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**THE WRITERS, THE CONFLICTS AND POWER IN BULGARIA AND CZECHOSLOVAKIA
1948-1968**

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Abstract

My research answers the need for a comparative approach in the research of the history of Eastern Europe. In this respect I will compare the relationship between the writers and the power wielders in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia during the first twenty years of communist power in the two countries (1948-1968). My main idea is firstly to trace the influence of the international context on the domestic scene in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia, and then to show how writers in the two countries answered the challenges posed by their political context. In terms of the international context, I will outline the role of the Soviet Union in the political development of the two countries. In connection with the domestic context, I will illustrate the two models of relations between the power wielders and the writers, exemplified by the Bulgarian Communist leader Todor Zhivkov and the First Secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, Antonín Novotný. The second trajectory of the research focuses on the conflicts conducted in the highest organ of control in the writers' sphere - the Praesidium of the Writers' Union. On the basis of primary sources, I will demonstrate the different approach exhibited by the writers in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia in a period of political unification. As a result of this comparison the thesis will contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between the politics and the arts in Eastern Europe during the Communist period.

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Introduction

The following research focuses on the relations between the writers and the power wielders in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia in the first twenty years of communist rule (1948-1968). In my thesis, I will show that despite the proclamation of the socialist unity in Eastern Europe, there were major differences

in the implementation of the communist system in each country that was part of the Eastern Bloc. As a case study of my work, I will show the system of relations between power and the writers in Bulgaria seen from the perspective of the model developed in Czechoslovakia. I will illustrate the differences between the Bulgarian and the Czechoslovak case as a combination between the post-war political context and the traditional patterns of communication between the people in power and the writers.

To begin, I will explore the spaces of conflict in the context of the history of Eastern Europe between 1948 and 1968. I will show the political response in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia to a number of general shifts in the historical context, ranging from the battle for power and the changes of the political elite to some major examples of social dissent. I will illustrate the political doctrine of Todor Zhivkov in the context of the reign of two Czechoslovak leaders: Alexander Dubček and Antonín Novotný. Next, to the political sphere, I will illustrate the participation of the writers in the domestic political conflicts on the basis of their position in the organizational life of the communist regime. Therefore I will focus on the internal dimensions expressed in the number of rifts inside the Writers' Union. Also, I will explore the monitoring of those internal conflicts, executed by the political leadership of the Bulgarian Communist Party. Here I will show how the latter not only managed to keep social dissent under its control, but how it also converted this success into a source for the stability of its power. In contrast, I will demonstrate the different character of the debates that took place in the Czechoslovak Writers Union. I will provide examples to illustrate how the latter was allowed to develop partial independence from the political leadership of CPCz which resulted in two major periods of turmoil – in 1956 and in 1967. In addition I will depict the involvement of the Bulgarian writers in the campaign against the Czechoslovak writers, highlighted during the First Congress of the Bulgarian Writers (July 29 - August 1 1968).

The chronological period which my work covers is the time from the imposition of the totalitarian

system in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia (1944-1948) up to the military invasion conducted by the “Five”¹ (1968). This time span reflects the structure of my thesis. Chapter 2 deals with the period from the installment of the communist regime to the death of Stalin. Chapter 3 unfolds in the context of Khrushchev’s first period of power which culminated in the Hungarian Revolution. Chapter 4 covers the period between 1957 and 1964 as the time of political stability in which I can describe the internal changes experienced by Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia, including the integration of the new generation of writers in socio-political life. Chapter 5 unfolds in the period from 1964 until 1968. Here, on the back of the arrival of Brezhnev in power I will explore the development of the relations between power and writers in Bulgaria in order to illustrate the loss of authority faced by the leadership of CPCz that ultimately led to the Prague Spring. Chapter 6 illustrates the changing context of 1968 in which the political leadership in Bulgaria became heavily involved in the pressure against the Czechoslovak leadership, made by the group of five members of the Warsaw Pact, which culminated in the military intervention in August of that year. In this context, I will unveil the accomplished model of assimilation of the writers on behalf of the political leadership. Also, I will show the dubious position of otherwise non-conformist writers towards their Czechoslovak colleagues. A number of examples will provide the background through which to answer the main research question of my thesis: Why, considering the writers in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia inhabited the same political context, did they respond so differently to the challenges in front of them?

The aim of the thesis is to demonstrate the opportunity for the scholars to leave behind the clichés and the general knowledge that dominated the evaluations of the post-war history of Eastern Europe. The goal of my thesis is to suggest a comparative format as a source through which every nation can revise its own

¹ The term defines the countries of the Warsaw Pact without Romania and Albania.

historical myths. Also, my intention is to provide an analysis of the historical events as a result of the combination of the social context and patterns of activity, established on a long terms basis. Therefore, my thesis aims to show the pattern of relations between power and writers as an established model that was redevelopment by the communist regime. In addition, my thesis aims to emphasize the need for an interdisciplinary approach in the search of the research question. I will show how the methodology of the historical analysis can be co-opted with some elements of the literary theory in the search for a better understanding of the socio-political life in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia in the 1950s and 1960s.

Theorizing Writers and Conflicts: An Interdisciplinary approach

The alterations which appeared as a result of the 1956 XXth Congress of CPSU impacted the social and cultural life of the Eastern Bloc. It also marked the beginning of personal changes in all important spheres of the communist sociopolitical hierarchy. In the relatively young communist states like Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia, this meant a serious blow to the prewar generation which had been personally involved in the imposing of the communist regime in the years 1944-1953. It was therefore blamed for conducting the policy of the Cult of Personality. Its forced downfall provided an opportunity for the generation of those individuals born in the late 1920s and early 1930s to achieve promotion in different spheres of the communist social hierarchy. In addition, the Communist party announced them as a symbol of the victory of communism and the arrival of the ‘new socialist man’. Intellectual life did not remain outside that shift and young artists begun to appear more often in front of the public eye and their presence had a massive influence in the turbulent decade of the 1960s. In the history of Bulgaria these artists came to be called the “April Generation.” Its rise was connected with the political struggle of

Zhivkov to replace the old guard with a new elite that would be loyal to him. The process will be studied as part of the conflicts that existed amongst the rank and file members of the Bulgarian Writers' Union. The result of this analysis will provide a better understanding of the lack of response in Bulgaria to the events of 1968 which took place in Czechoslovakia. Moreover my work will reveal that members of the same generation who were the product of similar circumstances came to differ fundamentally in their political reactions. I will also illustrate, using literary examples, how in two works, the members of two generations responded to the political context.

The work will attempt to create a balance between the writer's artistic uniqueness and the impact of the inhabited historical context. Therefore, it will combine political biography with important examples of artistic representation of social reality. In order to complete those tasks I intend to use a historical model of analysis. With its use, I will depict the writers as protagonists in a historical narrative with a detailed examination of their activity under the cause–event methodology, producing my evaluations as a result of the writer's relation to the world of politics. In the next pages I will reveal the most important elements of my research.

Political conflicts

There are two major types of political conflicts: global political and local political. The former creates a particular context so the latter may develop. Therefore, in a strict chronological order, the text will outline the most important conflicts on a geopolitical level, and then will focus on their interpretation inside Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia during the period from the establishment of the communist regime in Eastern Europe to the invasion by the five Warsaw Pact countries of Czechoslovakia.

These conflicts will serve as a framework that will contextualize the conflicts in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia which involved some popular writers. Undoubtedly, changes in the international context did make an impact on the life of the writers. This was the case with the death of Stalin in 1953, with Khrushchev's speech at the 20th Congress of the CPSU, with the Hungarian Revolution in 1956, and with the Prague Spring in 1968. In the post war decade, the greatest challenges in front of Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia were focused around tensions inside the bipolar world such as the establishment of the postwar division of Europe; the erection of the Berlin Wall; and the Caribbean Crisis. On one hand, after 1963 the global relations changed and a new period of relaxation in international relations appeared. On the other hand, the position of Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia as satellite states left their domestic development tightly connected to the changes in the Soviet context. Despite the fact that the changes of the political leadership in the Soviet Union produced a wave of conflicts, the political leaders in the Soviet Bloc used the transitions from Stalin to Khrushchev and from Khrushchev to Brezhnev in favor of their own political survival. In the first case, the change gave birth to conflicts related to the redistribution of power in the hands of those political leaders who had been in the shadow of Stalin's favorites. In the second case, the change was used as an attempt on behalf of well-established power wielders to preserve their leadership in the name of the unity. The Bulgarian leader Todor Zhivkov managed to appear victorious in both cases while the Czechoslovak leader Antonín Novotný was forced to step down. In the context of the Prague Spring, the Bulgarian political leadership created a strategy of neutralizing every act of the Czechoslovak political leadership that went out of the narrow framework of the system. Here, the model established in Bulgaria prevailed over the socialism with a human face, developed by Alexander Dubček and his followers in CPCz.

Nevertheless, periods of stability in political life allowed a number of dormant conflicts to reappear.

In Bulgaria, Zhivkov managed to balance different tendencies inside socio-cultural life by guaranteeing the control of the Communist Party, while in Czechoslovakia, Novotny allowed the rebirth of Slovak pretensions and gradually let the party apparatus and cultural life slip from his control. Following Brezhnev's arrival, the Bulgarian political leader was also quick to react to the orders given by Soviet leaders and cemented his omnipresence with an already established method of dealing with conflicts. In a period of stability inside the Eastern Bloc, Novotný's inability to get in touch with internal conflicts led to his removal from power.

The last part of my analysis exemplifies the conflict between the regime in Bulgaria and the reformers in Czechoslovakia. That was a political confrontation par excellence between two rival visions for the future of the Communist State. In the period of the Prague Spring, Zhivkov demonstrated his own political credentials in front of the Soviet political leadership.

My work will show three main conflicting trajectories that existed in the political context: the conflict between the pre-communist past and the communist present that dominated the postwar decade; the conflict between the changes and the preservation of the status quo that dominated from 1956 until 1964; and the conflict between revaluation and revision in the period 1965-1968.

The Writers and the Conflicts

My analysis combines primary sources with secondary literature. In the case of Bulgaria, primary sources have served as the major component. In the Czechoslovak case, I rely on the paradigms developed by a number of scholars dealing with the history of the Prague Spring. In order to enhance my

arguments, I have use examples from the Soviet model of the relationship between the power wielders and the writers. Within the framework I trace the relations between the writers and power in two main areas. In first place, there is the space of direct interconnection between politics and the writers - related to the establishment of governing principles of socio-cultural life. Here, the writers are often exposed to direct conflicts with the power wielders who are responsible for the ideological unity of the regime. The second area is inhabited by the writers and the conflicts which existed between them. Namely, the conflicts among the rank and file members of the leadership of the Writers' Union – the Praesidium of the Writers Union.

Here I will reveal one of the greatest differences between Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia, related to the involvement of the General Secretary of the BCP in the writers' sphere. Zhivkov's first intervention was when he used the situation of the writers in order to criticize his predecessor Vulko Chervenkov in 1956 and this spread until 1968, when in front of Dubček, Zhivkov officially proclaimed the support of the Bulgarian intellectuals for his policies. In this context I will show that the leaders of the Czechoslovak Communist Party decided to withdraw from direct intervention in the writers' sphere. As a result my thesis will show two modes of interaction between the power wielders and the writers, as well as the outcomes of these modes. Also, I will show the level of tension inside the leading organ of the organizational life of the writers – The Praesidium of the Writers' Union. In addition, I will demonstrate the conflicts inside the generational framework of the Praesidium by carefully observing the role of the generational change in the context of the political situation in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia after 1956.

After the establishment of the Communist Regime in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia, the Writers Union was an organization that followed the Soviet model of total state control over artistic life, promoted by Andrei Zhdanov in 1934. As a result the structure of the organization emulated the model of the

Communist Party. There were two main bodies responsible for the work of the writers - the Secretariat and the Praesidium. The former included a wide range of members of the Writers' Union and they were involved into discussions about the organizational life of the organization. The latter, however, was responsible for the decision making. My work will cover the activity of this highest organ of the Writers Union.

