election results.

“Now, we are not happy with the recent election results as they stand, but imagine what would happen if this electorally peripheral but noisy perspective became a sufficiently powerful political alternative? Imagine what the election results would look like then.”

Lack of national awareness

According to Prof. Minchev the fundamental question focuses on a missing element during the Bulgarian transition, namely consciousness and awareness of national identity.

“The legacy of the ‘Revival Process’, in which ethnic Turkish Bulgarians were forced to Slavicize their names or leave the country, equates national identity with nationalism and the repression of minorities. We were liberal to such an extent that in the 1990s no one dared to say a word against Ahmed Dogan and his cronies’ ruthless, self-interested plunder of whole regions of Bulgaria.”

Prof. Minchev notes that Dogan’s DPS party (Movement for Rights and Freedoms) was formed in a very interesting way. It is an ethnic party, with an aim to protect minority Turks from attacks, but it is also very corrupt. They use ethnicity as an excuse, but when it is not profitable to represent the interests of the Turkish minority, DPS assumes positions that are well-disposed to all ethnicities.

Restoration of the Bulgarian social elite

“Without restoring a sense of national identity and an awareness of this identity we will not be able to pursue common national goals,” says Prof. Minchev. He does not suggest rebuilding national consciousness on a repressive, authoritarian or any other radical basis. Rather, “It is about being able, politically and ideologically, to answer the question in every Bulgarian’s mind, namely ‘where is the point in 7 million people living together and following the same goals?’”

Prof. Minchev is not at all surprised that so many people respond to this question by concluding that there is no point, so they pack their bags and go abroad.

“Nothing can be achieved if we do not lay the foundations for the restoration of the Bulgarian social elite, which was destroyed in the upheavals during the second half of the twentieth century and the 25 years since the fall of communism. First, it was destroyed in the decade-long crack- down after the communist coup of September 9 1944. The Bulgarian communist elite who replaced the previous one never became a national elite unlike, for example, in Romania. Instead they defined themselves as the colonial administration of the USSR in Bulgaria. They were never interested in anything but Moscow’s opinion.

“When circumstances gave the Bulgarian communists a real opportunity to work as a national elite in 1989-1990, they failed to do so and sought help from Moscow instead. Unfortunately, the encouraging signals from Moscow never came, and the elite managed only to divide and fight among themselves

over the spoils of public money. Their only achievement was to prevent the emergence of alternative elite, which was not difficult due to the fact that the alternative elite started from scratch in 1989. “

From this perspective, according to Prof. Minchev, Bulgaria remained in a very dangerous vacuum. The lack of national elite has allowed the Bulgarian state to remain in an inert and passive position.

“As a result, the only well-organized group where ‘pluralism’ does not exist was the political and economic elite which surround Dogan.” According to Minchev, this group was able to control a significant section of the economy and has achieved maximum infiltration within the institutions of the Bulgarian state. “Reform is not a solution to this problem because it would merely initiate conflicts of interest at all government levels between this corporate network of Dogan elites and potential reformists.”

Prof. Minchev repeats that, “Without the recovery of the Bulgarian national elite in its various forms - as spiritual, political, economic and intellectual elite - restoration of Bulgarian national identity is barely possible.” A strong parliamentary majority and “an executive branch made up of people who are prepared to make difficult choices and ready to promote change” are necessary for this to change to become reality.

Oligarchy does not hide back stage, it sits on the stage

According to Prof. Minchev, the Bulgarian oligarchy, largely organized around DPS, is no longer hiding, rather it sits fully centre-stage. “Forget about the phrase ‘behind the curtains’. Today’s oligarchy is so arrogant that it no longer feels the need to hide, but dictates all actions from onstage”.

Prof. Minchev says that these oligarchic elite orchestrated the “circus” around the KTB Bank collapse, and that the events and players that caused the crisis were obvious to anyone who was not blind. “I’m not an economist and do not participate in the KTB debate, but from my experience, I do not see how a bank, whose owner is just a façade, can be rescued. This person had lost the confidence and trust of the real owner so there was no way the bank could be saved. The nominal owner probably imagined that he was ‘in charge of the train’ as the Bulgarian businessman Ilia Pavlov used to say. Many things happened in Pavlov’s life mainly because he thought he was ‘in charge of the train.’”

