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THE ROLE OF AN EXTERNAL FACTOR FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE COMMUNIST REGIME IN BULGARIA – SEPTEMBER 1944–1948

This study is an attempt at highlighting the role of an external factor, that is, the combined role of the policies of the Soviet Union, the United States, and Great Britain, regarding the establishment of a Communist regime in Bulgaria. First, we discuss the attitude of the three “Great Powers” to the Communist party coming to power on 9 September 1944. Second, we then outline their role in the process of asserting the Communists in the coalition government of Bulgaria from 9 September 1944 to the end of 1948, when the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) took full control of every sphere of Bulgarian political, economic, cultural and social life, closely following the Soviet (Stalinist) model of state socialism.

Let us begin by clarifying the role of this external factor for the rise of the BCP to power on 9 September 1944. Bulgaria emerged from World War II as a defeated state. As an ally of Germany, in December 1941 it declared war on the United States and Britain.¹ On 5 September 1944 the Soviet Union declared war on Bulgaria,² which was still at that point unwilling to break off diplomatic relations with the Reich. The three states prepared the text of the Armistice Agreement with Bulgaria, signed on 28 October 1944, and oversaw its implementation until the autumn of 1947, when the Peace Treaty with Bulgaria entered into force. Thus the fate of Bulgaria from the autumn of 1944 till 1948

¹ V. Toshkova, *SASHT i Bulgaria 1919–1989. Politicheski otnosheniya* (Sofia, 2007), pp. 161–163; B. Filov, *Dnevnik* (Sofia, 1990), pp. 433–434.

² L. Spasov, *Bulgaria i SSSR 1917–1944 g. (Politiko-diplomaticheski otnosheniya)* (Veliko Turnovo, 2008), pp. 484–487.

depended largely on the victors – the Soviet Union, the United States, and Britain, on their geopolitical interests, and on the relations between them.

The fall of the country into the Soviet sphere of influence was of great importance for the role of the Communist Party in the government of Bulgaria. First of all, it was a result of the course of the war – Churchill's thwarted idea of the Second Balkan Front in 1943,³ and the advance of the Soviet Army on the peninsula in the summer of 1944. It is also necessary to take into account the diplomatic steps of London, which in May 1944 proposed to divide the Balkans into spheres of influence: Romania was to be in the Soviet sphere, and Greece in the British one,⁴ and the reluctance of Western allies to sign an armistice with Bulgaria at the end of August 1944.⁵ They did not want to contradict the aspirations of Moscow to take a leading position in Bulgaria and thereby challenge the unity of the Anti-Hitler coalition.

On 8 September 1944, three days after the USSR declared war on Bulgaria, Soviet troops crossed the Danube. This facilitated the coup on 9 September 1944 and the seizure of power by the Fatherland Front coalition, in which the Communist party played a leading role.⁶ The Soviet occupation, which lasted until December 1947, determined Bulgaria's place in the Soviet sphere of influence. This was confirmed at the meeting between Churchill and Stalin in Moscow in October 1944, when Churchill proposed 75 per cent Soviet influence in Bulgaria, against only a 25 per cent Western one.⁷ Churchill's readiness to confirm Bulgaria's position in the Soviet sphere stemmed from his desire to obtain Soviet consent for non-interference in Greece, where the positions of the Communists were very strong.

Thus, the course of military actions and the arrangements between the victors gave great advantages to the BCP. It was connected with the Soviet Union ideologically, but also through its leader Georgi Dimitrov, who during the war was in Moscow together with the party's foreign bureau.⁸ The BCP relied on Soviet support, and Moscow relied on the loyalty of the Bulgarian Communists. At the same time, the Communist party had also local advantages: during the war, it organised an armed resistance⁹ to break the country

³ U. Churchil, *Vtorata svetovna vojna. Memoari*, vol. 5: *Obruchut se zatyaga* (Sofia, 1995), pp. 265–266, 288–289, 318–321; S. Pintev, "Bulgaria na tristrannite suyzni konferentsii v kraya na 1943 godina (Moskva i Teheran)", *Istoričeski pregled* 1996, no. 2, pp. 62–63; *Moskovskata konferentsiya na ministrите na vunshnite raboti na SSSR, SASHT i Velikobritaniya 19–30 oktovvri 1943 g. Sbornik dokumenti* (Sofia, 1984), pp. 148–149, 356–357, 387–388; *Teheranskata konferentsiya 28 noemvri – 1 dekemvri 1943 g. Sbornik dokumenti* (Sofia, 1984), pp. 107–108, 111, 137.

⁴ U. Churchil, *Vtorata svetovna vojna. Memoari*, vol. 6: *Triumf i tragediya* (Sofia, 1995), p. 77; G. Gunev, I. Ilchev, *Uinstun Churchil i Balkanite* (Sofia, 1989), pp. 222–223; E. Kalinova, *Pobeditelite i Bulgaria (1939–1945)* (Sofia, 2004), pp. 31–32.