Literary representation of conflicts

In my work I have no intention to provide stylistic analysis of the literary works of the socialist period, but to supplement my depiction of the relations between power wielders and writers in Bulgaria with case studies developed in two novels from that period. Therefore, I chose Dimitar Dimov and Georgi Markov. They were part of two different periods in the history of Communist Bulgaria. The former took part in the establishment of the Communist State and in 1951 was attacked by the power wielders in the Writers' Union but then rehabilitated by the communist leader Vulko Chervenkov. His work *Tobacco* became the most popular novel written during the Socialist period. The latter was considered to be one of the most gifted authors in the 1960s - the time when Todor Zhivkov established his regime, but in 1968 was forced to leave the country by becoming the most celebrated voice of dissent before his murder in 1979. The two novels – *Tobacco* published in 1951 and *Men* published in 1962 represent two different case studies through which I will show how Dimov and Markov incorporated the socio-political conflicts into the form of literary work. Dimov's novel *Tobacco* had to serve to the communist propaganda by underlining the bleak pre-communist past so the readers can glorify the communist present, but I will illustrate the author's realistic depiction of picture of the conflicts that shaped the division between the prewar elite and

the leaders of the communist movement.

Markov's novel *Men* takes place in the post-Stalinist period and follows the story of a group of young friends who are trying to adapt themselves to post-Stalinist reality. Here, using as an example those young people who were raised and educated in the communist era and whom the regime considered important to be promoted as builders of the new bright future, I will focus on the trajectory set by the power wielders for its citizens in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Using Markov's work, I will show the struggle for promotion and acceptance in Socialist Bulgaria and how it reflected the position of the individual in the totalitarian state.

As a result, the literary works will complement my research on power, writers, and conflicts. In addition, these supplementary chapters demonstrate the possibility of an interdisciplinary approach that can provide a much clearer picture of the relations between the power wielders and the citizens in Bulgaria. In the first place I will demonstrate the way in which Dimov saw the political reality in comparison with Markov's vision. Also, I will demonstrate the choices made by those individuals who had found themselves in conflict with the political reality. The answer of these questions will provide a more detailed image of the socio-political system in Eastern Europe in the Communist era.

In addition I use the version of *Tobacco* that was published after 1989. My intension is to work with the original text that was censored shortly after its appearance in 1952 and published after 1989. This approach is part of the main goal of my work: to incorporate literary works into the historical analysis of the communist period.

Primary and Secondary Sources

In the years after 1956 in the Soviet Bloc, there were many deviations from the original character of the totalitarian state, marked by the closing down of a number of labor camps and the decrease in the intensity of political purges. However, a number of totalitarian mechanisms remained in place to be used in cases of urgency, leaving intact both the political system of party control and its repressive organs. In order to clarify the peculiarity of such a social climate I will use the number of scholarly theories dealing with various aspects of totalitarian and quasi-totalitarian regimes. In this respect, I rely on general theories of western scholars about totalitarianism, those of Hannah Arendt², Carl Friedrich³, and Emilio Gentile⁴. However, taking into consideration, the occasional inapplicability of this generic totalitarian framework, I will extend my research into an understanding of power practices discussed by authors such as George Konrad⁵ and their concept of ‘managerial state’, and scholars such as Eric Voegelin⁶ and his definitions of ‘political religion’.

The domestic context in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia was always influenced by the international situation and the state of colonial dependence of Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia on the Soviet Union. Consequently, this meant that Moscow must be taken into consideration as an important ‘outside’ center of power. I will rely on some important works dealing with Colonialism, such as those of Marc Ferro⁷ and Edward Said⁸ to reveal the level of interdependence of the writers on that organized body of foreign power.

² Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of the Totalitarianism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971)

³ Carl Friedrich and Zbigniew Brezezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and autocracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956)

⁴ Emilio Gentile, *Politics as Religion*, ((New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2006)

⁵ George Konrad and Ivan Szelenyi, *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*(New York, Harcourt Brace, 1979)

⁶ Eric Voeglin, *Modernity without restraint*, (Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2000)

⁷ Marc Ferro, *Colonization: A Global History*, (London: Routledge, 1997)

⁸ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (London: Penguin Books, 2003)

My analysis of the work of the postwar writers in the context of the political development of their times will attempt to answer two questions. How did the young writers in Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria go into the conflict with the authorities in terms of their political visions; how did their Bulgarian counterparts remain in the contact zone with political authorities? What was the difference between political confrontation and political obedience?

The general scope of my research aims to illustrate the presence of certain dynamics which directed the course of events in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia. It has to be stated that I have been working under the influence of the work of Robert Service⁹ in those parts of my thesis that deal with the implementation of the communist system in Eastern Europe. Similarly, I use the comparative analysis of political confrontation in Eastern Europe as it exists in the works of Adam Westoby¹⁰, Robert Conquest¹¹, and others. Apart from general works I have used well-established works dealing with the history of the Soviet Union in order to examine the events related to the struggle for power in two periods, 1953-1956 and 1964-1965. In addition, I have used some important contributions to this field of study which are related to major events such as the Hungarian Revolution. When discussing the political developments in 1968, I have relied on the work of Ivan Volyges¹² on the political conflict between Czechoslovakia and the “Five” Warsaw Pact countries. I have used his work as an explanatory framework for the military intervention in Czechoslovakia.

Also in order to clarify the decision making process of the Soviet political leaders I have used works

⁹ Robert Service, *A History of Modern Russia from Nicolas II to Putin* (London: Penguin Books, 2003); Robert Service, *Comrades: A History of World Communism* (London: Macmillan, 2007)

¹⁰ Adam Westoby, *Communism since World War 2*, (New York: The Harvester Press, 1981)

¹¹ Robert Conquest, *Reflections on a Ravaged Century*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000)

¹² Ivan Volyges, “The Hungarian and Czechoslovak Revolutions: A Comparative study of Revolutions in Communist Countries” in *The Soviet Invasion of Czechoslovakia: Its Effects on Eastern Europe* (New York: Praeger publishers, 1972)

that follow the politics of the two leaders – Khrushchev and Brezhnev. The role of the Soviet leaders is also followed inside the above stated general narratives in the history of the Soviet Union. Also, I have drawn a broad picture of the history of Western Europe as described in the works of Henry Kissinger¹³, Tony Judt¹⁴, and Mark Kurlansky¹⁵.

The main body of secondary literature, however, rests on the achievements of scholars dealing with the history of Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia. Here I would like to point out the works of Ivan Elenkov¹⁶ and Ivailo Znepolski¹⁷ that combine a historical and a socio-cultural analysis. This approach is also evident in Hristo Hristov's biography of Todor Zhivkov¹⁸ where the author deals with the modes of communication established by Zhivkov both in his domestic propaganda and his foreign policy. That type of approach provided my work with the depth needed to outline the socio-political scope of the power wielders in Bulgaria. In addition, I must mention the work of the British historian Richard Crampton¹⁹ that represents a rare example of a complete history of Bulgaria written by a foreign scholar.

On the other hand, the history of Czechoslovakia in the 1960s is the subject of the work of numerous scholars. The highlight is the reform movement of the 1960s. Here I must point out three seminal works: that of Galia Golan²⁰ devoted to the groupings that existed during the Prague Spring; the book of Kieran Williams²¹ which outlines the stages following the rise and fall of the Prague Spring; and the most

¹³ Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, (London: Simon and Shuster, 1994)

¹⁴ Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2005)

¹⁵ Mark Kurlansky, *1968, The Year that rocked the world*, (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2005)

¹⁶ Ivan Elenkov, *Kulturnia Front*, (Sofia: Ciela, 2008)

¹⁷ Ivailo Znepolski, *Bulgarskiat komunizum - sociokulturni cherti i vlastova traektorija*, (Sofia: Siela, 2008)

¹⁸ Hristov Hristo, *Todor Zhivkov: Biographia*, (Sofia: Ciela, 2012)

¹⁹ Richard Crampton, *History of Bulgaria*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005)

²⁰ Galia Golan, *Reform Rule in Czechoslovakia: The Dubcek Era 1968-1969*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008)

²¹ Kieran Williams, *The Prague Spring and its Aftermath*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997)

detailed analysis of the events in Czechoslovakia between 1953 – 1968 produced by Henry Skilling²² and consisting of 891 pages. In addition, the biography of Dubček, written by William Shawcross²³ is amongst the best examples of works dealing with the model of political leadership in Eastern Europe, produced by western scholars. I also must mention the work of Mary Heimann²⁴ that places the history of Czechoslovakia in the 1960s in a general framework, related to the lack of consistency within the policies of the Czechoslovak state.

It has to be stated that the history of writers in the socialist period has not yet been fully written. Nevertheless, I need to mention some important works that formed the background to my analysis. In the first place, the works of Vladimir Migevev²⁵ represent the first concise history of the writers in Bulgaria in the period 1944-1968. Despite the absence of a theoretical framework and well developed research question, the work represents an important source due to its detailed chronological analysis of the relations between power and the writers in Bulgaria. Next to the work of Migevev, I must point out the research of Natalia Hristova²⁶ that is the first attempt of creating a common framework – the author attempts to interpret the passive resistance of the writers as a specific form of dissidence which should not be mistaken for obedience.

Recent developments in the field of Bulgarian studies have also been marked by the achievements of a research group working under the supervision of Michail Nedelchev and Plamen Doinov²⁷. I use their works devoted to the self-criticism of the writers in the late 1950s and the early 1960s.

²² Henry Gordon Skilling, *Czechoslovakia's interrupted revolution*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976)

²³ William Shawcross, *Dubcek and Czechoslovakia*, (London: Hogarth Press, 1990)

²⁴ Mary Heimann, *Czechoslovakia: The State that Failed*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011)

²⁵ Vladimir Migevev, *Bulgarskite Pisатели I Politicheskia jivot v Bulgaria: 1944-1969*, (Sofia: Kota, 2001)

²⁶ Natalia Hristova, *Spezifika na Bulgarskoto Disidentstvo*, (Sofia: Letera, 2000); Natalia Hristova, *Vlast i intelligentsia*, (Sofia: Letera, 2005)

²⁷ See Porediza "Literaturata na NRB: Istorija i Teoria", (Sofia: Kralitza Mab, 2010-2015) v. 1 – 10

Within works devoted to the Czechoslovak writers I must point out the volumes edited by Pavel Janoušek²⁸, which cover the period 1948 to 1968, and the work of Michal Bauer²⁹ devoted to the period of the late 1950s and early 1960s. In addition, Bauer places special emphasis on combining analytical work with the publishing of important documents and stenographic records devoted to the organizational life of the writers.

The background of my historical analysis relies on a combination between the primary sources and secondary literature. In some cases the secondary literature dominates the narrative, especially when dealing with well researched topics. A great number of data, including the documents of the BCP became public only five years ago.³⁰ Much of the material is still under preparation in order to be used as material for scholars. While the documents of the primary institutions of the Communist State – The Central Committee and The Politburo are publicly available, the documents related to a number of institutions and more importantly the so called personal archives are still not accessible. This is true for the personal archives of many members of the cultural elite in the socialist period. However, there is much data available revealing the institutional life in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia. I focus on one type of institution whose data is available both in the Bulgarian and in the Czech archive³¹ – the Praesidium of the Writers' Union.

These records provide an overview of the socialist system that differs from the one developed by the western scholars before 1989. In addition, due to the severe monitoring on the public representation of the conflicts, these stenographic records can help the scholars to see the actual character of the controversy

²⁸ Pavel Janousek, *Dějiny české literatury 1945 – 1989*, (Prague: Academia, 2007)

²⁹ Michal Bauer, *Ideologie a Pamět: Literatura a Instituce na přelomu 40. a 50 let 20 století*, (Prague: H&H, 2003); Michal Bauer, *Kodifikace a variance ideologicko-estetické normy v české literatuře 50 let 20 století*, (Prague, Akropolis, 2011)

³⁰ <http://archives.bg/politburo/>" <http://archives.bg/politburo/>; See also Bibliography

³¹<http://www.pamatniknarodnihopisemnictvi.cz/>; See also Bibliography

that existed in countries like Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia. These records provide information about the position of the Praesidium of the Writers' Union as the space of internal struggles which remained hidden from the public. Therefore, these sources include reports which were prepared for particular events. In this respect my work will reveal the preparation of the controversial congresses of the Czechoslovak Writers in 1956 and in 1968. In other cases, the Praesidium has discussed topics such as budgets, salaries, publishing houses, newspapers and preparations for events of public character.

I worked in two institutions that granted me access to these documents: the State Archive in Sofia and Památník Národního Písémnictví in Prague. It has to be stated that the data related to the Bulgarian Writers Union is catalogued while the documents of the Czechoslovak Writers Union are chronologically arranged, but there are no catalogues which slowed down my work. However, working simultaneously with those documents provided me with the chance for a comparative research of the internal life of two important institutions in socio-political life of Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia.