According to Prof. Minchev, the Bulgarian oligarchy created a system through the KTB bank, whereby people in senior political positions became dependent on them. “Oligarchs would hardly give up power, or allow themselves be controlled by parliament. Disputes over who is good, and who is bad, who is capable and who is not, are memories from the past and are no longer of any use. Given the current

political infrastructure, whoever enters the parliament in Bulgaria, you or me, would have to obey the oligarchy or leave. And this situation will continue until the changes I have talked about come to pass.”

Ognyan Minchev is professor of political science, Dean of the Department of Political Science at the University of Sofia (1999- 2008) and policy analyst. Dr. Minchev is heading the Institute for Regional and International Studies and is chairing the Board of Transparency International in Bulgaria. His publications are mostly focused on issues of post-communist transition, institutional reform and modernization, energy security, transatlantic relations, Russian and post-Soviet studies.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS LATER: REFLECTIONS ON THE REVOLUTIONS IN EASTERN EUROPE

By Stephen Grand

When the Berlin wall came tumbling down in November 1989, and popular revolutions spread throughout the former Soviet satellite states, which could have imagined that, twenty-five years later, citizens in many parts of the region would still be struggling to realize the ideal of governments of, by, and for the people?

1989, that remarkable year that Ralf Dahrendorf referred to as the *annus mirabilis*, brought a decisive break with the past but ushered in a far less certain future. For the region's citizens, the years since have often been tumultuous ones, marked by economic dislocation, political upheaval and, in the case of the former Yugoslavia, civil war -- even as they have, on balance, brought important political and economic advances for most countries.

For social scientists that did not have to live through the experience, the region's last twenty-five years represented an unparalleled social experiment. Thirty successor states emerged from the ashes of the East bloc. All had similar political and economic structures because of their shared communist past. In response to the revolutionary events of 1989 and then the Soviet Union's final collapse in 1991, all at least claimed to be embarking upon transitions to democracy. All crafted what at least on paper were nominally democratic constitutions. All held popular elections that were to varying degrees free and fair. All proceeded to put in place a set of putatively democratic political institutions, including elected parliaments and independent judiciaries. And all made some space for civil society organizations and an independent media to operate.

Yet these countries ended up following very different trajectories. A few, like Poland and the Czech Republic, moved rapidly along the path toward something approximating liberal democracy. Others' democratic revolutions were never really genuine. Political leaders in Central Asia, for instance, may have made gestures toward democracy, but never really relinquished the levers of power -- adopting some of the institutional forms of democracy but not its substance. In a third group of countries, including Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia, initial popular revolutions were co-opted by local

political elites, but their attempts to return their country toward authoritarianism were eventually reversed following lengthy popular struggles.

For those keeping score, Freedom House, in 2013, ranked fourteen of the 30 successor states of the former Soviet empire as "free," nine as "partly free," and seven as "not free."

What did we learn from this grand experiment? Like any real-world experiment, there were flaws in the design from the start. The results were to a degree pre-determined: Those countries further to the west had the most historical experience with democracy, were the wealthiest, had the most educated populations, and had the most exposure to the outside world, which meant they had the greatest chances of becoming liberal democracies. Moreover, all these characteristics made them the most logical candidates for NATO and EU enlargement, which only added to the incentives for them to reform.

But the extent to which the results were pre-cooked from the beginning should not be overstated. Geography was not destiny. In 1989, Yugoslavia, which had the most exposure to and trade links with the West, seemed particularly primed for success; instead, civil war ensued. To the east, Mongolia and tiny Kyrgyzstan have outperformed expectations.

So, among the things we learned:

- Democratization needs to be understood as a long-term process whose fate will not be decided by a single event -- such as how a constitution gets written or who wins an election -- but instead by a broader struggle between citizens and their leaders over their respective rights and prerogatives. Breathtaking advances and heartbreaking reversals are to be expected along the way -- the latter in particular are a part of the political learning necessary toward building a democracy.
- The highly centralized power found in authoritarian and totalitarian political systems can be exceedingly difficult to decentralize. Left to their own devices, political leaders are unlikely to relinquish powers that they could otherwise exercise themselves.
- The problem of getting incumbents to govern within their mandate and step aside when their term is complete is a key challenge confronting transitions around the world.
- Institutions are important in circumscribing the discretion of political leaders. But efforts to put new rules in place, erect new political institutions, and create "independent authorities" and "ombudsmen" to check egregious behavior will come to naught if they are not perceived to be backed up by the popular will.

- Over the long term, successful democratization requires the emergence of a political constituency for democracy: a critical mass of citizens who, regardless of their personal political ideologies or party affiliation, value democracy as an important end in its own right and are willing and able to advocate for it. Citizens must be prepared to defend nascent democratic institutions from encroachment if democracy is to take root and endure.