⁵ S. Pintev, *Bulgaria v britanskata diplomatsiya 1944–1947 godina* (Sofia, 1998), pp. 22–36; *Bulgaria – svoenravniyat suyznik na Tretiya raih. Sbornik dokumenti* (Sofia, 1992), pp. 312–317.

⁶ A. Vezenkov, *9 septemvri 1944 g.* (Sofia, 2014), pp. 185–235.

⁷ U. Churchil, *Vtorata svetovna vojna. Memoari*, vol. 6, pp. 218–219; *Bulgaria – nepriznatiyat protivnik na Tretiya raih. Sbornik dokumenty* (Sofia, 1995), pp. 83–86, 89–96.

⁸ G. Dimitrov, *Dnevnik (9 mart 1933 – 6 fevruari 1949)* (Sofia, 1997); M. Isusov, *Georgi Dimitrov. Zhiznen put i politicheski idei* (Sofia, 2004); M. Stankova, *Georgi Dimitrov: A Biography* (London, 2010); M. Foskolo, *Georgi Dimitrov: edna kriticheska biografiya* (Sofia, 2013).

⁹ E. Kalinova, I. Baeva, "Realniyat oblik na antinatsistkata suprotiva v Bulgaria", *Novo vreme* 2017, no. 1–2, pp. 83–109; V. Toshkova, "Bulgaria v evropeiskata suprotiva prez Vtorata svetovna vojna" [in:] *Izsledvaniya po istoriya na sotsializma v Bulgaria 1891–1944* (Sofia, 2008), pp. 401–444.

off from Germany, which was acknowledged by the Western allies. It also initiated the formation of the Fatherland Front,¹⁰ which took power on 9 September 1944.

We move on now to outline the role of this external factor in asserting the Bulgarian Communist Party in the coalition government from 9 September 1944 to the end of 1948. The Soviet, American and British policy towards Bulgaria was crucial for the relations between the parties in the Fatherland Front coalition. The attitude of the three countries towards the political parties in the country was determined by their global interests. Changes in these interests chart four periods, during which the actions of this “external factor” affected the position of the BCP in the government.

The first period is from September 1944 to the end of December 1944. The desire for cooperation and mutual respect for their strategic interests dominated the Anti-Hitler Coalition. After Soviet troops entered Bulgaria, Stalin could have immediately imposed a Soviet regime, but this did not fit into the Moscow strategy of early 1944. This strategy was based on the idea that after the war, the USSR had to ensure a “durable period” of peace and security “minimum 30 [to] maximum 50 years” to restore its economic, military and human potential.¹¹ The main priority was to achieve an effective security system, which was only possible while maintaining good relations with the United States and Britain. They, in turn, were achievable if the Soviet Union gave up establishing socialist regimes at the end of the war, and therefore the socialist perspective, without being abandoned, was significantly postponed in time. For their sphere, the Soviets envisaged not dictatorships of the proletariat, but coalition governments with the participation of the Communist parties that should govern according to the “principles of large democracy following the ideas of the People’s Front”. The USSR would guarantee its own security by concluding long-term mutual assistance agreements with them.¹²

This strategy relied on Roosevelt’s willingness to cooperate with the USSR even after the war in the name of world peace, but also demanded compromise because of US disapproval – clearly expressed as early as October 1943¹³ – of establishing Soviet regimes in the course of the Soviet army advance. That is why Moscow was careful not to incite suspicions in its allies that it “exported” the Soviet regime to its sphere of influence. This may explain the “delayed” entry of Soviet troops in Bulgaria,¹⁴ awaiting the “independent” takeover of power by the Fatherland Front; the composition and distribution of ministry

¹⁰ E. Kalinova, “Vuznikvane na Otechestveniya front v godinite na Vtorata svetovna voina” [in:] *Istoriya na Otechestveniya front/suyuz v Bulgaria*, vol. 1 (Sofia, 2012), pp. 11–46.

¹¹ T. Volokitina, “Perspektivy razvitiya Bolgarii posle Vtoroy mirovoy voyny. Vzglyad iz Moskvy (novyye dokumenty rossiyskikh arkhivov)” [in:] *Bugaria i Rusiya prez XX vek. Bulgaro-ruski nauchni diskusii* (Sofia, 2000), pp. 240–241; V. Dimitrov, *Stalin’s Cold War. Soviet Foreign Policy, Democracy and Communism in Bulgaria, 1941–1948* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 43–44.

¹² *Primiriето mezhdu SSSR, Velikobritaniya, SASHT i Bulgaria (yanuari-oktomvri 1944 g.). Dokumenti* (Sofia, 2014), pp. 55–67.

¹³ *Moskovskata konferentsiya 19–30 oktomvri 1943 g. Sbornik dokumenti*, pp. 378–380; E. Kalinova, *Pobeditelite i Bulgaria*, pp. 54–55.