These records provide information about the position of the institution as the last guardian of the internal struggles before they surface in the public. Therefore, these sources include reports which were prepared for particular events. These have been turned into an object of discussion. In this respect my work will reveal the preparation of the controversial congresses of the Czechoslovak Writers in 1956 and in 1968. In other cases, the Praesidium has discussed topics such as budgets, salaries, publishing houses, newspapers, and preparations for events of public character.

Contribution

Comparative research on the history of Eastern Europe is amongst the most important tasks in front of the scholars dealing with the region. The unclear division which follows a line from the Western Balkans – the Balkans - to Central Europe confronts many scholars with the problem of finding a framework which would not be too general. Within the first major comparative contribution to this field of study it is helpful to use a model based on historical development. I have taken two young states, one in the center of the Western Balkans, Bulgaria and the other a representative of Central Europe, Czechoslovakia, that were forced into the system of totalitarian control under the same ideological denomination – communism - and under the same political dominion – that of the Soviet Union. In order to narrow the focus of my research I have choose to follow the fortunes of a particular social stratum with a special position in the history of the two countries – their prominent writers. I have decided to incorporate this analysis into the framework of political conflicts and the position of the writers within them.

The second major contribution of my thesis to my field of study is the chronological scope. The historiography dealing with the period 1944-1989 has devoted numerous volumes to the installation of the communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe or to the application of the Stalinist model. There are also many works devoted to the 20th Congress of CPSU and the Hungarian Revolution. In addition many researchers tend to focus on major events like the Prague Spring in 1968 and the last years of the communist rule in the late 1980s. My work focuses on the period from 1948 until the invasion of the “Five” in Czechoslovakia that took place in August 1968. In this respect, it deals with an era which is relatively under-researched.

In addition, the use of literary works will help for better understanding of the relations between power and citizens in the communist state. Through these supplementary chapters I will demonstrate the capacity of an interdisciplinary approach to shed a light to the reasoning behind the decisions made by important members of the political and intellectual elite. Therefore, the use of literary works will be based on a contextual unity between the author, the fictional characters and the actual objects of the historical analysis.

Chapter 1: Politics and the writers in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia 1919 – 1953:

Between the Nation State and the Totalitarian Regime

Introduction

The following chapter traces the foundations of the conflicts between writers and power wielders. In chronological terms, the chapter is divided between two major periods – the interwar and war period, 1919-1944 and the years marking the transition of Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia into communist states, 1944-1953. On the basis of this historical framework, the chapter reveals the most important aspects of the relevant political developments and the model of activity of the writers within the historical context. The introductory part will show patterns which would outlast the Stalinist period and would be reintroduced in the post 1956 framework of conflict between the politicians and the writers.

The Prewar Years and WWII 1919 – 1944

In the year 1878, after being part of the Ottoman Empire for five centuries (officially from 1396), the International Congress in Berlin gave an autonomous status to Bulgaria. However, the new political state was still partially dependent on the Ottoman Empire, and more importantly its territories were not unified in terms of the 19th century National Revival program. As a result, during the next fifteen years in

Bulgaria, while internal policy focused on the introduction of a modern political system, Bulgaria's foreign policy strove for the inclusion of those territories which remained outside of the new Bulgarian state and for their official recognition as part of the Bulgarian state.

In domestic terms, the state adopted a Constitution (1879) and on its basis Bulgaria was proclaimed a parliamentary monarchy. In addition, the political divisions which appeared during the debates about the Constitution led to the establishment of a moderate right (conservatives) and a moderate left (the liberals). Despite the appearance of some authoritarian tendencies represented by some political figures, all in all, political life in this period was an example of a successful transition of Bulgaria from a Balkan province of the Ottoman Empire into a modern Eastern European state.

On the international level in 1908 Bulgaria officially proclaimed its complete independence from the Ottoman Empire. Soon afterwards, in 1912, Bulgaria became a part of the Balkan Bloc which declared war on the Ottoman Empire. In a chain of events, Bulgaria's ambition for national unification dragged the state into three consecutive wars (The First Balkan War 1912, The Second Balkan War, 1913, and World War I, 1914). Rather than national unification, the outcome of the wars was a large scale human loss, accompanied by a loss of territories and a financial bankruptcy brought by the reparations imposed as a result of the Versailles Treaty.

Political developments in the early 1920s were overshadowed by this context of national collapse. King Ferdinand abdicated in favor of his son, Boris. The political system, however, was preserved. During the general parliamentary election in 1919 power went into the hands of the Agrarian Party and its charismatic leader – Alexander Stamboliisky. His authoritarian government, however, was overthrown by a coup which was silently supported by the King himself. As a result, between 1923 and 1926, the state

was on the verge of civil war. Nevertheless, a moderate policy conducted by two governments in the period 1926 - 1934 resulted in a brief period of political stability.

The success of these two governments was connected with the popularity of the Monarch. In the second half of the 1920s, the figure of King Boris III emerged as an embodiment of hope for a new revival. Realizing his position and following another coup in May 1934³², the monarch exceeded his constitutional powers. He shunned the constitution and singled the start of a period referred to the Bulgarian historiography as “The May 19 regime.”³³

Radical ideas fell on fertile ground in many of the countries which saw themselves as victims of Versailles. As a result, the communists were brought onto the political scene. Their ideas were sharpened by the success of the 1917 October Revolution in Russia and by traditional pro-Russian sympathies in the country. Another outcome of the Bolshevik success in Russia was the fragmentation of the Social Democratic Party which resulted in the formation of the Bulgarian Communist Party. In 1919, the group around the ‘thick’ socialists led by Dimitar Blagoev established the Bulgarian Workers Party and joined the Comintern. During the elections of 1919, the BWP was established as the largest parliamentary opposition to the ruling Agrarian Party. In September 1923, under the Comintern’s guidance, the BWP organized an unsuccessful anti-state uprising and as a result its most prominent figures were forced to flee the country.

The image of the party worsened two years later when its military wing organized an assault on the church of Sveta Nedelya. More than 130 people were killed and over 500 people were wounded. The party cemented its image of an underground terrorist organization. The authorities reacted violently to the

³² Ivan Ilchev, *The Rose of the Balkans*, (Sofia: Colibri, 2005) p. 260.

³³ *Ibid.*

assault. Severe state repression affected a great number of communist devotees who had not participated in the terrorist attack. The most blatant case was the arrest and the murder of the poet Geo Milev.

Through emigration, the Bulgarian communists turned their party (the Bulgarian Workers Party) into a powerful exile organization following the Leninist model. Henceforth its leadership was made up of Bulgarian emigrants. One of the most important activists was Georgi Dimitrov. He had a successful career in the international communist movement and between 1929 and 1932 became the chairman of the Department of West-European relations of the Comintern. What had enhanced Dimitrov's career, however, was the trial against him and two other leading Bulgarian communists who were accused of burning down the Reichstag in Berlin in 1933. Dimitrov's defense speech mythologized his image in the communist movement. Having being found not guilty, the Bulgarian communist leader obtained Soviet citizenship and spent 10 years in Moscow – between 1936 and 1946. As a result of his popularity, he joined the personal circle of Stalin's friends and consolidated his position as the supreme leader of the Bulgarian communists.

The regime established in Bulgaria after 1936 did not develop into a totalitarian system. Although, as a result of the war, in the early 1940s the economy was destabilized. Still, the country never experienced the turmoil witnessed by most of the countries in the region. Moreover, based on a compromise between Stalin and Hitler, Bulgaria reclaimed the territory of South Dobrudzha (lost after WW1 and given to Romania as part of the Versailles Treaty). On the basis of these territorial acquisitions, King Boris III³⁴ signed the pact which aligned Bulgaria with the Axis. In 1941, after allowing the German army to pass through its territory to attack Yugoslavia and Greece, the Bulgarian authorities were given the right to administer some of its territories. As a result, the successful diplomacy of King Boris III boosted his

³⁴ Ibid., p. 344.

popularity among the population.

The split between Hitler and Stalin in 1941, however, was a major blow to the strategy of non-alignment adopted by the Bulgarian government. Interwar relations with Germany and the obvious threat they constituted (being already in Romania, the Nazi army was able to occupy the country in a few hours' time), in addition to the underground communist movement, reactivated by Moscow, led the Bulgarian political leadership to preserve its loyalty to the Axis. As a result, after 1941 Bulgaria was exposed as part of the Nazi-Fascist coalition.

The development of the Jewish question in Bulgaria characterized the model of relations between the Bulgarian government and Nazi Germany. After the decree from 1942 about the "Final Solution of the Jewish Question", the Bulgarian government was unable to prevent the deportation of those Jews who lived in the newly administered territories, since the latter were under the ultimate authority of the Nazis. However, the deportation of those Jews who were citizens of the Bulgarian state was successfully resisted both by the local population which hid many of the Jews in their homes and by the political leadership which refused to yield to the pressure of Nazi Germany.

The unexpected death of King Boris III in 1943 was not only a massive shock but it also put an end to the moderate political course. The new political leadership in Bulgaria opened a massive wave of repressions against the underground guerrilla movement. This was the second time, after 1925, during which Bulgaria was facing civil war. In addition, the bombings of Sofia by the anti-Nazi coalition exposed the Bulgarian population to the reality of the World War. In addition, as a result of the turn of the war after 1942 and in September 1943, the pro-German politician Bogdan Filov resigned. In the period 1943-1944, two Bulgarian governments began working on the potential withdrawal of Bulgaria from the

Nazi coalition. In the process they looked for cooperation with the Allies. These attempts, however, were interrupted by a coup organized by the quasi-military political party Zveno and the local communists. The coup was coordinated by the Communist leadership in exile so as to coincide with the entry of the Red Army into Bulgaria on September 9, 1944.

In 1919, while the Bulgarian prime minister protested against the sanctions imposed on the state, The Great Powers welcomed the delegation of Czech and Slovak representatives and recognized the new state of Czechoslovakia. In 1920, the country adopted its constitution on whose basis the state was declared a Parliamentary democracy governed by a National Assembly. The latter was also responsible for electing the president of the state with a mandate of eight years. Amongst the most influential political parties during the First Republic were the Agrarian Party and the Social-Democratic Party³⁵. In addition, there was also a strong and influential presence of the Catholic Party and the Communist Party.

Nevertheless, according to the historian Mary Heimann, political life in Czechoslovakia was that of a “troubled democracy.”³⁶ In 1923, the National Assembly passed The Law for the Protection of the Republic. It included special protection against propaganda against the symbols of democracy and libel against the president. The political leadership of the First Republic had difficulties in sustaining the multinational character of the state - as people of Czech origin dominated in all important state positions. In addition, at the beginning of the 1930s, the economic crisis underlined and deepened these internal divisions.³⁷ Lastly in the mid-1930s, the democratic nature of the state was undermined by the influence of two non-democratic political projects – the Nazi model, created in Germany after 1932 and the

³⁵ Mary Heimann, *Czechoslovakia: The State that Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), p. 72.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

³⁷ Zdeněk Kárník, *České země v éře První Republiky, díl 3: České země a Československo ve Velké Hospodářské Krizi (1930 – 1934)*, (Prague: Libri, 2002), p. 190.

bolshevization of the Communist Party, which aimed at imposing the Soviet model.³⁸

The communists held an important place on the political stage in Czechoslovakia. Similarly to the BWP, the Czechoslovak Communist Party was founded as a result of the split inside the Social-Democratic Party. In the parliamentary elections of 1925, the CPCz won second place with over 900 000 votes. Unlike its Bulgarian counterpart, CPCz remained an integral part of the Czechoslovak parliamentary democracy. But due to its bolshevization, the role of the Communist Party diminished, and during the elections of 1929 and 1935 it took fourth place. Its membership also dropped drastically: while the CPCz had 150 000 members in 1928, the party had only 35 000 members in 1931. The economic crisis in the 1930s, proclaimed by the communist leadership as a fulfillment of the Marxist predictions about the decline of the capitalist world, had helped only towards a slight increase of the number to 55 000 members.³⁹

Similarly to Dimitrov, Klement Gottwald established himself as the undisputed leader of the Communist Party. As part of the process of bolshevization, he had also replaced the cadres of the party. Although, he was not as close to the Soviets as was Dimitrov, Gottwald also expressed his vision of close links between the Soviets and the Czech communists. During his speech at the Fourth Congress of the CPCz he acknowledged that “We are the party of the Czech proletariat, and our supreme revolutionary staff is in Moscow to learn from the Russian Bolsheviks how to wring your necks. And you know the Bolsheviks are masters in this”.⁴⁰

Both the Bulgarian and Czechoslovak communist parties followed similar paths. The political role of

³⁸ Kárník, pp. 193 – 200.