Stephen R. Grand is a Nonresident Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution. Portions of this essay are adapted from his recent book, "Understanding Tahrir Square: What Transitions Elsewhere Can Teach Us about the Prospects for Arab Democracy" (Brookings Institution Press, 2014).

GOING BACK AND FORWARD – 25 YEARS OF TRANSITION AND YET NO END OF HISTORY IN SIGHT

By Vedran Džihic

It seemed to be a wonderful dream of a world and particularly Europe reaching the end of history (Francis Fukuyama) and entering an era of everlasting liberal democratic peace. In some parts of Europe it worked out quite good, at least for a period of time. Championing the successful winners in the race towards the end goal of democracy in 2004 during the first big bang enlargement was nice and promising. Closing one European eye on some losers waging wars in Former Yugoslavia or permanently lagging behind like Moldavia or Belarus for example was rather frustrating.

The global economic crisis has revealed the fragility of the political and socio-economic systems and jeopardized a democratic consensus. As Jan Werner-Müller has recently put it in *Foreign Affairs* "democracy is struggling: nearly all the countries that joined the EU during the last decade are experiencing profound political crisis." 25 years after the end of the Cold War, initial euphoria about democratic change in many countries of the East and Southeast has given way to growing mistrust in political institutions and political representatives, and an increasing disaffection with democracy itself. This wide-ranging disaffection is due to the weak performance of political systems and a rather weak output of the regimes, be it in political, social or economic terms, be it in terms of more justice and equality. Politicians seem not (any more) able or willing to deliver tangible results to their voters. Harking back to Abraham Lincoln's famous quote that democracy was "government of the people, by the people, for the people", politics thus produces no or too little goods "for" the people.

Thus, the situation in (some parts of) Europe is rather dramatic, with some major challenges and conflicting trends portraying a picture of a rather divided than continent united in peace. There is even a risk of European parts drifting apart, having one part of Europa dedicated to liberalism, democracy and openness and another one embracing authoritarian values and illiberalism. As Michael Ignatieff put it recently in *New York Review*: "A new political competitor to liberal democracy began to take shape: authoritarian in political form, capitalist in economics, and nationalists in ideology."

With the general crisis of democracy in the inner circle of democracies we face an emergence of grey-zones between democracy and authoritarianism and even new forms of authoritarianism in some parts of Eastern and Southeastern Europe. Classical authoritarianism seeks for an absolute

obedience, is directed against individual freedoms and liberties and always ready to use repression against opponents. New authoritarian regimes are chameleon-like – they are able to adjust to new circumstances, they have institutionalized representation of a variety of actors and they even incorporate some democratic procedures like elections and thus create a structure resistant to change.

Looking at the peripheries of Europa might help us illustrate this assumption. The peripheries are zones of anger (as Sloterdijk has put it), where the perceptions of Europa and general values are in a constant flux with no finality in sight. It is precisely in the peripheries that we see competing and conflicting narratives of Europe and more generally conflicting narratives about the regimes best suited to rule. The one is basically oriented towards liberal and democratic values and another one heading towards authoritarian values. In between lies an explosive mix of uncertainty. There are many examples to illustrate this rift, be it Ukraine, Hungary, countries of the Western Balkans or even Bulgaria. As we have seen in the Ukrainian case, the drifting apart of parts of the country in terms of narratives about Europa quickly translated into violent division of the country creating facts on the ground that are – probably – here to stay (see Crimea). Parts of the Western Balkans are also an interesting place to look at. Here we have fragile states with no solution for internal ethnic conflicts and disputes while at the same time regimes with strong (male) rule are emerging, pairing populism and nationalism with quite of the empty rhetoric of reforms and Europeanization. Hungary that is, at least according to its Prime Minister Orbán, embracing “illiberal democracy” and limiting some fundamental freedoms, or Bulgaria with constant parallelism between protests, elections and new governments not able to deliver what population seems to want are further examples of fundamental changes going on in Europe nowadays. To make my point – in Eastern- und Southeastern part of Europe, not to speak about Russia or Turkey, in a region that went through more than two decades of democratization, we are witnessing new challenges to democracy and emergence of grey zone semi-authoritarian regimes, which – under the guise of democracy – limit individual freedom and reduce liberties.

