

Review

**from Teodorichka Gotowska-Henze, D. Sc., Assoc. Prof.
at the Institute for Historical Research – Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
on the monograph “Bulgarian-Polish Political Relations 1945-1989”
by Stoyan Dimitrov Stoyanov**

The proposed dissertation was written under the scientific guidance of Assoc. Prof. Marinova-Hristidi in the Department of History of Bulgaria - Contemporary Bulgarian History. It is based on published and unpublished archival materials (from the CSA funds, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Commission for Disclosure of Documents and Declaration of Affiliation of Bulgarian Citizens to the State Security), presenting and analyzing Bulgarian-Polish relations in the context of the Eastern Bloc. With the help of a number of Bulgarian scientists (Iskra Baeva, Evgenia Kalinova, Iliana Marcheva, Lyubomir Ognyanov, Natalia Hristova, etc.) the milestones in the recent history of Bulgaria and Poland are professionally highlighted. The archival information and research of these authors are the pillars on which the doctoral student builds his research using a lot of Polish authors, as well as English literature.

The subject provides an opportunity to trace the bilateral relations during the whole period of socialism and at the same time illustrates the differences that the two countries demonstrated within their common affiliation to the same socio-political system (in the amplitude of the ‘most faithful Soviet satellite’ and ‘the terrible child of the Eastern bloc’). Furthermore, the thesis follows the dynamics of bilateral relations during the period under review and against the background of changes in the international situation and in the domestic and foreign policies of both countries.

The monograph consists of a preface, an introduction, four chapters (arranged chronologically, but also thematically), a conclusion and a list of sources / 333 pages /, with attached documentary photos from Bulgarian daily newspapers. The structure is balanced; the main objectives, chronological framework and review of the main collective and individual studies are clearly stated in the introductory part of the paper.

The starting positions of the two countries were quite different and they were determined primarily by their participation in World War II. Therefore, I consider it appropriate that the first chapter systematically reviews the stages in the development of the world conflict, emphasizing the more dramatic fate of the Poles. The period of 'people's democracy' is correctly assessed as a preparatory period for the establishment of one-party rule, as well as the predestination of Bulgaria and Poland to become part of the Soviet bloc. Already in 1944, the Bulgarian-Polish Society was restored /operating until 1951/, an interesting detail is the inclusion of Bulgarians and Poles in the postwar Slavic movement and the All-Slavic Congress in Belgrade in December 1946. The thesis emphasizes the importance of the Paris Peace Conference for the future of Bulgaria, the support of the Slavic bloc and in the first place, the active position of Poland in defense of defeated Bulgaria. /p.43/

With the signing of the peace treaties, the transition to the establishment of a one-party regime began. This process developed according to a similar scheme in both countries in spite of the fact that, as the paper rightly states, unlike the Bulgarian Communist Party, which had built a broad organizational structure during the war, the Polish Workers' Party did not have their own structures in some regions, nor had they members in others /p. 55-56/. In the end, however, the socio-political result was the same - the establishment of Soviet-style state socialism. Both the theoretical preconditions for this course and the international factors that led to its imposition are well substantiated. Based on Bulgarian archival sources, the Bulgarian participation in the meeting in Shklarska Poremba in September 1947 was reconstructed. In 1948, the first post-war Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance was signed. Poland and Bulgaria were also among the co-founders of the COMECON in 1949, and bilateral co-operation cemented by the Treaty expanded multilaterally within the socialist community. At the same time, in domestic politics, purges against the "enemy with a party ticket" were carried out in both countries.

Chapter One deals with the period of de-Stalinization, which in both countries had similar content, but also specifics. It is reasonable to observe that in Bulgaria the personal changes in the party leadership did not have a dramatic impact on the overall policy. (p. -90) In Poland, however, economic imbalances and negative public sentiments came to the fore, exacerbating the domestic political situation. As early as 1956, the first strikes and workers' riots were registered in Poznań. The rehabilitation of Vladislav Gomulka and his election as First Secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) symbolized the desire to break with the

methods of Stalinism. The conclusion from the analysis of events in the first postwar decade is self-evident: Poland and Bulgaria developed as loyal members of the Eastern Bloc; after 1956, however, domestic political specifics increased. /p.109/ The approach to the cooperation of the land, to the church was different; unlike Bulgaria, the anti-Russian and anti-Soviet sentiments in Poland were becoming more and more obvious.