³⁹ Henry Gordon Skilling, “Gottwald and the Bolshevization of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, *Slavic Review*, Vol 20, 1961, p. 645.

⁴⁰ Cited in Henry Gordon Skilling, “Gottwald and the Bolshevization of the Communist Party”, p. 643.

the parties had increased after WWI, but their openly declared intention to subjugate themselves to the Soviet state diminished their position in the political life of their countries. However, the domestic upbringing of the communist elite in Czechoslovakia between 1924 and 1934 contrasted with the life in exile of the Bulgarian communist leadership. Despite this important distinction, which would have a major impact on the establishment of the communist regimes in the two states after 1944, the two organizations were founded on the same principle of the Leninist party structure - a strictly hierarchical control and undisputed leaders like Gottwald and Dimitrov.

The international context which in 1918 allowed for the creation of Czechoslovakia was the reason for its dissolution in 1938-1939. The new situation was the result of the political maneuverings of the Great Powers in their attempts to tackle the rising territorial aspirations of Hitler's Germany. But the decisions taken by the Czechoslovak political leadership, and President Beneš in particular, were also questionable.⁴¹ After Munich 1938, the situation in Czechoslovakia was similar to that in Bulgaria after Versailles 1919 – the mixture of anger against the Western powers and of disdain towards the incompetent domestic leaders was felt by the local Czechoslovak population. However, the difference was that despite the National Catastrophe in 1919, Bulgaria preserved its independence, while Czechoslovakia was subjugated to Nazi Germany in 1938-1939.

In March 1939, the Nazis turned Czechoslovakia into the so called Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. The ex-president Beneš formed a government in exile. The political history of the Protectorate can be divided into two periods, 1939-1941 and 1941-1944, both of which witnessed two massive waves of repression. The first came after the imposition of the Nazi rule and the second came as result of the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich in 1942. Nevertheless, the population in the Czech Protectorate

⁴¹ Mary Heimann, pp. 111-150.

adapted to the system in great numbers, while in Slovakia, Nazi collaborators supported independence away from the control of the Czechs. In fact, while the Nazi regime based its power on oppression and fear, it also used the internal conflicts which had existed during the Czechoslovak First Republic in favor of strengthening its power.⁴²

Resistance similar to that of the Bulgarian authorities and the Bulgarian population against the deportation of the Jews did not take place in the Czech and Slovak territories. On the contrary, in Slovakia, on the basis of Slovak Law 68, 18,586 people were taken to Auschwitz while in the Protectorate, of 140 000 people who had passed through Theresienstadt, around 90 000 were deported to Auschwitz.⁴³

The turn of events in favor of the Allies was welcomed in the Czech and Slovak lands. On the day after the debacle of the Prague Uprising, Soviet troops entered the city and proclaimed the last stage of the struggle for liberation. Most importantly, during the last stage of the war, the government in exile of Beneš guaranteed the status of Czechoslovakia as a victim of the Nazis whose political leadership was on the side with the Allies. Bulgaria on the other hand was seen as part of the Axis and therefore as an enemy of the victorious allied coalition.

The World of Yesterday: The Writers and The State 1919 – 1944

The major conflicting point in cultural life after the establishment of the national state in Bulgaria (1878) centered on the political call for modernity. The process crystallized after a decade in which Bulgarian

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 135.

writers were still predominantly focused on the history of the national liberation movement (Zahari Stoyanov, Ivan Vazov). After that period, during which the writers produced epic representations of the past, some authors appeared who focused on the troubled image of the Bulgarian modernization (Aleko Konstantinov, Elin Pelin). In addition, during the first decade of the 20th century, the struggle for modernity was expressed in the poetry of Pencho Slaveikov and Peyo Yavorov. They collaborated with the literary critic Krustyo Krustev inside the magazine *Misul* which was a tribune of “Europeanization” and which was opposed to the “Balkanization” of social and political life.⁴⁴

The crisis which came as a result of the wars reshuffled the Bulgarian literary scene. One part of this change was expressed in the memoirs of Efreim Karamfilov. In them, the poet recaptures the event which he had witnessed after the broadcast of the news about the sanctions imposed on Bulgaria, on November 29, 1919. 1500 people gathered in front of the home of the writer Ivan Vazov, remembers Karamfilov, and the national poet appeared in front of the crowd, remaining silent and bursting into tears. In contrast to the silence of Vazov, the young poet Emaniul Popdimitrov, whose hometown was split between Serbia and Bulgaria as a result of the new demarcation, published a manifesto in which he asked writers to participate in the rebuilding of the state. In this text, he addressed the disengagement of the intellectuals with this appeal: “Now you are standing alone, counting your wounds, and observing with stoicism the spiritual decay of those who had once belonged to your own circle.” The words of Popdimitrov were an expression of another conflict: that between the need for political engagement and the aesthetic position outside of politics.⁴⁵

The post WWI context and the Russian Revolution changed the nature of this political engagement.

⁴⁴ Roman Hadjikosev, *Lekcii po bulgarska literature*, (Bukuresti: University Press, 2004), p. 23.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

As a result, at the start of the inter-war period, Bulgaria witnessed the transformation of symbolist verse into a political manifesto, and Hristo Smirnenski (1898–1923) was the first poet who represented this transition. His poetry moved from ironic depictions of urban life to sharp political messages. Another symbolist, Geo Milev, also stopped writing symbolist poetry and became an active spokesman against social injustice. He came to support the Communist Party. However, it was Nikola Vapzarov who came to represent the accomplished image of a proletarian author.⁴⁶ In his works, he not only underlined the class division and the oppression of the working classes, but also depicted the latter's everyday life. His death, which was a result of the state manhunt against communist supporters in 1942, turned him into a communist martyr.

The second group of writers with a political agenda were those who regarded Germany as a state which could wreak revenge against the injustice suffered by the Bulgarians as a result of the Versailles treaties. Most of these writers were related to the national tradition in literature and were prominent historical novelists such as Dimitar Talev and Fani Mutafova. Their activity documented the traditional relation between the genre of the historical novel and the national political agenda. As Cveta Trifonova points out, they were not concerned with international political doctrines, but strove for the re-acquisition of the territories, which had been lost after WWI.⁴⁷

Those authors who were not engaged in a political struggle and who believed in aesthetics as a priority in literature were gathered around the literary magazine *Zlatorog*. The latter was supported by authors with varying political backgrounds. There was the left wing poet Nikola Furnajiev and the novelist Yordan Yovkov, who was known for his close relations with King Boris III. Despite the turmoil

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 53.

⁴⁷ Trifonova, *Pisateli i dosieta*, p. 283.

which took place at the beginning of the 1920s and in the second half of the 1930s, the magazine remained loyal to its primary credo of refusing political engagement.

The proletarian authors spoke against injustice which was seen as class-based and not as part of a specific national situation. In addition, these writers had ties with the Communist Party. The unengaged authors ignored the appeal of Popdimitrov and retained their politically non-aligned status. Emanuil Popdimitrov did not take part in any of these groups concentrated on fighting for that part of the Bulgarian territory which as a result of WWI had been made part of Yugoslavia. On the eve of WWII there were two predominant groups in Bulgarian cultural life. One of them fought for social causes, the other one was l'art pour l'artistic.

Within these groups, everyone except the proletarian writers benefited from the political situation in Bulgaria during World War II. The non-political discourse of the l'art pour l'artistic group was welcomed by the country's political leadership. Those writers devoted to the cause of national union enthusiastically welcomed the success of Germany and had seen new territorial gains as a vital step towards national unification.⁴⁸ Some of them produced philosophical writings in support of the fascist ideology, since they saw this as a useful underpinning of the concept of national unity.⁴⁹ A small group around the fascist magazine *Vasil Aprilov* wrote articles with Anti-Semitic content. The most important author in this group was Fani Mutafova.

A conflict between democratic and revolutionary authors was an important part of the relations between the writers and politics during the First Czechoslovak Republic.⁵⁰ The first group was primarily

⁴⁸ Trifonova, p. 250.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Alfreud French, *Czech Writers and Politics*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 20.

represented by the writer Karel Čapek. Contacts between him and President Masaryk have raised some questions in historiography. Some authors shared Čapek's vision of a debating club as a place in which President Masaryk participated in an exchange of ideas rather than in as club with a political agenda,⁵¹ but other authors were critical towards the existence of close relations between a writer and a power wielder.⁵² Moreover, the historian Richard Crampton claims that the relations between Masaryk and Karel Čapek represented the position of the writer in Eastern Europe as a mediator between intellectuals and society.⁵³ However, the interwar position of T.G. Masaryk and the fact that there was no evidence which would suggest that the famous writer did participate in Masaryk's decision making prove that their relationship differed substantially from the relationship between the Bulgarian writers and King Boris III. In addition, Čapek was not only loyal to his philosophical credo of pragmatism but he was also a defender of democracy against various forms of totalitarianism – a position which did not have an equivalent in the Bulgarian literary scene.

In contrast, the writer Jaroslav Hašek and his satirical novel *The Good Soldier Švejk* were not warmly received in Czechoslovakia. This was because Hašek's work did not correspond with the political agenda of building of the new state.⁵⁴ The non-ideological character of Hašek's novel also meant that it was rejected by the revolutionary writers.⁵⁵

The radical political agenda appeared firstly inside the Czechoslovak avant-garde and similarly to the Bulgarian symbolists, the former was divided between proletarianism and poetism.⁵⁶ Authors like Wolker

⁵¹ Zdeněk Kárník, *České země v éře První Republiky*, p. 286.

⁵² Mary Heimann, p. 70.

⁵³ Richard Crampton, *Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century*, (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 30.

⁵⁴ Cecil Parrot, *A study of Svejk and the short stories*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p.167.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Rajendra. A. Chitnis, Vladislav Vančura: *The heart of the Czech avant-garde*, (Prague: Karolinum Press, 2007), pp. 38 – 39.

attempted to incorporate these differences, while radical authors were influenced by the Russian Revolution. For example, S. K. Neumann who proclaimed the necessity of clearly stated ideological engagement.⁵⁷ However, many *avant-garde* poets were repelled by the Communist Party after the latter bolshevized itself in 1935.⁵⁸ For a short period, this put an end to the conflict amongst the revolutionary writers.

There were also openly religious catholic writers like Jakub Deml in Czechoslovakia in the interwar period. This did not have a counterpart in the literary scene of Bulgaria. In addition some Czech writers dealt with universal problems without a particular political agenda. This contrasted with the strictly politically directed forms of social confrontation which were pursued in Bulgaria by authors like Emanuil Popdimtrov.

During the Nazi occupation, most Czech writers adapted themselves to the new conditions. Some of them adopted models of passive resistance while others openly collaborated with the Nazis.⁵⁹ Some writers like Václav Černý and Vladislav Vančura openly fought against the Nazi regime. The latter was arrested for subversion and consequently executed by the Nazis. The historian Alfred French argues about the existence of a generation of poets who were defined by the Nazi period.⁶⁰ On the whole, the experience of Czechoslovak writers from 1938-1945 would be transmitted in the post war years as an integral part of their relation with the Communist regime.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Zdeněk Kárník, *České země v éře První Republiky*, p. 287.

⁵⁹ "Ve Jménu Přežití Národa: Kultura mezi Pasivní rezistencí a Kolaborací v Kontextu Denních Tištěných Médii Protektorátu", In *O protektorátu sociokulturních souvislostech*, ed. Dagmar Magincová (Červený Kostelec, 2011), p. 15.

⁶⁰ Alfred French, *Czech Writers and Politics*, p. 20.

Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia on the Road to Totalitarianism

On September 9, 1944, despite the attempts of the last non-communist Bulgarian government to leave the Axis, simultaneously with the entrance of the Soviet Army, a coup organized by the local communist militants took place in Sofia. The coup had the support of important military officials and of the pro-communist wings of the Agrarian and the Social Democratic Parties. As a result of the success of the coup, a new government of the Fatherland Front (FF) was established.

In a similar fashion to the rest of Eastern Europe, the position of Prime Minister was given to a non-communist - Kimon Georgiev, the leader of the political union ZVENO. The communists took over the control of the Ministry of Interior (Anton Yugov) and the Ministry of Justice (Mincho Neichev). The FF worked in close collaboration with the Allied Control Commission (ACC). However, in the power structure of the ACC, the leading role was given to the representatives of the Soviet Union. As a result, the ACC gave the Soviets the opportunity to control important sectors like the importation of foreign printed materials and cultural goods.⁶¹

Political representation within the FF was dominated by two major parties – The Communist Party and The Agrarian Party. In 1944, these old political rivals shared the same vision about a foreign policy pointed towards the Allies. They also had a similar vision regarding the domestic situation. Both political parties wanted to punish the ‘collaborators’ who had brought Bulgaria into the Axis.⁶² In addition, both the communist and agrarian political leaderships remained silent during the violence which spread in Bulgaria in the autumn of 1944. The activity of the People’s Court was also not confronted by the non-communists in the FF, nor by the ACC. The People’s court unleashed a massive wave of repression aimed

⁶¹ Richard Crampton, *History of Bulgaria*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 180.