“What is going on?”, asked Radical French philosopher Alan Badiou two years ago. “Of what we are the half-fascinated, half-devastated witnesses? The continuation, at all costs, of a weary world? A salutary crisis of that world, racked by its victorious expansion? The end of that world? The advent of a different world?”

We don't know what is going on, but we all feel and fear that some pieces of our free world as we knew it since 1989 are falling apart. Are we facing a completely new era where the core values and

achievements of open societies will continue to stumble? Or will the crisis help revitalizing democracy and proving that radical democracy thinkers underlining the need for a constant renegotiation and struggle for the sake of democracy? In any case, instead of the end of history we see it rewritten before our eyes. A fascinating and dangerous exercise we may say.

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MY 1989

By Vladimir Levchev

Even the best economists fail to foresee major world crises. Even the best seismologists are powerless to predict catastrophic earthquakes. The Marxist theory of the predictability and 'inevitability' of historical processes has proved to be wrong. Communist ideologists were confident that a 'new and fair society would defeat capitalism, but the actual society that came to be represented little more than the folk wisdom: 'Man proposes, God possesses.'

The 'new and fair society' of brotherhood and equality was not what it was claimed to be, but a brutal Communist Party dictatorship. And of course, it did not defeat capitalism. At the end of the Cold War it became clear that Marxist theory had seriously miscalculated.

Even Zbigniew Brzezinski had not anticipated the sudden collapse of the totalitarian communist regimes in Eastern Europe.

There are unexpected revolutionary waves, sudden tsunamis that flood the world, or a part of it, and sharply change the map as well as the cultural and political climate of a region. Though it became clear long ago that the Soviet Bloc had lost the Cold War on the economic front, no one expected its sudden collapse. The sudden revolutionary wave in fall 1989.

Conspiracy theorists nostalgic for communism saw, and still see, the long arm of Washington behind everything. According to them, evil Uncle Sam and Uncle Reagan organized the collapse of communism with the cooperation of their secret services. But if the American secret services were able to organize nationwide protests and revolutions that overthrew regimes, the Cold War would have ended in the early 1950s. And if the KGB was able to organize revolutions or nationwide protests, communism would have succeeded in London, Paris and Washington.

Undoubtedly all interested intelligence services try to interfere in revolutionary situations and take advantage of them. But no agent can convince millions of people to forget their fear of a dictatorial regime and go out on the streets to protest - not just in a single country, but throughout half a continent.

The earthquakes that caused the tsunami that hit Eastern Europe in the autumn of 1989 had happened long before. Communist regimes from East Berlin to Sofia were swept away, but no-one could predict what exactly would replace them. Todor Zhivkov lost power on November 10, only one day after the Berlin Wall fell. That same autumn there was a 'Velvet Revolution' in Prague, and a very 'un-velvet' civil war in Bucharest.

In the second half of the 1980s, despite retaining the illiberal and centralized state economy of the USSR (this was an error), Gorbachev had begun to democratize Russia. Censorship was weakened, political persecution declined and there was a movement to create a new 'communism with a human face', but it was the same communism that had tried to impose Leonid Brezhnev 20 years previously at the time of the Prague Spring.

The Soviet model of democracy without economic reform led to the creation of a powerful KGB oligarchy. Communists became the new capitalists. Unfortunately, this also happened to some extent in Bulgaria after November 10, 1989.

In the mid-1980s, everyone in Bulgaria started reading 'Ogonyok' magazine and watching Russian Television (the 'Second Channel', which until then had been synonymous with boredom.) This was a paradox because while the USSR was being democratized under Gorbachev, Bulgaria was still facing economic decline, political backwardness and a state of general limbo. At the same time, Zhivkov's program of forcibly renaming all Turks living in Bulgaria (a policy known as the 'Revival Process') was well under way. There were also severe electricity shortages and the population experienced general impoverishment. The heightened misery and stagnation on the streets and in people's souls was depressing.

Rising discontent.

Even taxi drivers began openly to curse Zhivkov to their passengers, which in an earlier period would have been unthinkable. Gorbachev lifted the suppression of Radio Free Europe, Deutsche Welle and Voice of America so it became easy for us to listen to them - not in public places of course, but quietly at home. We listened in order to hear ourselves, because the truth of what was happening in our country was still suppressed by our government-controlled media.

There was no internet, Skype, or Facebook. The Iron Curtain was physically palpable and could not be removed by any means, just like the concrete wall shooting at everyone in the centre of Berlin could not be removed. A very small percentage of Bulgarians were allowed to visit the West, even if only for short trips. Visiting the western world or even working or studying there was a mirage that people could only dream of while on their way home to their apartments with no electricity, or when standing in line at the bakery.