¹⁴ Soviet plans for crossing the Danube and occupying Bulgaria were ready on 4 IX 1944. The Soviet Union declared war on Bulgaria the following day, but the Soviet troops crossed the Danube in the morning of 8 IX 1944, taking into account the information that the Fatherland Front was ready to take the power in the evening of the same day (E. Kalinova, *Pobeditelite i Bulgaria*, pp. 105–106).

positions in the Fatherland Front Government, where the Communists were on an equal footing with the other partners;¹⁵ plus the numerous warnings against the “leftist” actions in the work of the Communist Party.¹⁶ Thus, Stalin supported the Communists, but also restrained them from entirely taking over power.

The Soviet strategy had a chance of success, because the United States and Britain were also interested in cooperation within the Anti-Hitler Coalition. For Churchill, it was of greatest importance that Stalin kept his promise not to go against British intentions in Greece, so he did not want to “provoke” Stalin with British activity in Bulgaria, which had never been of special importance for the Balkan policy of Britain. The US behaviour towards Bulgaria since the end of August 1944, when it became clear that Bulgaria would be occupied by the USSR, until the beginning of 1945, was indifferent both because of Roosevelt’s desire to cooperate with Stalin and the lack of special interest in the region. That is why Washington and London did not contest Bulgaria’s incorporation in the Soviet sphere. As a result in the summer of 1944 in Cairo they refused to sign an armistice with the Governments of Bagryanov and Mouraviev, in which there were no representatives of the Fatherland Front, but agreed to this when the Fatherland Front took power.¹⁷ Moreover, they did not object to having a minor role in the Allied Commission that oversaw the ceasefire and was headed by a Soviet officer. Stalin, in turn, was very responsive when it came to Greece, which was Britain’s preoccupation. He agreed to withdraw the Bulgarian troops from Western Thrace.¹⁸ He also refused to support the Greek Communists during the December 1944 uprising and postponed the formation of a South Slavonic Federation, which London did not support because of the threat it would pose to Greece.¹⁹

Thus, the USSR’s intention to preserve the Anti-Hitler coalition, Britain’s relief achieved through the “percentage” arrangements, and the United States’ lack of special interest created the atmosphere that allowed the Fatherland Front’s “honeymoon” that lasted from 9 September to December 1944. The four parties in the coalition cooperated successfully and voted together on even such laws as those of the so-called “People’s Court” and the opening of labour camps for political opponents.²⁰ The Fatherland Front coalition seemed to be strong, and the most influential political party – the Communist party, regarded

¹⁵ M. Minchev, *Purvoto pravitelstvo na OF* (Sofia, 1988), pp. 58–79; L. Ognyanov, *Durzhavno-politicheskata sistema na Bulgaria 1944–1948* (Sofia, 1993), pp. 12–13.

¹⁶ V. Toshkova, “Primiriето s Bulgaria – 28 oktombri 1944 g.”, *Izvestiya na durzhavnite arhivi* 1994, no. 68, p. 61.

¹⁷ *Primiriето mezhdu SSSR, Velikobritaniya, SASHT i Bulgaria*, pp. 111, 118–121, 125–132, 150–157; S. Pintev, *Bulgaria v britanskata diplomatsiya*, 29–41; V. Toshkova, “Primiriето s Bulgaria”, pp. 72–86.

¹⁸ G. Daskalov, *Bulgaria i Gurtsiya. Ot razriv kum pomirenje 1944–1964* (Sofia, 2004), pp. 56–74; *Bulgaria – nepriznatiyat protivnik na Tretiyah Raih*, pp. 83–86, 89–96; U. Churchil, *Vtorata svetovna voina. Memoari*, vol. 6, pp. 218–219.

¹⁹ Y. Baev, “Bulgaria i grazhdanskata voina v Gurtsiya (1944–1949)”, *Voennoistoricheski sbornik* 1992, no. 2–3, pp. 89–97; G. Dimitrov, *Dnevnik*, p. 460; M. Lalkov, *Ot nadezhda kum razocharovanie. Ideyata za federatsiyata v Balkanskiya yugoiztok (1944–1948 g.)* (Sofia, 1993), pp. 203–209; G. Daskalov, *Bulgaro-yugoslavski politicheski otnosheniya 1944–1945* (Sofia, 1989), pp. 226–315.