⁶² Iskra Baeva, Evgenia Kalinova *Bulgarskite přehodí*, (Sofia: Paradigma, 1997), p. 29.

against the political and social elite of the country, which has been accused of collaboration with the “Monarchist-Fascist regime” in Bulgaria. Between December 1944 and April 1945, the court issued nearly 3000 death penalties.

The parity between communists and agrarians drastically changed in the period between 1945 and 1946. Firstly, in June 1945 the Agrarian Party was divided into a pro-communist and an anti-communist wing. As a result, the latter wing around Nikola Petkov established itself as the leading oppositional organization. Even in those times of openly propagated political differences, both the Agrarians and the communists supported the overthrowing of the Monarchy. As a result of a Referendum on September 15 1946, Bulgaria was declared a republic. In November of the same year, the communist leader Georgi Dimitrov returned from Moscow and officially took over the leadership of the Communist Party and the post of Prime Minister.

Being the only opposition organization, Petkov’s Agrarians soon became an object of repression, organized by the communist officials. However, due to the political maneuvers of Stalin towards the Allies, the aim of which was to show that the principles of democracy were respected in the territories under the control of the Soviet Union, The Agrarian Party was allowed to participate in the elections for the National Assembly which took place in 1946. Although the communists won the majority of the votes, the elections also underlined the voters’ strong support for the opposition which gained over one million votes.⁶³

However, the political situation changed due to the evolving international context. In February 1946, George Kenan, the leading expert on Russia in the U.S Department, wrote the so-called *Telegram 511*.

⁶³ Ivan Ilchev, *The Rose of the Balkans*, p. 355.

This represented an analysis of the functioning of the Russian and Soviet foreign policy. The bottom line was that negotiations with the Soviet side were doomed to fail because of the tradition of Russian expansionistic policy, promulgated by Stalin. Western politicians had come to the conclusion that Stalin would not collaborate in the reconstruction of postwar Europe. Kennan's reasoning came to form the Truman Doctrine, proclaimed on March 12 1947 in a speech made by the American president Harry Truman. This doctrine proposed to support Turkey and Greece financially, in order to prevent these two countries from becoming part of the Soviet sphere of influence. In response to this, two months later, the Soviet authorities disallowed the governments in Eastern Europe from participating in the Marshall Plan. All in all, these changes made it possible for the communists to complete the process taking complete power in Eastern Europe.

As a result, the Soviet Union had strengthened control over its satellites and political disunity did not last long in Bulgaria. In November 1947, the leaders of the Bulgarian opposition were arrested during a session of the Parliament. This was followed by a staged trial against the leader of the opposition, Nikola Petkov. On September 27, 1947, in violation of all legal standards and despite the protests of the American ambassador, Petkov was hanged.

The killing of Nikola Petkov symbolized the final stage of a process which had started with the coup in 1944. From 1948, even the nominal role of the FF came to an end. This became evident with the adoption of the new Constitution in December 1947. Approved by Parliament after the opposition had been arrested on its premises, this new most important state document is usually called by historians the Dimitrov Constitution. From the middle of 1948, however, the communist leader suffered severe illness and the control of both the party and the state was taken over by his close ally Vulko Chervenkov.

Undoubtedly, in 1948 two major conflicts, which occurred outside of the domestic context, were used by the power wielders within the top-down decision making system of democratic centralism in Bulgaria. In the first place was the split between the Soviet Union and Tito's Yugoslavia. The split added a dose of nationalistic nuance to the previous discourse of accusations, since in Bulgaria there were many who had experienced the Balkan Wars and WWI, and a great number of them considered the injustice suffered by Bulgaria as a result of western favoritism towards Yugoslavia. Secondly, in the second half of 1949, the struggle against "the enemy within", introduced by Stalin, was emulated by Chervenkov in order to discredit his main rival for the post of the late Dimitrov, Traicho Kostov. The latter was arrested and accused of spying for the Americans. Consequently, in December 1949, Kostov was hanged.⁶⁴ This signaled a struggle for power within the communist party in which the supporters of Chervenkov managed to win all the important positions.

The war time collaboration between non-communists and communists in Czechoslovakia continued through the Košice Government Program. Beside the primary goal of ending the war and supporting the Red Army, the program stated clearly which would be the conflict zones on the postwar domestic scene. The Košice Program set out to fight against the outside enemy – the Germans and the Hungarians, and to search for "the enemy within the state" - collaborators and traitors.

The first months after the liberation of Czechoslovakia in 1945 witnessed the spread of violence in the Czech and Slovak lands. Just as with the lack of a reaction in Bulgaria, the Czechoslovakian political leadership did not confront these excesses. From June, 1945, however, the process was institutionalized with the establishment of 'The People's Court'. As Mary Heimann⁶⁵ points out in her analysis of the

⁶⁴ Richard Crampton, *History of Bulgaria*, pp. 180- 191.

⁶⁵ Mary Heimann, *Czechoslovakia: The State that failed*, p. 159.

situation, the number of people sentenced to death *per capita in Czechoslovakia* was outnumbered only by those in Bulgaria. In Slovakia, the external enemy was not present and the search for ‘an enemy’ focused on the domestic front.⁶⁶

On May 26, 1946 the first postwar general elections in Czechoslovakia were held. Although the election results underlined the fact that the Communist party in Czechoslovakia had the largest prewar basis of support in the whole of Eastern Europe,⁶⁷ Heimann suggested that its success was also due to the abolition of the two most popular prewar political parties – the Czech branch of the Agrarian Party and the Slovak Branch of the People’s Party.⁶⁸ In addition, by the end of 1946, the communists had managed to assume control on the two most important sectors in national security – the army and the secret police.⁶⁹ There were sporadic conflicts such as between the communists and the Democratic Party in Slovakia, as with the death sentence of the ex-leader of Slovakia Jozef Tiso. However, the unity in the National Front was preserved and an actual opposition, as it had existed in Bulgaria, did not appear in Czechoslovakia.

As it is pointed out by Heimann, in early 1948 the non-communists in the National Front had realized the enormous extent of the political control which was now wielded by the communists.⁷⁰ Not surprisingly, the first open conflict came in relation to the purges in the apparatus of the Ministry of Interior. The attempt by the non-communists to create a political crisis, with twelve ministers resigning from office, in reality worked in favor of the Communist Party. They were well prepared for such a development and on February 24, they organized a massive strike involving over two million citizens.

⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 160.

⁶⁷ Ricard Crampton, *Eastern Europe*, p. 180.

⁶⁸ Mary Heimann, *Czechoslovakia: The State that Failed*, p. 167.

⁶⁹ František Hanzlík, *Únor 1948. Výsledek nerovného zápasu* (Praha: Prewon, 1997).

⁷⁰ Mary Heimann, *Czechoslovakia: The State that Failed*, p. 170.

The success of the latter was due first and foremost to the international context but it had also come as a result of the politics of collaboration, pursued in the period 1944-1948 both by the non-communist parties in the National Front and the President Beneš himself.

In Czechoslovakia, Stalin's policies were fitted into the context of existing national conflicts. In this respect, Mary Heimann points out that there was tension in postwar Czechoslovakia between ethno-linguistic nationalism and socialist internationalism.⁷¹ She gives the example that the international conflict between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union was used by the leadership of CPCz to subordinate the Slovak Communist Party. In addition, the Czechoslovak communists also benefited from the international situation in their struggle against potential anti-communist opposition – a process which was accomplished in Bulgaria in the period 1946–1947. In 1948-1949 Gottwald's regime launched a campaign against three bearers of potential resistance – the principal physical training nationalist organization Sokol, the National-Socialist Party, and the Catholic Church.

The search for an internal enemy was introduced in Czechoslovakia after it had taken place in Bulgaria. The process was to be associated primarily with the name of the General Secretary of the CPCz Rudolf Slánský, but in fact its scope was much broader and included all levels of the CPCz. In fact, in 1949 Slánský himself initiated the search for internal enemy of the CPCz on Stalin's order. However, in September 1951, Klement Gottwald came to the conclusion that bringing to justice such an important figure would dismantle the myth that Czechoslovakian communists were soft.⁷² Unlike Chervenkov, Gottwald was a member of the old guard and was under suspicion, mainly due to his 1930's remarks about Czechoslovakia's own path to socialism. By deposing Slánský and by deflecting "guilt" onto him in 1952,

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 200.

Gottwald reaffirmed his indisputable position as leader.

The Present versus the Past: The Writers in the Post-war Decade

The new government constructed particular institutions with the aim of exercising centralized control over cultural life.⁷³ Its main aim was to impose a number of new communist social values and a new vision of the role of the state within the cultural process.⁷⁴ The first task was the purging of the closest collaborators with the prewar regime. It was executed by two specific state organizations – the People’s Militia, which was subordinated to the FF, and the State Security (SS), a special unit under the control of the Ministry of the Interior. Writers were amongst the first victims of the witch hunt.⁷⁵ Interrogations followed by torture resulted in the creation of one of the first blacklists of the new regime. The document was issued on behalf of the FF committee and included the names of twenty-nine popular writers and journalists who were to be excluded from the Writers' Union.⁷⁶ Amongst them were Dimitar Talev, Vladimir Vasilev and Fani Popova-Mutafova.

The problem with the argumentation against Vasilev, Talev, and Mutafova was connected to the fact that Bulgaria was not occupied by the Nazis during WWII. Therefore, in order to impose collective guilt, the post-1944 Bulgarian regime urged the communists to adapt the profile of the Nazi collaborator to Bulgarian conditions. As a result, the power-wielders fabricated accusations like ‘exaggerated Bulgarian

⁷³ Ivan Elenkov, *Kulturniat front*, (Sofia: Siela, 1995), pp. 20-136.

⁷⁴ Vesela Chichovska, *Politikata sreshtu prosvetna tradizia* (Sofia: Gutenberg, 1995); Ivailo Znepolski, *Bulgarskiat komunizum. Socio kulturni cherti i vlastova traektoria*, (Sofia: Ciela, 2008).

⁷⁵ Ivaila Alexandrova, *Goreshto cherveno* (Plovdiv: IK Janet 45, 2008).

⁷⁶ Vladimir Migevev, *Bulgarskite Pisateli i politicheskiat zhivot v Bulgaria: 1944-1969*, (Sofia: Kota, 2001), p. 11.

chauvinism.⁷⁷ This broad accusation allowed them to bring to justice both writers like Mutafova, who had expressed some fascination with fascism, and also literary critics like Vasilev, who supported neither the fascists, nor the communists.

The political unity between the communists and agrarians dominated the first year of the organizational life of the writers. On September 30 1944, Trifon Kunev, a member of the Agrarian Party, was elected chairman of the Bulgarian Writers' Union. In connection with the commonly accepted position towards the recent past, he did not object to the purges initiated by communist department in the Union.⁷⁸ Firstly on November 16, 1944, the communist group of writers released a report in which they proposed the purging of the Union of the members of the PEN club. A week later, under the pressure of the communist organization within the Writers' Union, the latter issued an official document in support of the setting up of the People's Court.

Moreover, along with other members of artistic organizations, writers collaborated with the People's Court by providing testimonies about the "fascist past of the defendants".⁷⁹ The final version of the list of the purged was issued in 1945 and included the names of 102 intellectuals, including painters, journalists, and writers. As a result, some were sentenced to death, others to life in prison. There were also those who received less severe sentences.

The atmosphere in the country influenced the position of the writers. As a result, in April 1945 Trifon Kunev resigned from the post of chairman of the Writers' Union.⁸⁰ The influence of the communists grew and the members of the Union were expected to participate in the development of communist propaganda

⁷⁷ Cveta Trifonova, *Pisateli i dosieta*, p. 7.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁷⁹ Ivaila Alexandrova, *Goreshto cherveno*, pp. 120-240.