In the late 1980s, a few workers at the State Security office could afford to drive western cars in the streets of Sofia and had begun to secretly transfer government money to western banks.

The 'Club in Support of Glasnost' was created in the autumn of 1988 in Sofia. Similar organizations had already been established such as the Ruse Committee, which campaigned against chemical pollution

in the Danube town of Ruse, and the Independent Society for the Protection of Human Rights. The 'Ecoglasnost' movement was also founded around that time. These were illegal organizations, and even protests against the pollution in Ruse were banned. Everything that was not organized by the Party or the state under its control was treated as hostile activity.

The notion that there was no resistance in Bulgaria before November 10, 1989 (or at least until the final months of the Zhivkov regime) and that Bulgaria was the most loyal satellite of the USSR, is still widespread. To this day, many believe that all dissidents in the late 1980s were proxies of the secret services, and that in the early years there were no grievances or protests against the regime. This falsification of history was begun deliberately in the early 1990s by those very same people from the secret services, many of whom were also frantically laundering money outside Bulgaria. It is true that many secret service agents had infiltrated dissident groups. But that does not mean that all these groups were front-men and that there were no dissidents.

However, today most young people cannot imagine the scale of repression in Bulgaria that began immediately after the Soviet occupation on September 9, 1944. Students are not taught in school how many hundreds of thousands of people were killed or abused in camps and prisons during the communist period. Until recently, nothing was said about the 'Goryani' guerrilla movement of the late 1940s and early 1950s, which was likely the largest armed resistance group against any communist regime in Eastern Europe.

Severe repression at home

In the late 1980s, even among those who were aware of the repression of the 1950s, there were many who believed that under Zhivkov there were no longer camps and political prisoners. We knew nothing about the camps in Lovech or Skravena or about the re-opening of Belene in the 1980s. No-one knew that people like Alexander Strezov or Lubomir Sobadzhiev had spent years in prison for expressing their discontent with the regime in public or to 'close friends'. The public did not know that jazz musician Aleksandar Nikolov, better known as Alex Sweet, was sent to a camp and executed in 1961 because he had made jokes about communism. The history of the communist period is yet to be written, a history that 25 years later is not taught to students while many others are unaware of what really happened.

What was the year 1989 for me?

I will allow myself to start with a little personal history. When people who know little about me hear my last name, they ask "When did this man manage to reinvent himself." It is well-known that my father, the poet Lyubomir Levchev, and other Bulgarian writers and artists of the time were close to Ludmilla Zhivkova. In my early childhood my father was a young poet living with the parents of my mother, artist Dora Boneva, and in my great-grandfather's house, a near-ruin with an outside toilet.

My father's political career started later and as a teenager I enjoyed the privileges of his family - a large apartment, a car and a holiday home. I also benefitted from the privilege of living in a home where art and culture were prized above all else. After graduating from the English language high school and from the Art Academy, I worked as an editor at *People's Culture* magazine and translated American poets such as Allen Ginsberg.

In the early 1980s I wrote the poem *Comrades with rifles over their fireplaces*.

Not only boars, but also humble pigs are killed for Christmas. In the same way I had my own file containing 300 pages of denunciations, but which, I recently discovered had been destroyed in 1990. I do not think of myself as a hero but I mention these facts as a defence. I know very well that under communism, tens of thousands of people were repressed, imprisoned or killed for expressing their opinions or simply because they came from 'bourgeois' families. It would be absurd to compare myself with them.

In January 1989, the poet Edvin Sugarev and I started our self-published magazines, *Glas* ('Voice') and *Most* ('Bridge'). At the same time, a petition was circulating in support of another poet, Petar Manolov, who was being persecuted by the police. One day I visited Blaga Dimitrova and asked her to sign the petition. I knew that she and her husband, Jordan Vasilev, were members of the Club in Support of Glasnost, and I wanted to know how to become a member. At her house I met with Zhelyu Zhelev, the author of the banned book, *Fascism*, and later Bulgaria's first freely elected Prime Minister. A little later both Edvin and I became members of Ecoglasnost.

Edvin and I initially thought to prepare two copies of the magazine, so that if one of us was arrested after the first issue, someone would remain to release the second. But we later decided to issue two completely separate magazines instead. The magazines were written on a typewriter. The cover of mine (*Glas*) was designed by Stefan Despodov, and the cover of Edvin's magazine (*Most*) by Vlado Rumenov.