Chapter Two examines the period in the development of the two countries, marked by the rise of party leaders T. Zhivkov and Vl. Gomulka. Their first meeting was in Sofia in 1958 and it highlighted the different positions of Sofia and Warsaw regarding the leading role of the USSR. The positions of the two leaders were determined by the different public attitudes in the two countries. The Macedonian question occupied a special place in bilateral relations after 1963. Zhivkov revised the post-war policy of the Bulgarian Communist Party in Pirin Macedonia and showed that he was determined to oppose the falsifications in history; however, the changed Bulgarian position encountered difficulties in imposing itself in Polish circles, where the Yugoslav point of view was already adopted. For years, the Bulgarian Embassy in Warsaw was committed to promoting Bulgaria's position on the issue. Warsaw did not essentially change its special relationship with Belgrade, though.

It is reasonable to note that unlike Bulgaria, where Zhivkov's government managed to "tame" and control cultural circles, in Poland the intelligentsia and students became a generator of dissident sentiments and protests in 1968. The dissertation also presents the cultural policy of 'opening', implemented by Lyudmila Zhivkova, although her domestic approach towards attracting intellectuals of non-proletarian origin has not been clarified. This definitely formed different from the existing intellectual attitudes in Poland and became one of the reasons why the dissident movement in Bulgaria appeared much later.

Chapter Three analyzes the crisis in Poland in the 1970s, focusing on the country's economic difficulties. Stoyanov correctly states the main reason - the capabilities of the extensive economy were exhausted - but his finding that "while the population of other satellites tends to reconcile, with the Poles things are different" /p.175/ is not quite precisely differentiated. After the suppression of the Prague Spring, for example, the Husak regime took various measures to boost the living standard of the population. Improvement in living standards was also apparent in other socialist countries ("goulash socialism"). The Polish economic and social crisis was the result of many factors and the role of the government is not to be

underestimated. It is not a matter of coincidence that the first demands of the workers' protests in Dansk claimed a reduction in the prices of some food products, as well as personal changes in the leadership of the PZPR. In the end, Gomulka was replaced and Edward Gerek became the First Secretary of the PZPR. A little later, the old prices were restored and 25 billion zlotys were set aside for salaries, pensions, and an increase in living standards. The attempt of the new party leadership for modernization through taking out loans and 'opening up' to the West was a governance decision that proved to be a trap preparing for the next Polish economic crisis. A new increase in prices logically led to another workers' riot. In 1976, the government was forced to back down, while taking repressive measures against the strikers. Economic demands remained the main motive in the 1980 protests, when the government's position was hesitant and inconsistent once again. This time, along with the economic demands, there were also political ones, the first of which was for the formation of an independent trade union. In the end, the Central Committee of the PZPR accepted all 21 requests of the strikers. The days of E. Gerek in the country's government were counted - the following year the state was taken over by Wojciech Jaruzelski.

I consider a certain contribution of the doctoral student to be the use of materials from the Commission for Disclosure of Documents and for declaring affiliation of Bulgarian citizens to the State Security to reconstruct the response to Polish events and the establishment of "Solidarity" in various Bulgarian circles.

Chapter Four covers other important events from the Second Cold War, such as the assassination attempt on the Pope (the so-called "Bulgarian trail") and the "Revival process." Sofia's attempts to gain full support for its domestic policies from its allies in the Eastern bloc failed, and Poland was one of the countries that was clearly distancing itself from Sofia.

Mikhail Gorbachev's coming to power also meant a fundamental redefinition of relations with the satellites. Stoyanov illustrates what this meant for Bulgaria in the economic sense and correctly presents the political dilemma facing T. Zhivkov. At the same time, the domestic political and economic crisis in Poland was escalating. Workers' protests were resumed with new demands for legalization of the Union. In February 1989, Poland became the first socialist country to hold 'Round table' talks between government and opposition. The way to the legalization of the multiparty system was open. Simultaneously, the "Great Excursion" of the Bulgarian Turks was underway in Bulgaria, the domestic and foreign political situation in

the country deteriorated. In 1988, the first dissident organizations appeared. The assumption that Moscow's attitude towards Zhivkov's positions had the most negative influence was proved. The internal party coup in Bulgaria took place in the context of broader political changes such as the fall of the Berlin Wall and the "Gentle Revolution" in Czechoslovakia. The conclusion correctly summarizes the main conclusions stated in the chapters.

Notes and recommendations

On pp.76-78 two terms have been used several times: Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance and Treaty of Comradeship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance - the second option has become common for Bulgarian use.

‘Otechestven Front’ newspaper was consistently used from the Bulgarian press; it is not clear why information from ‘Rabotnichesko delo’ was not used.

More attention shall be paid to the arrangements of the Helsinki Final Act and in particular to the clarification of the so-called "Third basket" as dissidents in Eastern Europe refer to these agreements.

The research task set by the PhD student has been successfully completed. I vote positive and propose that the esteemed jury award Stoyan Stoyanov the scientific and educational degree "Doctor".

Sofia, 02.04.2022

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