²⁰ E. Kalinova, “Myastoto i rolyata na Otechestveniya front v godinite na ‘narodnata demokratsiya’ (1944–1947)” [in: *Istoriya na Otechestveniya front/suyuz v Bulgaria*, vol. 1 (Sofia, 2012), pp. 47–68.

it not as a temporary but as a long-standing alliance of broad social and political strata that would facilitate the gradual transition to socialism.²¹

The second period in this external factor's activities, important in tightening the Communist Party's grasp on power, covers the whole of 1945. At the beginning of the year, there was serious tension in the coalition, caused by internal processes and not by external pressure. The desire of each of the four parties to strengthen their own positions and the Communist Party's aspirations to dominate and control its allies by supporting their left wings, threatened to split the coalition.²² This did not correspond with the Soviet plans, and Stalin intervened directly. The instructions he gave to a Bulgarian governmental delegation on 28 January 1945 in Moscow are indicative. Stalin reminded them that at the moment the Communists needed an alliance with the "democratic faction of the capitalists" against the "fascist faction" and that the Soviet road to socialism was the best, but not the only one: "There may be other forms as well – a democratic republic and, even under certain conditions, a constitutional monarchy."²³ This was a clear instruction for the Communists to seek "national paths" to socialism, other than the Soviet model and in line with local conditions. The Bulgarian Communist Party had to realise that the USSR would not allow an excessive strengthening of its positions in order not to annoy the US and Britain. It is worth mentioning that Bulgaria had to sign a peace treaty, which also required moderation. Thus, Soviet readiness for partial compromises continued. Moscow bore in mind Churchill's reluctance for Bulgaria to receive co-belligerent status, and until the end of the year did not raise this issue, even though the Bulgarian army contributed to the war against Germany.²⁴ After Washington and London expressed doubts about the democratic character of the first post-war parliamentary elections, Stalin twice forced the Bulgarian government to postpone them, albeit as a result undermining the prestige of the Bulgarian Communist Party that was committed to their speedy conduct.²⁵ Moreover, after the second postponement, Stalin advised the Bulgarian Communists to legalise the emerging opposition parties. This would make political life more democratic and satisfy the Western allies.

The readiness of the Soviet Union for concessions with regard to long-term Soviet interests continued until the end of 1945 and was directly dependent on the US and Britain's respective readiness.²⁶ London's behaviour did not create problems for Moscow. Churchill was pleased that Stalin did not interfere in Greece and was ready to distance himself from Bulgaria by concluding a fast peace treaty with her. The United States, however, were not bound by any arrangements with the USSR and became increasingly

²¹ E. Kalinova, "Narodnata demokratsiya – nachaloto i krayat na edna ideya", *Novo vreme* 2016, no. 3–4, pp. 97–98.

²² E. Kalinova, "Myastoto i rolyata na Otechestveniya front", pp. 68–85.

²³ G. Dimitrov, *Dnevnik*, p. 464.

²⁴ E. Kalinova, "Pobeditelite i bulgarskiyat voenen prinos sreshtu Germaniya prez Vtorata svetovna voina" [in:] *Vtorata svetovna voina, Bulgaria i sledvoenniyat svyat* (Sofia, 2005), pp. 80–93.

²⁵ V. Dimitrov, *Stalin's Cold War*, pp. 113–127; S. Pintev, *Bulgaria v britanskata diplomatsiya*, pp. 132–139.

²⁶ V.A. Vasilev, "Suvetskata politika v Bulgaria po dokumenti na Foriin ofis (oktomvri 1944 – noemvri 1945)" [in:] *Bulgaria i Rusiya prez XX vek*, p. 304; V. Toshkova, "SSSR v proektite na SASHT za sledvoennoto ustroistvo na Iztochna Evropa (1941–1947)" [in:] *Bulgaria i Rusiya prez XX vek*, p. 339.

inclined to oppose it. Among the first signs of this new policy was the Yalta Declaration of February 1945, proposed by Roosevelt. It envisaged joint action by the USSR, the United States, and Britain in liberated Europe, and in the countries left in the Soviet sphere of influence. The United States urged Bulgaria to apply this declaration and to hold the parliamentary elections under tripartite control, which was detrimental to the interests of both the Bulgarian Communists and the USSR.²⁷

Confrontation became more pronounced after the end of the war in Europe, when the common enemy Germany was defeated. The unity in the Anti-Hitler coalition was no longer of such importance, and Roosevelt who was inclined to co-operate with the USSR, died and was replaced by the new president, Harry Truman. The US diplomatic representative in Sofia, Maynard Barnes, contributed to this policy. His promises that the United States would not allow the Communists to dominate Bulgaria and would support those who oppose them impressed Nikola Petkov, the leader of the Agrarian Union, the second largest party in the Fatherland Front.²⁸ He had been an ally of the Communists since 1943 and a minister in the coalition cabinet of 9 September 1944. However, in the summer of 1945 he was ready to leave the cabinet, judging that the time of cooperation with the Communists was over, just as the co-operation between the US and the USSR was over. In the summer and autumn of 1945, US support for the opposition contributed to the formation of several opposition parties. At the Potsdam conference, the US also provided another instrument for pressure on the countries in the Soviet sphere, declaring that Washington would sign peace treaties only with countries meeting the American's standards of democracy.²⁹