We did not have computers at the time, not to mention printers. The Internet would not appear for another six years. At this time in Sofia there were only two publicly available Xerox machines, both of which were under surveillance. It occurred to Edvin to use double-sided photographic paper to print the magazines, which we could buy at a regular photographic store. With one ordinary light bulb in a dark room, we printed the typed pages onto photographic paper, then exposed the images in the bathtub. It was a time-consuming process.

Among the authors published in *Glas* were Zhelev, Mihail Nedeltchev, Ani Ilkova, Georgi Rupchev, Miglena Nikolchina, Alexander Kiossev, Boris Rokanov, Rumen Leonidov, Ivan Krastev, Dejan Kjurjanov, Mirjana Basheva, Victor Paskov, Elka Konstantinova, Elizabeth Moussakova, and Blaga Dimitrova, as well as Krasimir Damianov, Radoy Ralin, Asparukh Panov, Tzvetan Todorov, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Czeslaw Milosz in translation.

We produced 50 copies of *Glas* and *Most* and distributed them in person to people who had democratic beliefs. Many of them then made additional copies and distributed them further, thereby continuously increasing circulation. However the magazines gained real popularity only after Romyana Ouzounova discussed them on Radio Free Europe.

The main activity of various informal groups was to sign petitions and letters of protest which were then disclosed publicly through self-published magazines or Radio Free Europe. The Czechs and Poles had already been doing this for many years. Some of the most prominent Bulgarian intellectuals were involved in such organizations, including Radoy Ralin, Blaga Dimitrova, Boris Hristov, Zhelyu Zhelev (Chairman of the Club in Support of Glasnost), Mihail Nedeltchev, Dimitar Korudzhiev, Marko Ganchev, and Georgi Velichkov. Edvin and myself were among the youngest activists.

In the third issue of *Glas* we published an open letter to Polish intellectuals, including Andrzej Wajda, and also to the Minister of Justice of the People's Republic of Bulgaria, in which we appealed for the release of all Bulgarian political prisoners. We specifically listed ten names, including some Bulgarian Turks.

I remember how Romyana Uzunova, on reading out another Bulgarian protest petition on Radio Free Europe, said: "The most amazing thing is that among the names of the signatories is the son of the President of the Union of Writers Lubomir Levchev." Only later did I have the chance to meet with her personally.

Edvin Sugarev and myself were fined for "the publication of unregistered periodicals." The fine was large considering the standard of living at the time. I lost my position at *People's Culture* and was taken to the Bulgarian censor and threatened with prison if I attempted to put together any further issues of the magazine. However, I managed to publish another issue during the International Ecological Forum ('Ecoforum') in Sofia in October 1989.

Many foreign journalists came to the forum. Ecoglasnost collected signatures in the garden in front of Crystal restaurant for a petition against two insane construction projects for the Rila Mountains and the Mesta River. (Ecoglasnost was against the construction of the nuclear power plant in Belene.) People would stop as they passed through the garden and sign the petition, and we managed to gather several thousand signatures. However, despite the presence of foreign journalists, state police came and arrested and beat some of the activists collecting signatures.

But on November 3 a large protest was organized in front of Alexander Nevsky Cathedral. Around seven thousand people gathered, and the petition was publicly and loudly submitted to the National Assembly. It was the largest crowd of protestors ever to gather in communist Sofia. But the article

in the official regime newspaper, *Rabotnichesko Delo*, the following day reported the event only at the bottom of the penultimate page (the back page being too visible), and in tiny letters stated that "a group of citizens" had submitted a petition to the National Assembly, without specifying its contents. To mark the occasion, I wrote the poem, *A Group of Citizens*.

Nobody could have imagined then that just one week later, Todor Zhivkov would resign as Secretary of the Party, under pressure from a group of younger communists who supported Gorbachev. Zhivkov declared that he would wait "for the storm [of perestroika – transformation] to pass". But the storm, instead of passing, swept him away. Perestroika did not save Gorbachev either - he who had believed, naively, that communism could transform and democratize itself.

The Soviet communist order was rotten and it simply collapsed, largely under the weight of its economic bankruptcy and not because of Reagan or Gorbachev. Nevertheless, it was the discontent of the people that ultimately overthrew the system.

"You can fool all the people some of the time, and some of the people all the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time," proclaimed Abraham Lincoln. Unfortunately, in our country many people allowed themselves to be fooled more than once - all the time..