⁸⁰ Vladimir Migev, *Bulgarskite pisateli*, p. 14.

via a process called “taking the politics down to the masses”. As a result, in July 1945, a group of young authors were sent to execute this task by organizing mass readings in factories and some other working class environments. Among them were the twenty-two-year-old Blaga Dimitrova and the twenty-three-year-old Radoi Ralin.⁸¹ Both of them would become important figures in the opposition in the 1960s. At that time, however, these young poets were close collaborators of the regime and they supported and disseminated its slogan ‘These who are not with us are against us’.⁸²

In these socio-political circumstances, between the 23rd and 25th of September, 1945 the first national conference of the writers took place.⁸³ The idea of the reconciliation of the past was reflected in the election of the governing body of the event. It included prominent communists such as Todor Pavlov and authors from the prewar period such as Dora Gabe, Elin Pelin, and Elisaveta Bagryana. However, the staged character of that reconciliation is evidenced by the different destiny of two of the participants in the conference – Nilkolai Liliev and Krum Kyulyavkov. For the former, who belonged to *Zlatorog* and was one of most renowned poets of the interwar period, the appearance at the conference was followed by a decade of exclusion from public life. On the contrary, Kyulyavkov, who during this meeting attacked European cultural life and denounced it as aesthetic formalism, soon after its conclusion became the head of the Ideological Department in the State Security.

The attack against the presence of the communists in every sector of society which was published by Kunev in *Zemedelsko Zname*, represented the most openly expressed position of dissent between 1946 and 1947. He started publishing a weekly column entitled “Small and insignificant as a camel”. As pointed out by the literary critic Tzveta Trifonova, the metaphorical meaning of the title was actually

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 19-25.

aimed to underline the idea of these articles – to depict the most controversial aspects of political life.⁸⁴ Kunev criticized the violence and the terror used by the communists against the opposition.

In order to enhance his arguments, Kunev used examples from the literary tradition. He wrote a modernized version of the satiric novel of Aleko Konstantinov, *Bai Ganyo*. Within it, he depicted the communist power wielders as “the hungry grandsons of Bai Ganyo” and practically matched the communist New Age with the Balkanization of the late 19th century. Kunev also personally attacked the fallacy of both non-communist and communist writers. In his review of the National Conference of the Writers, Kunev provided images of some of the most devoted communist writers standing alongside the Minister of Education in the 1938’s pro-fascist Bulgarian government. In addition he reminded his readers that many of his colleagues who now collaborated with the communist regime had signed a proclamation in support of King Boris III less than ten years previously.⁸⁵ Kunev’s article highlighted a major characteristic of intellectual life in Bulgaria – namely the long lasting tradition of close contact between Bulgarian intellectuals and the power wielders.

In 1946, Kunev republished his articles in a single volume. In the foreword, he described the communist writers as “Krum Kilyavkov’s golden horde”. In response, Georgi Karaslavov, Todor Pavlov and Boris Delchev furiously attacked him, calling him a scoundrel, vulture, collaborator, and gangster. Afterwards, Kunev had to stand trial, but the political context and the international recognition of the Agrarian Party allowed him to escape severe sanctions.

The pressure on Kunev was part of a new wave of repression against writers. The oppression was carried out in Bulgaria by the domestic political leadership through a process called domestic clarification

⁸⁴ Cveta Trifonova, *Pisateli i dosieta*, p. 122.

⁸⁵ Vladimir Migevev, *Bulgarskite pisateli*, p. 20.

and implication. The person who executed this task was Pantalei Zarev. In the prewar period, he had never been highly regarded as a writer, but his activity in the resistance guaranteed him the position of an important communist apologist after 1945. In his clarifying speech, he underlined the two most important changes which must take place in accordance with what the Soviet Union required. Firstly, Zarev pointed out that the aesthetic norms of Soviet art – related to both form and content must define art as such for all the people in the whole world. Secondly, he defined the concept of freedom as part of the repertoire of the retrograde forces.⁸⁶ Zarev's speech not only highlighted the colonial status of domestic culture, but it had also aligned the concept of "artistic freedom" with the concept of "exaggerated Bulgarian chauvinism" as a part of the communist discourse through which the regime aimed to depict the enemy of the state. As a result, in the next four decades, the importance of "real" socialism was to be used as an argument against an "artistic freedom" attached to the fascist past.

In his speech before Parliament at the end of 1946, Georgi Dimitrov enumerated the "quality writers" in Bulgaria. Those authors whose names were not read out by the communist leader became targets of political accusations and persecution. But the regime provided a chance for the ostracized writers to recant. Some of them took up this opportunity and decided to put an end to the isolation to which they were condemned, once they had been defined as enemies. Redemption was achieved through a process of self-criticism, during which the author was supposed to condemn his own activity in the pre-communist era and embrace "the new communist epoch".

Slavcho Krasinsky was one of those writers who literally reignited his life with this tactic of self-criticism. In 1946, he was released from prison and wrote an article under the title "We are splitting up

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

with an epoch in which we did not have the courage to be its enemies.”⁸⁷ This text was an eloquent example of the discourse of self-criticism as a mechanism of redemption.⁸⁸ Also, it evidenced the troubled experience of the prewar intelligentsia. In his reflection on the nature of Bulgarian intellectual life in the 1930s, Dr. David Jeroham claims that after 1944 the prewar generation had experienced an unspoken sense of guilt which was the direct outcome of the fact that they had not stood up against the evil of the epoch – Nazism.⁸⁹

At end of 1947, the debacle of the political opposition was followed by the trial of Trifon Kunev. Unlike 1946, the writer did not defend himself, like Krasinsky he accepted his alleged wrongdoings, and tried to diminish his guilt calling it a misunderstanding which appeared as a result of the political context.⁹⁰ Despite his attempts to recant, on November 1, 1947, Kunev was sentenced to five years’ solitary confinement.

In April 1948, during a plenary meeting of the CC of the BCP, a new course of Sovietization was officially approved. The Central Committee demanded an intensification of the class struggle and an increase in the revolutionary vigilance in the sphere of culture. During the next meeting of the Writers’ Union, these ideas were misread by some members when they attacked the communist writers Nikola Furnadzhiev and Lalyo Ponchev, accusing them of anti-communist writings in the pre-war period. Much to their surprise, the organizers of the attack were severely criticized by the chairman of the Union, Hristo Radevsky. He accused them of sectarianism and his position on this matter highlighted the fact that any activity which was not coordinated within the structures of democratic centralism was to be treated as

⁸⁷ Prinudeni tekstove. Samokritika na bulgarski pisateli, ed. Plamen Doinov, (Sofia: Ciela, 2010), pp. 67-70.

⁸⁸ Cveta Trifonova, Pisateli i dosieta, p. 374.

⁸⁹ Ivaila Alexandrova, Goreshto cherveno, p. 350.

⁹⁰ Cveta Trifonova, Pisateli i dosieta, p. 155.

anti-party behavior. The intercession of Radevsky was aimed at preventing the appearance of internal conflicts within the organization which might shatter its unity.

At the end of 1948, the Fifth Congress of the BCP made the new political situation official. Writers were now given specific tasks. When referring to processes of transformation within the intelligentsia, the communist leader Chervenkov said that writers must now stand at the forefront of literature – they must denounce the old, bourgeois authors. They must guide young writers and literary critics to write according to the tenets of socialist realism.⁹¹

In this period, the communist regime in Bulgaria proved the theory of Tzvetan Todorov about the role of the past as a servant of the totalitarian doctrine.⁹² An article of Alexander Obretenov commemorating Ivan Vazov represented this reconciliation between the literary tradition and the present political situation. Obretenov connected Vazov with the cult of the Soviet Union by creating the following chain of dependencies: “Vazov’s admiration of our people is connected with his admiration of Slavonic world and in particular of our liberator – the Russian people.”⁹³ Vazov was also classified as a person unmasking tyrants.⁹⁴ This argument was evidence of a semantic shift in the interpretation of the texts of Vazov – the meaning of the word tyrant used by Vazov in relation to the Ottoman oppressors was changed to denote the enemies of the communist state, mainly the leaders of the western world. In the final part, Vazov was now seen as “spokesman for truth, knowledge and progress.”⁹⁵

The speech of Vulko Chervenkov during his meeting with the writers which took place on January

⁹¹ Vladimir Migevev, *Bulgarskite Pisатели*, p. 53.

⁹² Tzvetan Todorov, *Hope and Memory*, (London: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 65.

⁹³ *Literaturen Front*, 25. 09. 1948, p. 2.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

28, 1949 also reflected this process of assimilation of the past. Firstly, the communist leader defended the actual system of democratic centralism: “The argumentation that literature and art were not supposed to be controlled by one central body of power actually represent a bourgeois view about pure art.”⁹⁶ However, after underlining the importance of control, he transformed himself into a defender of the literary tradition “Our literature did not begin after 9 September”, said Chervenkov, “it relied on authors such as Petko Slaveikov, Hristo Botev, Ivan Vazov, Pencho Slaveikov, Elin Pelin, Peyo Yavorov, Hristo Smirnensky and Nikola Vapzarov. They constitute our national heritage which needs to be preserved.”⁹⁷

The process of reconciliation continued during the next meeting of the Writers’ Union, which took place in March 1949. Pantaley Zarev presented a report in which he highlighted the importance of an appropriate evaluation of the Bulgarian cultural heritage.⁹⁸ Consequently, the prewar writers Elisaveta Bagryana and Elin Pelin were elected members of the new leadership of the Writers’ Union. The whole paradigm of the political maneuvering between the past and the present and the idea of educating the artists rather than purging⁹⁹ them soon underwent some changes due to the Stalinist purges in Eastern Europe.

The political trials of Traicho Kostov and others set up the stage for similar actions within the Writers’ Union. On the basis of the model used in the People’s Courts, writers were asked to testify against and discredit each other.¹⁰⁰ As a result, accusations based on slander turned into important testimonies on the basis of which the party proposed that the communist writers Todor Borov, Peter Slavinsky, Atanas Dushkov, and Svetoslav Minkov were to be expelled. This final list was approved by

⁹⁶ Vladimir Migev, *Bulgarskite Pisатели*, p. 66.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁹⁸ *Prinudeni tekstove. Samokritika na bulgarski Pisатели*, p. 120.

⁹⁹ Vladimir Migev, *Bulgarskite Pisатели*, p. 68.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 68-71.

Hristo Radevski and Pantaley Zarev.

The list was based on trumped up charges. The accusations were related to the pre-1944 activity and varied from “talking against the communists” or “requesting travel to Fascist Germany” to “participating in the defeat of the 1923 communist insurrection”. There were also some brutal personal attacks, such as the accusation that the mother of Todor Genov had had a love affair with the governor of his native town.

During a staged meeting which took place between 6th and 7th April, 1950, most of the accused accepted the accusations. In this manner, Orlin Vasilev asked the organization to allow him to prepare for the next meeting a text of his complete and systematic self-criticism. Peter Slavinsky and Svetoslav Minkov admitted their guilt and left their destiny in the hand of the organization. These writers were fully aware that if they refuted the accusations, that would have meant confrontation, while if they recanted and accepted the accusations that would give them a chance of survival. The strategy of avoiding a conflict proved successful, they were pardoned and kept their posts in the Writers’ Union and their Communist Party membership.

However, Atanas Dushkov rejected the accusations and openly confronted the arguments of the accusers. His speech was in total contrast to the dominating mood of inescapable conformity. He talked about shame and confusion - words which expressed his individual experience - he refused to collude with the collective body on whose verdict he depended. Dushkov’s rebellion resulted in his expulsion from the Writer’s Union and the Communist Party.

At end of April 1950, the young writer Bogomil Rainov presented a report called “The ideology of capitalism and its remnants in our literature”. The writers were frightened when seeing what had happened to Dushkov and they performed the tasks of accepting their guilt without hesitation. In his

speech, Nikola Furnazhiev admitted that lack of open political engagement and his leanings towards bourgeois ideas of creative freedom, symbolism and pessimism in his prewar writings were his gravest sin. The complete surrender of the author was evident in the following statement: “The writers who speak most often about apolitical art and who produced the purest of works in their real life are the most dull and implacable enemies of progress. Very often, these heads which appear to be in the clouds in reality hide the darkest thoughts of an evil predator. In the context of our days, individualism leads to fascism.”¹⁰¹ This statement made by highly talented Bulgarian writer constituted evidence that the totalitarian construct of the present had won over the literary tradition of the 1930s, both politically and linguistically. Also, after 30 years of polemics about the role of the arts, in which Furnajiev himself had participated, the totalitarian state imposed political engagement and condemned the aesthetic position.