Thus the implementation of the Yalta Declaration and the US consent to the signing of the Bulgarian Peace Treaty became the strongest trump card of Washington in support of the Bulgarian opposition.³⁰ However, this was just a part of the much more important game between the USSR and the US to negotiate their pending issues after the end of the war. The Moscow meeting in December 1945 of the Soviet, American and British Foreign Ministers was the last echo of wartime cooperation. In order to obtain Soviet approval for their plans in Japan, the United States gave up its firm support for Bulgarian opposition and reduced it to moderate pressure on the Bulgarian government to include two opposition representatives in the cabinet.³¹ This would formally allow Washington to recognise the parliamentary elections held in late 1945 and with it the new government and sign a peace treaty with it, thus withdrawing from Bulgaria. Naturally, the Bulgarian opposition received the Moscow Conference decision with deep

²⁷ E. Kalinova, *Pobeditelite i Bulgaria*, pp. 220–223; V. Dimitrov, *Stalin's Cold War*, pp. 97–99.

²⁸ E. Kalinova, "SASHT i razhdaneto na bulgarskata opozitsiya sled Vtorata svetovna vojna – 'sluchayat' Meinard Barns i Nikola Petkov", *Istoriчески pregled* 2015, no. 5–6, pp. 90–101.

²⁹ *Berlinskata konferentsiya 17 yuli – 2 avgust 1945 g. Sbornik dokumenty* (Sofia, 1987), pp. 335–336, 506–507; E. Kalinova, "Myastoto i rolyata na Otechestveniya front", pp. 47–171.

³⁰ P. Stoyanova, E. Iliev, *Politicheski opasni litsa. Vudvoryavaniya, trudova mobilizatsiya, izselvaniya v Bulgaria sled 1944 g.* (Sofia, 1991); P. Meshkova, D. Sharlanov, *Bulgarskata gilotina. Tainite mehanizmi na narodniya sud* (Sofia, 1994); Z. Tsvetkov, *Sudut nad opozitsionnite lideri* (Sofia, 1991).

³¹ I. Baeva, E. Kalinova, *Sledvoennoto desetiletie na bulgarskata vunshna politika (1944–1955)* (Sofia, 2013), pp. 99–100; V. Dimitrov, *Stalin's Cold War*, pp. 137–139.

disappointment. Its leaders had the feeling that they had been used by the Americans as a means to apply pressure on Moscow so that the US could achieve their other more important goals.

The third period in the external factor's influence is from the beginning of 1946 until 10 February 1947, when the victors signed the peace treaty with Bulgaria. After the USSR and the US settled the most important issues related to the end of the war, ideological opposition once again came to the fore. On 22 February 1946, George Kennan's "long telegram" formulated the new US policy for the "containment" of the USSR. It gained publicity when on 5 March 1946 Churchill, in the presence of President Truman (with whom he had previously consulted about this step), delivered at Westminster College in Fulton (Missouri) his famous speech, often considered as the beginning of the Cold War. The speech referred to the Soviet Union as the new enemy of the United States and Britain, and Churchill called on both states to oppose together the Soviet threat.³²

Churchill's speech was perceived in the Soviet Union as a call for an offensive against its sphere of influence, and Stalin instructed the Communist parties in Eastern Europe to strengthen their positions in power and exert pressure on their oppositions. After the Bulgarian opposition refused to fulfil the Moscow decision and legitimise the cabinet, Stalin declared that it could "go to hell" and in the new government, with its consent, the BCP already had more ministers than the other coalition partners.³³ In the summer of 1946, the Communists tightened their control of the army, and launched political trials against opposition leaders.

Still, Stalin hoped to preserve an understanding with the West. Proof of this is his attitude towards the Civil War in Greece, which began at the end of March 1946. Moscow, in contrast to Britain and the United States, did not intervene directly, but ordered Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, and Albania to help the Greek Communists.³⁴ Stalin was still supporting the tactics of "people's democracy" and he did not encourage actions that could be seen as imposing the Soviet model in Eastern Europe. His advice to the Communist Party in Bulgaria went in the same direction. In September 1946, the BCP leader Georgi Dimitrov was told that "the Russian Communists should not be imitated", and that the transition to socialism could become "in a special way – without a dictatorship of the proletariat".³⁵

This meant that the Communists should continue to rule in a coalition, all the more important as the Paris peace conference began in the summer of 1946.³⁶ Therefore, the regularisation of Bulgaria's international situation depended on the Western allies. That was why the US still had the opportunity to exert pressure to change the processes in Bulgaria. However, the leaders of Bulgarian opposition, Nikola Petkov and Kosta Lulchev,

³² V. Toshkova, "Dvupolyusniyat svyat i negovite simvoli" [in:] *Problemut Iztok-Zapad. Prevuplushteniya v novo i nai-novo vreme* (Sofia, 2005), pp. 33–49.