What has happened over the last 25 years is a further, and no less important, issue. To a large extent, the turmoil of these years and our status as the poorest country in the European Union is due to the fact that our inheritance from the communist era is still a sad reality. State Security tried to control our transition, but, thanks to God, with many difficulties, we have taken the Euro-Atlantic path.

Our life is not a song, but anyone who says that Bulgaria is now worse than it was during the communist period is either deliberately lying to young people, or lying to themselves.

I lived in America between 1994 and 2007. When I returned to Bulgaria, I was amazed to see the positive change in the country.

From a distance you can see the overall picture more clearly. If we manage to deal with our corruption issues and lack of a fair judicial system, we could be even better. But nothing should ever stop us and take us back to those dark times.

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POWER PROBLEM

By Wojciech Przybylski

A quarter of century later we are best again living in a world of protest. This culture of protest comes from a negative, rather than from a positive inspiration. We tolerate the negative inspirations as in theory at least protests should reenergize democracies. But more they also deepen lack of acceptance for any political power. In effect the anti-political pacifism from non-violent revolutions from 1989 has also questioned the idea of power.

What do recent non-violent leaderless movements have a common? Apart from that they all take place virtually at the same time they have been triggered by different factors and they stand against various challenges specific to their location like the Wall Street excessive wealth and influence, lack of perspectives for middle-class in Spain, copyright legislation of ACTA in Poland or recent corruption of political elites in Slovakia or in Bulgaria. Interestingly, of all recent protests in Europe only in Ukraine this has developed so, that it gives a promise of a democratic revival. It is so mostly because the Ukrainian Maidan had a dream to follow and not only a negative politics of post-soviet Mordor to rebel against.

Of all regimes only democracies welcome such protests on the streets. It is believed that protests help democracies to reinvent themselves. In Central Europe a wave of peaceful revolution has spread from the Solidarity movement. It was started by negating oppression but at the same time it followed a dream of reinstalling a political community based on European social rights and welfare state. What can we make out of today's negativism? What are the dreams to follow? That is a serious challenge because without it the culture of protest remains just a self-pitying folklore.

Unless we accept some form of power as the goal of democratic revival the revival itself is impossible. There are two modes of power we may take into consideration - following modern interpretations of Spinoza's writings. One power is a coercive force; the other is about building up country's potential. It is obvious that democracies prefer only the latter: European model attractiveness, a soft power, a promise of wealth and prosperity. But eventually even this power is powerless if one cannot defend and sacrifice own well-being at least for the common good - even for the name of potential of one's country. So what are Europeans willing to sacrifice today?

Before 1989 has happened there were many efforts to understand human condition of that time. It was mostly about ideas that would change the system. Vaclav Havel in his essay 'Power of the powerless' has put in the centre of this reflection a figure of a greengrocer, an everyman of that time, who would need to change himself in order to make political change for better, freer world. The political change has had to begin with change of individual habits - he wrote - that would challenge the oppressive power of the previous regime.

Majority of those greengrocers are long gone with their business but the metaphor remains valid. Every of them was powerless but the collective action of each individual who wanted to stop lies and demanded truth was threatening the coercive power. This search for new greengrocers has to begin instantly if we think seriously of a future democratic revival, a revival of principles. We already find them in countries of neighborhood. Time to find them also within Europe.

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HAS THE “NON-HAPPENING TRANSITION” HAPPENED?

By Yordan Sokolov

During these days, in which we officially celebrate the 25th anniversary since the overthrow of the criminal communist regime, and since the beginning of building a democratic Bulgaria, we have to find an answer to that question: Why do some people see the transition as a failure? Why are the last 25 years being qualified as ‘the hardest’ in our recent history? Why is the narrative being imposed that precisely in this period we have become ‘the poorest’ and that ‘nothing has changed’?

Why are only mistakes being sought for while the indisputable successes stay unseen? Why is it stated that the transition hasn’t happened? Who needs this narrative? Who imposes this pessimistic reading of our transition?

The answer of common-sense people is more than clear. On one hand this pessimism is the overthrown nomenclature, sheltered in the ranks of the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), and obligingly supported by an extreme nationalist Bulgarian-Russian party, which took a stand for our country to leave the EU and NATO and to return to the Eurasian sphere. On the other hand, this is the Russian fifth column in the circles of BSP that finds different approaches (mostly related to our energy dependence and thus our entire economy) to destabilize our country.