After 1950, Vulko Chervenkov came to be omnipresent in the cultural sphere. In 1950, he personally attacked the painter Alexander Zhendov. The reason for this was a letter sent to him by Zhendov in March of the same year in which the famous artist and member of the Communist Party expressed his concerns with regard to the situation in cultural life - the suppression of criticism and a general mood of disillusionment amongst the intelligentsia. The letter represented constructive criticism and the fact that it was not public underlined its non-subversive character. The communist leader, however, condemned Zhendov in a speech given on 26 May, 1950. He accused him of an individualistic and bourgeois revolt aimed both against the Communist Party and against its criticism of decaying Western-European culture. The following words of Chervenkov highlighted the situation in Bulgarian cultural life, six years after the communist coup: “I ask Alexander Zhendov: what are you crying for? What is not enough for you in our situation? Obviously you cry for that capitalistic freedom of artistic creativity, for the wreckage of the

¹⁰¹ Prinudeni tekstove. Samokritika na bulgarski pisateli, p. 124.

capitalist life style. What kind of ‘freedom’ was not enough for you, Alexander Zhendov? You want freedom, but freedom from what and from whom? Obviously it is freedom from the party and its policy, from its ideological struggle for socialist realism. Well. Then you can go to hell. The party can only benefit when frees itself from the presence of such lovers of ‘freedom’ like you.”¹⁰²

The speech was followed by a staged meeting of the Painters’ Union where Zhendov was expelled, and consequently he lost his Communist party membership. As a result, he experienced deep social isolation, causing him severe depression and within three years, he died. In one of the few conversations with a friend, the famous Bulgarian writer Chudomir, Zhendov shared his situation: “You have no idea what is like to fall out of grace and to be stigmatized. The majority of the people I know, if they see me on the street would cross over to the other side, and if by accident we met, they would pretend they never knew me. The rest, the closest friends, it is me who is avoiding them, so not to put them in jeopardy - and so, complete isolation.”¹⁰³

The situation with the painter Zhendov concludes the whole gamut of practices used by the regime in its conflicts with the intellectuals. Chervenkov’s speech about Zhendov consists of sarcastic personal attacks, similar to these hurled at Kunev, such as “who do you think you are” and “go to hell”. These attacks are mixed with the official language of accusations. Zhendov is accused of attacking the socialist order from bourgeois positions. The denouncement of Zhendov reconfirmed the system of democratic centralism in which these discussions related to the political and social life were disseminated top to bottom.

This period witnessed the merging of contact and conflict. Through the vehicle of democratic

¹⁰² Borbi chistki v BKP: 1949-1953, Documenti i materiali, (Sofia: Central State Archives in Bulgaria 2001), pp. 261-263.

¹⁰³ Kazunlushka Pravda, Vol.5, May. 1965, p. 3.

centralism, the political leadership was able to conduct personal purges without turning this into a chaotic 'witch-hunt'. Only those in the highest ranks of the communist state were allowed to initiate confrontation. This was most vividly highlighted by the activity of the communist leader Chervenkov. He was the one who embodied the harmonization between the past and the present both in relation to people and to ideas. In other words, the model described by Todorov was complete.

The writers realized that they must accommodate to the new reality imposed by the regime. The case of Alexander Zhendov showed what happened to those who dared to contradict authorities. As a result, the prewar generation was trapped in a dependence on the so-called collective will, executed by a narrow circle of power wielders. The dependence affected both the political and artistic past of each writer.

In addition, at the end of the decade, language became an instrument for establishing contact with political reality. There were contact words: guilt, understanding, anger, or enemy, all of which connected the individual with the collective. On the other hand, there were conflict words - shame, confusion, or disillusionment, which represented for the regime an act of deliberate subversion, and an attack against the socialist community.

Within the sphere of actual literature, the novel *Tobacco*, written by Dimitar Dimov, became one of the most controversial landmarks during the socialist era in Bulgaria. The process of the writing of this novel was influenced by different political periods. Dimov wrote the novel between September 1946 and January 1949. It was published at the end of 1951. Its success was extreme and *Tobacco* was warmly welcomed by the public.

Dimov sent a copy of the published work to the party leader Vulko Chervenkov. The communist leader responded with a letter of approval: "I congratulate you from the bottom of my heart. Thank you

for sending it to me. I am reading it with deep satisfaction and a great deal of delight over our contemporary literature and your personal success.”¹⁰⁴

Critics vary in their analysis of the positive reaction of Chervenkov. The dissident writer Georgi Markov pointed out that the communist leader had attempted to do what was expected of him and to comply¹⁰⁵ with the Soviet calls for better quality in literature. On the other hand, the historian Vladimir Migev sees Chervenkov’s reaction as an attempt to gain personal credit from the success of the novel.¹⁰⁶ However, Chervenkov reacted fully in line with his style of personal communication with the intellectuals and with his policy known as the carrot and the stick.

The Writers’ Union seemed to disregard the positive reaction of Chervenkov. The novel became an object of serious discussions during the next two meetings of the organization. After a heated debate with 10 people voting against the work and 7 voting for it, the leadership of the Union removed the novel from the list of works proposed for a state award. On the opinion of the critics, the author had infringed the rules of socialist realism and weakened the positive image of the communist movement. However, one of the votes in favor of Dimov was that of the chairman of the Writers’ Union, Hristo Radevsky.¹⁰⁷ This meant that the criticism against *Tobacco* was not supported by the two major power wielders within the regime – the Communist party leader and the chairman of the Writers’ Union. The fact that the critics of *Tobacco* ignored the principles of democratic centralism, disregarding Radevsky’s and Chervenkov’s praise for the novel, was to be punished.

Vulko Chervenkov publicly responded to the situation with an article in *Literaturen front*. The title

¹⁰⁴ Archivut na Dimitar Dimov, ed. Ekaterina Ivanova, (Sofia: Garmond, 2009) p. 230.

¹⁰⁵ Georgi Markov, *Zadochni Reportazhi*, (Sofia: Ciela, 2000), pp. 202-204.

¹⁰⁶ Vladimir Migev, *Bulgarskite pisатели*, p. 79.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

was: “On the novel *Tobacco* and its unfortunate critics”. In the article, the communist leader criticized dogmatism in Bulgarian literature as represented by the critics of the novel. He underlined the fact that the Communist regime had now been in power for ten years and yet had not produced high quality literature. Nevertheless, Chervenkov accepted some of the ideological criticism – he did admit that the Communist Party was not represented in a proper manner and that the work had not fulfilled its political task. He suggested to the author that he should rewrite his work in close collaboration with the literary critic Yako Molkhov.

The position of Vulko Chervenkov during the *Tobacco* controversy revealed the accomplished image of a party leader from the period of the cult of personality. On the one hand, he defended the writer against his critics. On the other, the communist dictator did retain his ultimate authority and reconfirmed the principles according to which literature should be written and criticized in communist Bulgaria. Therefore, he became brutally involved in the literary process by urging Dimitar Dimov to rewrite his novel under the scrutinizing presence of Molhov. At the same time, those who attacked the novel were forced to produce public self-criticism, as Alexander Gerov did: “I felt great satisfaction when this (Chervenkov’s) article revealed all my previous doubts and hesitations. I felt ashamed that I had not seen these things before and I had missed what makes a great artistic work.”¹⁰⁸

In Czechoslovakia, the Košice program placed special attention on “the formation of the citizen of the new country.”¹⁰⁹ The post 1945 drive towards state propaganda increased the political role of the intellectuals. The National Front enhanced the social prestige of writers. As a result the Ministry of Information handed over much of the power to three writers – František Halas was responsible for the

¹⁰⁸ Prinudeni tekstove, p. 155.

¹⁰⁹ Pavel Janoušek, *Dějiny české literatury 1945 – 1989, díl 1944 – 1948*, (Prague: Academia, 2007), p. 26.

publishing houses, Vítězslav Nezval for the cinema and Ivan Olbracht was in charge of the National Radio. The status of writers was reconfirmed by recognizing continuity with pre-1939 Czechoslovakia. Thus, the Syndicate of Czech Writers (Syndikát českých spisovatelů) was re-established in 1945 under the leadership of František Halas and Václav Černý.

However, the Syndicate actively collaborated in the process of searching for the enemy and officially supported the People's Courts. The activity of the Syndicate was part of what the Czech literary historian Michael Bauer defined as pre-February 1948 purges.¹¹⁰ As was the case with the Bulgarian writers, the process was conducted in close contact between the writers' organization and State Security. The former provided the information about the culprits and on that basis the latter prepared the accusations. In contrast with Bulgaria, however, where the process was accomplished in the span of less than a year, the pre-February cleansing of collaborators of the Nazi regime in Czechoslovakia took two and in some cases even three years.¹¹¹

The main difference between the writers in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia was the scope and the nature of the debates. The historian Bradley Abrams characterizes the period from 1944-1948 in Czechoslovakia as a period of a "struggle for the soul of the nation"¹¹² while Alfred French labelled it "the battle of the books". In French's view there was an ideological clash between different interpretations of the concept of "truth". For the liberals, truth was a vague concept - a matter of observation, faith and conscience, while for the communists it had a pre-fabricated character – it was based on the norms proclaimed by

¹¹⁰ Michal Bauer, *Ideologie a paměť: Literatura a Instituce na přelomu 40. a 50. let 20. století* (Prague: H&H, 2003), p. 11.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² Bradley Abrams, *The Struggle for the soul of the nation: Czech Culture and the Rise of Communism*, (New York: Rowan and Litterfield Publishing group, 2004).

Zhdanov in 1934.¹¹³ Abrams focused on the conflict between communists and non-communists concerning the Czechoslovak situation. In his opinion, although rigid in character, the arguments of the communist intellectuals were more coherent and comprehensible than those of their opponents. The communists were very powerful in their attack on the recent past. They argued that Munich 1938 was a plot of the Western allies and defined the post-1945 era as a new beginning and a part of a historical *époque* leading to communism. Here they incorporated the historical roots of a Slavic nation as they proclaimed that the future belonged to the East and to the Slavic world, guided by the Soviet Union.¹¹⁴

The transformation of Syndicate of Czechoslovak Writers from a professional into an ideological organization was a major step towards the unification of the writers.¹¹⁵ Also, this meant a transition from a period of artistic independence to political uniformity. The process of the communist takeover of the writers' organization started in April 1948 with the conference of National Culture and was completed in 1949 with the establishment of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union (Svaz Československých spisovatelů). From the outset, the new organization declared its major priorities – an antagonistic approach towards the “terror of modernism”, subordination of the artist to the interest of the collective and the writer's political engagement. In his address to the meeting, the Prime Minister Antonín Zápotocký repeated a slogan used by the Writers' Union in Bulgaria since 1944, namely that the writers need to get closer to the people. The head of the Communist Party Gottwald declared that the period of clarification was over and the writers must now support the Communist Party.¹¹⁶

During the wave of purges in the period 1948-1950, the accusations ranged from sympathy for

¹¹³ Alfred French, *Czech Writers and Politics*, p. 31.

¹¹⁴ Bradley Abrams, *The Struggle for the soul of the nation: Czech Culture and the Rise of Communism*, pp. 104 – 117.

¹¹⁵ Michal Bauer, *Ideologie a paměť* p. 15.

¹¹⁶ Pavel Janoušek, *Dějiny české literatury 1948 – 1958*, (Prague: Academia, 2007), p. 16.

Masarykian democracy or Catholicism to close relations with the conservative circles in the province. In addition, the post-1944 activity of communist devotees was turned into an object of accusations.¹¹⁷

The case of the journalist Michal Mareš showed the mixing of the pre-and post-1948 trajectory of guilt. Mareš was sentenced to seven years both because of his anarchic-communist past and due to his reportages about the displacement of the German citizens, published in the period 1946-1947. Accusations of espionage, introduced as a consequence of the split between the Soviets and Tito, were used against Josef Pavlíček and Jiří Mucha. They were sentenced for providing information to western powers.

The political show trial of the General Secretary of the CPCz Rudolf Slánský was a decisive factor in the struggle for power within the Czechoslovak Writers' Union. In 1951, the existing leadership of Jan Drda was attacked by a group led by Jiří Taufer and Ladislav Štoll, who were close to the minister of information Václav Kopecký. Not surprisingly, the latter issued an official letter suggesting that the new members must be included in the leadership of the Union. The minister of information argued that "the current leadership did not fully respond to the tasks and aims of our literature and needs to be completed with new members that would enforce the ideological and working force of the Union".¹¹⁸ Although Drda had preserved his position of a chairman of the Czechoslovak Writers Union, a new governing body was established with the dominant roles of Štoll and Taufer.