³³ *Vostochnaya Evropa v dokumentah rossiiskikh arkhivov 1944–1953*, vol. 1: 1944–1948 (Moskva, 1997), p. 359, 360; M. Minchev, *Vtoroto pravitelstvo na Otechestveniya front* (Veliko Turnovo, 2001), pp. 28–32.

³⁴ A. Ulunyan, "Grazhdanskaya voina v Gretsii i Bolgariya: mirnyi i nemirnyi put' (1946–1949)" [in:] *Bulgaria v sferata na suvetskite interesi (Bulgaro-ruski nauchni diskusii)* (Sofia, 1998), pp. 140–143.

³⁵ G. Dimitrov, *Dnevnik*, pp. 533–534.

³⁶ S. Vasev, K. Hristov, *Bulgaria na mirnata konferentsiya Parizh 1946* (Sofia, 2017).

refused to fulfil the Moscow decision and to join the second Fatherland Front cabinet, thus causing a problem. For Washington it was a matter of prestige not to sign a peace treaty with this undemocratic (according to American standards) cabinet, but that could lead to Soviet refusal to sign the peace treaty with the US-tolerated Italy.

Facing this dilemma, US diplomacy decided to take part in peace treaty negotiations, while making use of the vulnerability of defeated Bulgaria to put pressure on the second Fatherland Front cabinet to include two opposition representatives.³⁷ These actions were the result of both the Cold War and the offensive against the opposition that the Communists in Bulgaria began in mid-1946.³⁸ In August 1946, at the Paris Peace Conference Secretary of State James Burns discussed with Bulgarian Prime Minister Kimon Georgiev not the peace treaty, but the current political situation in Bulgaria: the lack of civil liberties, the purge in the army, and the possibility for opposition representatives to be admitted to the government to ensure that the upcoming elections at the end of 1946 would be free and democratic. Burns insisted that it is for Bulgaria to make it possible for him to sign the peace treaty.³⁹ Thus, the US position on the terms of the peace treaty was directly used to pressure for internal changes in Bulgaria. The Secretary of State proposed that Bulgarian opposition leaders be summoned to Paris to negotiate their participation in the government that would hold the parliamentary elections. Burns assured that it would make it easier for the United States to recognise the cabinet. However, this pressure did not work because of Soviet objections. Both Stalin and Molotov advised the Bulgarian government not to agree to it and reassured them that the Americans would hardly refuse to sign the peace treaty with Bulgaria, because they knew that, in this case, the Soviet Union would refuse to sign the peace treaty with Italy.⁴⁰

In September–October 1946, on the eve of the elections, the US undertook a final attempt to obtain more favourable conditions for the opposition. In a letter to Prime Minister Kimon Georgiev, Secretary of State Burns reminded him that the government was expected to implement the Moscow decision and include two opposition representatives before the parliamentary elections.⁴¹ The US representative in the Allied Control Commission was instructed to take measures to secure free elections. The US attempt at direct intervention in a state of the Soviet sphere provoked a sharp Soviet reaction. The Soviet leadership of the Allied Control Commission rejected the US representative's request as interference in Bulgaria's internal affairs and as inappropriate given the commission's competences.⁴² Prime Minister Kimon Georgiev, after consultations with

³⁷ V. Dimitrov, *Stalin's Cold War*, pp. 155–159.

³⁸ Z. Tsvetkov, *Sudut nad opozitsionnite lideri*, pp. 22–57; D. Sharlanov, *Tiraniyata. Zhertvi i palachi* (Sofia, 1997), pp. 35–60.

³⁹ E. Kalinova, "Bulgaria, pobeditelite i mirniyat dogovor sled Vtorata svetovna voina" [in:] *Nova Bulgaria i mirut sled Vtorata svetovna voina* (Sofia, 2018), pp. 16–17.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 40–41.

⁴¹ *Politicheska istoriya na suvremenna Bulgaria. Sbornik dokumenti*, vol. 1: 1944–1947 (Sofia, 2016), pp. 317–319; E. Kalinova, "Kimon Georgiev i mirniyat dogovor na Bulgaria sled Vtorata svetovna voina" [in:] *Godishnik na Regionalen istoricheski muzei – Pazardzhik*, vol. 4 (Pazardzhik, 2013), pp. 145–146.

⁴² *Suyuznata kontrolna komisiya v Bulgaria (noemvri 1944 – dekemvri 1947 g.). Dokumenti – Purva chast* (Sofia, 2018), pp. 619–627, 629–633.

Moscow, sent a reply to Burns, in which he described government measures to secure free and democratic elections and assured him that they would allow the opposition to participate and thus meet the US requirements.⁴³ This marked the end of American attempts to take advantage of the peace treaty negotiations to obtain more favourable conditions for the Bulgarian opposition – it remained outside the government that prepared and held the elections in the autumn of 1946. The US lost all of its pressure instruments while the USSR demonstrated what it meant to have “at least 75 per cent” Soviet influence and reinforced the leading positions of the Communists in the country.