Furthermore, the perception of the ‘failed’ transition is instilled with all kinds of methods. Communist propaganda continues even today. The media permanently and deliberately points out negative examples from our lives, but it never remembers that school history books lack the facts connected to the communist regime; that they do not even mention the 25 thousand people killed without charge or trial, mostly among the circles of intelligentsia; or the hundreds of thousands who went through the death camps, and yet as many again who were forcibly deported or interned outside their places of birth. Young people do not even suspect that for students to have access to higher education, they had to receive special permission from the District Committees of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BKP), but at their expense the ‘children of the active fighters’ entered universities by right and without having to take any exams. Even Bulgarian National Television is broadcasting the program *The Best Years of Our Lives* which imposes the idea that these were exactly the years of the communist dictatorship.

The truth is that in our country the transition from communism towards democracy was far slower and more painful than in the rest of the ex-socialist countries. Even today we are falling behind in the areas of healthcare and public administration. Pension reform is also excruciating. There has

been permanent talk about reform in the judicial system, but the EU reports become more and more negative. Bulgaria remains the poorest country in the EU. Not only has our energy dependence on Russia not been overcome, it is becoming stronger. From 82 US dollars per 1000 cubic meters of natural gas, negotiated at the time of the government of the United Democratic Forces under Ivan Kostov, its price during the government of Sergey Stanishev was re-negotiated to 435 US dollars under the demands of Gazprom – the highest price in the entire EU, which has made our economy uncompetitive.

And here we should answer objectively and without emotion why everything is like that. Why are we the poorest and the sickest, why do we miss the enthusiasm that was flooding the squares 25 years ago, when the prophecy that we would need 20-25 years for our dream for real democracy to come true seemed monstrous to us? Why are the processes that could lead to a victory of the democratic system going in the slowest and most painful way in our country? The reason and blame lies first and foremost with the former Bulgarian Communist Party, which has remained unreformed, only changing its name to ‘Socialist’, as well as in the structures created by the former State Security, who are active even today. In which other former socialist country did the ruling Communist Party make an attempt to turn its country into the 16th Soviet republic? Where else was there such forced collectivization of agriculture? Where else were there such concentration camps, in which so many ‘guilty’ without guilt met their deaths? The Bulgarian Communist Party was satisfied with only changing its name to ‘Socialist’, but its thinking and actions remain unchanged.

In contrast to the rest of the countries, in which the files of the former special services were immediately revealed after the changes, in our country the process took many years (and even today there are unrevealed and undelivered files from military intelligence). Thus, in the judiciary system and even in the Constitutional Court, there were former State Security agents who resisted revealing files. They also resisted attempts at lustration for governing positions in banks, thereby leading to their bankruptcy. BSP blamed the democratic forces for all of the failures of the transition, although between the change on 10 November 1989 and the biggest economic catastrophe in 1997, we had only one democratic government – the government of Philip Dimitrov, which lasted only 13 months. Whenever BSP – on its own or in coalition – was in government, the reforms stopped and the country fell behind. The governments of Philip Dimitrov and Ivan Kostov then started the reform processes all over again. Each time after BSP has governed, our country has gone through economic collapse. Our country was led into real catastrophe by the rules of Andrey Lukanov and Zhan Videnov and now, with the BSP and DPS government of Plamen Oresharski, a bank has been bankrupted again. This is why our transition has been hard and painful.

Despite all of this the transition has been successful. Bulgaria has achieved the hardest reform of all and changed its geopolitical orientation, in spite of persistent efforts by Russia to retain us in its orbit. Our country is an equal member of the EU and NATO and uses all positive aspects of that membership. A social market economy has been built, and the share of private initiative in our GDP has reached 90%. Our exports are mostly oriented towards the other countries of the EU, and they are growing every year. The empty shops of the communist years and the Lukanov and Videnov winters are now full of goods. We are witnessing an incredible boom in housing construction, the development of beautiful office buildings and improving infrastructure. At last we also have highways. People can travel and take vacations, and the young can study both here and abroad.

Yes, the transition was hard, but it has happened!

Yordan Sokolov is a lawyer, politician and statesman, Minister of the Interior, MP in the 37th, 38th and 39th National Assembly, chairman of the 38th National Assembly. He was born on January 18, 1933 in Sofia. From 1956 to 1958 he was Secretary to the arbitration. He was a member of the Lawyer Council for seven terms. He is a member of the Executive Committee of the Union of Lawyers in Bulgaria. He was legal adviser to President Zhelev. He was appointed Minister of the Interior in the government of Philip Dimitrov. In 2004 was one of the MPs who founded the Party DSB, which he left in 2011.

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