The fourth and final period in which we can trace the external factor’s role in defining the directions of Bulgarian political life began in the spring of 1947 and ended in December 1948. In February 1947 the victors signed the peace treaties with the former German satellites. This further loosened the ties between the USSR and the US. On 12 March 1947, the Truman doctrine was announced envisaging military assistance to Greece and Turkey against the “red wave” from the North. It was followed by the Marshall Plan for the Economic Recovery of Europe.⁴⁴ Thus, Washington was taking steps towards US economic and military integration with Western Europe. This changed Soviet plans and stimulated similar actions in Eastern European countries.⁴⁵ At the end of September 1947, a meeting of nine European Communist parties was held in Szklarska Poreba (Poland), where a change of the Soviet strategy was announced. Cooperation was to be replaced by pointing out a new enemy – the United States. Against them, the “democratic camp” headed by the USSR should stand together, which meant Eastern Europe had to “unite”, that is, subject itself to the Kremlin.⁴⁶ The differences between the states in the Soviet sphere resulting from greater freedom in following the “national paths” to socialism, had to be wiped out if Moscow was to preserve its control. The Kremlin was most interested in imposing obedience in foreign policy. This could be directly achieved by changes in coalition governments, with the Communist parties taking a strong leadership role. This meant the elimination of the legal opposition and the expulsion of non-communist allies, which opened the way to a one-party system.⁴⁷ This was the end of “people’s democracy” as the “national road to socialism”. In this atmosphere the trial against the leader of the opposition Nikola Petkov took place in Bulgaria. It ended with his murder and the ban on his party in the second half of 1947.⁴⁸

⁴³ E. Kalinova, “Kimon Georgiev i mirniyat dogovor na Bulgaria”, p. 145.

⁴⁴ G. Nikova, “Nachalo na zapadnoevropeiskata integratsiya”, *Istoriчески pregled* 1990, no. 6, pp. 3–16; G. Nikova, “Planut Marshal, evropeiskite sili i Bulgaria”, *Istoriчески pregled* 1993, no. 4–5, pp. 57–63, 66–73.

⁴⁵ T. Volokitina, “Smena strategicheskogo kursa Izkvny v Vostochnoy Evrope v kontse 40-h godov v kontekste mezhdunarodnoy situatsii” [in:] *Stalinizm ut v Iztokhna Evropa sled kraya na Vtorata svetovna voyna* (Sofia, 2005), pp. 88–92.

⁴⁶ *Informatsionnoye soveshchaniye predstaviteley nekotorykh kompartiy v Polshe v kontse sentyabrya 1947 goda* (Moskva, 1948), pp. 7–10.

⁴⁷ V. Dimitrov, *Stalin’s Cold War*, pp. 176–178; I. Baeva, “BRP (k) i drugite v Kominformbyuro” [in:] *Bulgaria v sferata na suvetskite interesi*, pp. 360–368; G. Adibekov, “Kominform i Bolgariya” [in:] *Bulgaria v sferata na suvetskite interesi*, pp. 349–352.

⁴⁸ D. Sharlanov, *Tiraniyata*, pp. 97–154; P. Semerdzhiev, *Sudebniyat protses sreshu Nikola Petkov 1947 g.* (Sofia, 1990); Z. Tsvetkov, *Sudut nad opozitsionnite lideri*, pp. 114–140.

From the end of 1947 till the summer of 1948, the Bulgarian Communist Party experienced internal shocks associated with Soviet pressure to renounce “people’s democracy”.⁴⁹ They ended with the Soviet-Yugoslav conflict in 1948. The USSR wanted to oppose the West through a united bloc following instructions from Moscow, while Tito did not intend to give up his independent policy. This was unacceptable to Stalin and the Yugoslav Communist Party was excluded from the Cominform bureau, which meant that the ideas of “national” models for transition to socialism were rejected and banned. This blow against the Yugoslav Communist Party was to serve as a lesson for the other Eastern European countries.⁵⁰

In the summer and autumn of 1948, Georgi Dimitrov made a final attempt to defend “people’s democracy” by elaborating in detail its theory in order to prove that it did not contradict Marxist-Leninist ideology and Soviet political practice. The main question was whether socialism should be built with or without the dictatorship of the proletariat. Stalin identified the “dictatorship of the proletariat” with the Soviet regime and, in the new Cold War conditions, insisted that “people’s democracy and the Soviet regime are two forms of the dictatorship of the proletariat”⁵¹ – that is, no matter how the regime was called in Bulgaria, it should be aligned with the Soviet (Stalinist) model of the transition to socialism, following the theory of the “intensification of the class struggle” and the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The epilogue was the Fifth Congress of the Bulgarian Communist Party at the end of December 1948, where Dimitrov was forced to admit openly that there was no other path to socialism that was different from the Soviet one, and that the new system could be built only on the basis of the dictatorship of the proletariat.⁵² Dimitrov attempt to defend “people’s democracy” was doomed to failure because it was initially allowed by Stalin, as a way different from the Soviet dictatorship, only in relation to the strategy of the post-war co-operation with the West until the Soviet Union recovered. After the failure of this strategy, Stalin decided to impose full obedience and control on Eastern Europe in order to prevent it from slipping from his orbit. For this purpose, the governments in the Eastern European states should only be in the hands of the Communists, any opposition should be crushed, and Communist power should be based on state property and ideological monopoly. Thus, from the summer of 1948, in Eastern Europe a new period began – the period of Stalinism.

In conclusion, we would like to point out that the internal political processes in Bulgaria reflected the US-Soviet controversy and were strongly dependent on the relations between the two superpowers. This predetermined the victory of the Communist Party over its opponents and the establishment of Communist regime, which lasted until the end of 1989.

⁴⁹ E. Kalinova, “Narodnata demokratsiya – nachaloto i krayat na edna ideya”, p. 100; E. Kandilarov, “Otechestveniyat front – ot koalitsiya kum edinna obshtestveno-politicheska organizatsiya” [in:] *Istoriya na Otechestveniya front/suyuz*, vol. 1, pp. 172–175, 180–182.

⁵⁰ M. Lalkov, *Yugoslaviya (1918–1992). Dramatichniyat put na edna durzhavna ideya* (Sofia, 1999), pp. 189–196; A. Anikeev, “Sovetsko-yugoslavskii konflikt 1948 goda i borba s ‘titoizmom’ v stranakh ‘narodnoi demokratii’” [in:] *Bulgaria v sferata na suvetskite interesi*, pp. 161–172.

⁵¹ M. Isusov, *Stalin i Bulgaria* (Sofia, 1991), pp. 145–149, 155–159, 168.

⁵² L. Ognyanov, *Politicheskata sistema v Bulgaria 1949–1956* (Sofia, 2008), pp. 16–17; *Politicheska istoriya na suvremenna Bulgaria. Sbornik dokumenti*, vol. 2: 1948–1953 (Sofia, 2018), pp. 190–195.

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The Role of an External Factor for the Establishment of the Communist Regime in Bulgaria – September 1944–1948

The research objectives of this article are to analyse Bulgaria's place in the policies of the USSR, the USA and Great Britain in the early post-war years, 1944–1948, and to answer the main research question about the role of an external factor in the Bulgarian Communist Party's rise to power and its assertion as a leading political force. The method of analysing archival documents and causal connections between the Soviet and American policy, on the one hand, and the actions of the Communist party on the other, makes it possible to trace the geopolitical interests of the USSR and the USA and Bulgaria's place in them. The article discusses Soviet support for the Bulgarian Communist Party in the context of Moscow's strategy towards the United States and the way it changed in 1946–1948 as a result of the Cold War. It reveals the role of US diplomacy in the emergence of the anti-communist opposition in Bulgaria and its dependence upon the American support it received, and on Washington's policy towards the USSR. The research results highlight how the Soviet-American confrontation was projected on domestic political processes in Bulgaria and the way it predetermined the Communist Party's victory over its opponents.

KEYWORDS

Bulgarian Communist Party, anti-Communist opposition, Cold War

Rola czynnika zewnętrznego w stworzeniu reżimu komunistycznego w Bułgarii – wrzesień 1944–1948

Celem badawczym niniejszego artykułu jest zbadanie miejsca, jakie Bułgaria zajmowała w polityce ZSRR, USA oraz Wielkiej Brytanii we wczesnych latach powojennych (1944–1948), a także udzielenie odpowiedzi na główne pytanie badawcze, jakim jest rola czynnika zewnętrznego w dojściu Bułgarskiej Partii Komunistycznej do władzy i sięgnięciu przez nią po rolę czołowej siły politycznej. Przyjęta metoda badawcza opiera się na badaniu z jednej strony dokumentów archiwalnych i związków przyczynowo-skutkowych pomiędzy polityką sowiecką i amerykańską, a z drugiej strony działań partii komunistycznej, co pozwala prześledzić interesy geopolityczne ZSRR i USA, a także miejsce, jakie miała w nich Bułgaria. Artykuł omawia sowieckie wsparcie dla Bułgarskiej Partii Komunistycznej w kontekście moskiewskiej strategii wobec USA, a także zmiany zachodzące w latach 1946–1948 w wyniku zimnej wojny. Artykuł przedstawia rolę amerykańskiej dyplomacji w wyłonieniu się opozycji antykomunistycznej w Bułgarii oraz jej uzależnienie od wsparcia uzyskiwanego z USA, a także od polityki Waszyngtonu wobec ZSRR. Wyniki badania podkreślają, w jaki sposób konfrontacja sowiecko-amerykańska rzutowała na procesy polityki krajowej w Bułgarii, a także jak z góry zaciążyła na zwycięstwie Partii Komunistycznej nad przeciwnikami.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE

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