On the other hand, under the slogan of anti-slánskýism, some authors had tried to tackle the actual problems of the literary scene, especially dogmatism in literature. Alfred French thus suggested that on

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 40.

¹¹⁸ Michal Bauer, *Ideologie a paměť*, p. 277.

the Czechoslovakian literary scene, the actual de-stalinization started already in the period 1951-1952.¹¹⁹ Nevertheless, the impact of Slansky's case revealed a number of conflicts within the structure of the Writers' Union which were related for the struggle for control of the literary scene.

The Literary Text and Political Reality: The Novel *Tobacco* in the Context of the Battle for the Past

Plot and Structure

In ideological terms, the novel develops around the ideological conflict between the world of the capitalists and the world of the proletariat. The first part takes place in the 1930s as the author describes the functioning of the capitalist system in Bulgaria through the story of a major Tobacco Company. The second layer of this ideological constellation illustrates the resistance movement in Bulgaria during its formative period (1934-1939). In doing so, the author unveils the conflicts which existed among the communist affiliates. The first part of the novel represents a transitional period in which the focus is on the capitalist world. In the second part, the historical context would change drastically and the two camps would get into a direct conflict. The chain of events also follows the chronological order set by the early communist historiography.

Outside of that framework the novel unfolds around the troubled love between Boris and Irina. The former is an ambitious young man determined to succeed in the struggle for power and money, the latter is an independent young woman whose passion for medicine brings her to study in Sofia. The relationship

¹¹⁹ Alfred French, *Czech Writers and Politics*, p. 84.

of Boris and Irina follows a traditional pattern - from adoration to complete alienation followed by hatred and contempt. However, the dynamics set by the social context and the change of the spaces turns their relationship in a journey into the last years of the pre-war economical elite.

Time and Space

In the first part of the novel, the events are taking place in the time from the aftermath of the 1929 economic crisis to the outbreak of World War II. The story follows the transition of the country's economic system and the leading role of the German capital in this process. Historically, at the beginning of the 1930s Bulgaria exited the Golden Bloc and entered a financial system called Clearing. In his recent study of Bulgarian capitalism, the historian Rumen Avramov argues that this was due to "the range of opportunities in front of a small state during a period of an unclear international doctrine and a non-centralized global economy."¹²⁰ In his opinion, Bulgaria's free choice proved to be fictitious and the decision about its economic course was the result of "a passive acceptance of a context which was imposed from abroad." In this connection, Dimov's evaluation coincides with this framework.

In the 1950s, the Communist Party's interpretation of the events from the 1930s was unclear. Firstly, the 1930s were pointed out as a decade that had to be the opposite of the new epoch of the construction of socialism. In order to include different segments of society in that conflict, the regime's historiography coined the term a Monarchist-Fascist regime. The number of people included in that denotation ranged from cultural figures to local leaders and the institution of the Monarch itself. This served the needs of the totalitarian regime to illustrate not only a class confrontation but also to generate personal contempt

¹²⁰ Rumen Avramov, *Komunalen kapitalizum*, (Sofia: Bulgarska nauka i kultura, 2007), p. 36.

towards certain members of the pre-war social elites. In the novel Dimitar Dimov acknowledges the official line – *Tobacco* traces the life of the people related to the world of power and money, while also following the development of the progressive forces. What generates the subversive character of the novel is the fact that the author has fractured the unity of these groups and that he has revealed a detailed picture of the times before 1944 by avoiding the judgmental language of totalitarian propaganda.

The novel unfolds in three main spaces with certain ideological meaning attached to them – the small town; the capital; and the territory of Greece. In the first space, the small town represents the home of a particular strata of society pointed out by the communist regime as dangerous and as a bearer of the remnants of the past. On the one hand, the misery is expressed in Boris's fear of poverty nurtured in his upbringing. On the other hand, with her decision to study medicine, Irina leaves that space which the new regime sees as a hotbed of narrow mindedness and of traditional family values.

The capital city is described as the central point of the exploiters. With its political buildings and numerous bars and brothels, Sofia is characterized by an antagonizing atmosphere of power and lust. However, the big city is also a place where one can see the ferment of the revolution. Its suburban areas are inhabited by the resistance fighters. The space where the final stage of the novel takes place is Thessaloniki, in Greece. In the context of the late 1940s, Greece is a place where the last communist revolution in Europe failed. Moreover, Greece is a lynchpin in the conflict of the Cold War. What creates controversy in the choice of this location is the fact the territory of Greece south of the Bulgarian border was inhabited by the Bulgarian population at the beginning of the 20th century and represented an important part of the national question in the years after 1914. In this respect, a number of depictions in the novel contain a number of nationalistic connotations – a topic normally avoided in the late 1940s and the early 1950s.

The Characters and the Past

The owners of big companies were among the first victims after the communist takeover in Bulgaria. At first glance, it appears that Dimov transmits that judgment into the character of Boris Morev. He is depicted as a bleak personality who openly shows his disdain of the people around him. However, the author's eagerness to understand the foundation of the class enemy's anti-social behavior contrasts with his general stigmatization of this character. "His natural loathing of the world, intensified by his poverty, was not to be affected by his fear of moral decline but by the possibility of a miserable financial reward...At that moment tobacco's golden image shone on him. And he realized that with the use of his bright mind and open contempt of the people, he might be able to wield power over them."¹²¹ In the first part of the novel, Boris sets out to accomplish his capitalist dream without engaging in anything other than pursuing a financial success. The ambition of establishing Niccotiana as the largest tobacco company in the Balkans forces him to collaborate with Nazi Germany's Tobacco State Company. Otherwise, Boris openly expresses his contempt of his German business partners and their ideology. In this respect the image of Boris is different from that of a typical class enemy and their admiration of the Nazis.

Lenin defined the potential threat to the Bolshevik power as follows: "Clearly, in order to abolish classes completely it is not enough to overthrow the exploiters, landowners and capitalists, not enough to abolish their property; it is necessary to abolish all private ownership of the means of production, it is necessary to abolish the distinction between town and country as well as the distinction between manual workers and brain workers. This is a very long process. In order to achieve it an enormous step forward

¹²¹ Dimitar Dimov, Tyutyun, (Sofia: Ciela, 2009), p. 15.

must be taken in developing the productive forces; it is necessary to overcome the resistance (frequently passive, which is particularly stubborn and particularly difficult to overcome) of the numerous remnants of small scale production; it is necessary to overcome the enormous force of habit and of the conservatives which are connected with these remnants”.

Irina’s character resembles the archetype of the resistance against the communists in the small town which continued through the late 1940s and early 1950s. She is the only daughter of a respected local policeman. Her burden of family values, however, is contrasted with her awareness of her beauty and with her straightforward mindset “If her untainted body did not possess that strength and vigorousness and if nature had not generously bestowed her with physical charm and the ability of coquetry that attracted every man, she would have had numerous melancholic outbursts. But, even in this world ruled by narrow-mindedness, the effect she had over men filled her up with joy. She was aware that her intelligence and her beauty were more valuable than if her father was a doctor or a lawyer.”¹²²

Along with the class enemy, the foreign enemy was important part of the post 1944 propaganda. Due to the peculiar character of the war-time period, it was not possible to depict the image of the enemy as a Nazi soldier or a member of the Gestapo. In this context the members of the German Oligarchy seemed the perfect target. On the one hand, they exemplified the class enemy – the capitalist, while on the other, they were also collaborators with the vicious Nazi regime. When depicting its representatives, Dimov, however, did not subordinate his narrative to the standards of ideological stigmatization. On the contrary, he created the image of those Germans who were born in the last decade of the 19th century and whose actions were driven by an ambition to accommodate their traditional values in the new historical context of Hitler’s Germany.

¹²² Ibid., p. 25.

Baron Lichtenfeld is a German aristocrat forced to serve a regime that has taken away his noble rights. He is lazy and despises any physical activity, while in the meantime continues dreaming of those days of the Weimar Republic when he used to go hunting or court beautiful women. “It was a bitter fact – a Lichtenfeld had to work. This was due to a series of social changes which came after World War I and also the result of his adventures with some actresses in the French Riviera.”¹²³ In that respect, he finds his presence in Bulgaria humiliating. “First of all, he was forced to take this job as a result of an unbearable lack of money and also because that was the only way in which, he was capable of including his persona in the work of millions of Germans contributing to the Reich’s greatness.”¹²⁴ Scholars dealing with the history of the Third Reich underlined the role of the German aristocracy as Hitler’s main rivals.

The central role in the novel, however, is given to the director of the German Papyrus Corporation, von Gayer. “All his personality brought the air of feudal romantics, he had the soul of an unanimated stone-hearted Prussian and the composure of a hard working German. If von Gayer was an embodiment of the spirit of a knight-brigand from the Middle Ages, Lichtenfeld resembled a degenerated courtier.”¹²⁵ The fact that the two were not denominated as parts of a collective image of the hostile German capitalist class underlined the fact that Dimov fractured the class image of this particular group.

The image of Maria – a sick daughter of a major entrepreneur plays a significant part in the first part of the novel. She is a motherless child who had to endure her father’s love affair with her best friend. Dimov’s depiction of Maria’s body shows the degradation of the class she belongs to. “Her grey eyes and her thin and bloodless lips were reminiscent of the melancholy of a rainy day. Her long legs were the only physically attractive part of her body but their effect was diminished by her boyish, cold-hearted

¹²³ Ibid., p. 46.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 50.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 54.

personality. She was neither happy nor unhappy. Occasionally and with a silent irony of a philosopher, she would define herself a worthless belonging”.¹²⁶ Instead of focusing on her position inside the corrupt social strata of capitalism she is represented as a demented woman able to see through the immorality that surrounds her. Her only power is recognition because neither in body nor in her mind can she act against the reality around her. In addition, she is used by Boris in order for him to get to the business of her father. Boris marries Maria and both of them are aware of the corrupt nature of their relationship.

Resistance before 1941

The unclear character of the activities of the Communist party in the 1930s remained a challenge for communist apologetics during the 1950s. This was due to the communists' absence from political life after 1924 and the transformation of the Communist Party into an emigrant organization. Also, the situation worsened after the Nazi-Soviet pact of 1938 – a fact that remained hidden from the official historiography. Therefore, literary works and films depicted mainly the communist activity after the 1941 Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union. In these circumstances, Dimov focuses on characters whose ideological background did not allow them to take a leading role in the Communist Party's illegal activity but who sympathized with the Party's ideas. Therefore, when depicting the events in the 1930s, Dimov focuses on two characters whose predisposition would not allow them to become leading communists. Stefan and Max represent a group of communist believers who were excluded from the structures of the underground movement.

What prevents Stefan from becoming a communist is the fact that he is the brother of Boris, the

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 55.

capitalist. Therefore, in order to become a proper communist, Stefan would have to overcome the burden of his class origin and that of his brother's status. Not only is he in conflict with his family, but also with his fellow communists who do not trust him and rejected him. The first part of the novel follows the attempts of Stefan to escape his past, leading him to a tragic end. The position of Max is similar, although with the additional element of the role of ethnicity, because he is a Jew. The literary representation of Jews was a major problem in post-war Bulgaria. The protection of the Bulgarian Jews during the early 1940s by the government was omitted in the communist historiography. In addition, the presence of a large Jewish community of small business circles in pre-war Bulgaria would ideologically set many Jews apart from the anti-capitalist resistance movement. It was in these difficult circumstances that Dimov masterfully constructed this Jewish character in the novel. "He came from a poor family and his ancestors were from a large Jewish network that existed throughout different parts of Bulgaria. The position of Max was at the bottom of a social pyramid next to the tinsmiths. On the top there were the bankers. He was as poor as a tinsmith and as intelligent as a Ravi; what made him different from the doctors and lawyers was his impracticality."¹²⁷ Similarly to Stefan, Max is a victim of mistrust from the local communists. Both are rejected on the basis of prejudice which Dimov openly highlighted at a time when the system of recruitment by the communists was also based on trumped-up evidence.

Groupings and Contradictions

Incoherence within the two camps plays an important role in Dimov's subversive narrative. When he depicts a meeting between the two women in Boris's life - Irina and Maria, Dimov describes these two women as being in different stage of their relationship with the world of capitalism. The former is an

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 82

outsider who is taking her first steps in this new world of power and money, while the latter has been part of it for her whole life. In this relation, the main contrast is portrayed as between Irina's vitality and Maria's physical and mental degeneration. Again, the class conflict was present because the meeting between the two was between the daughter of a teacher and the daughter of a capitalist entrepreneur. When entering Maria's house, Irina is depicted as capable of grasping the difference between her own world and that of Maria. "On the one side, there was that immense power of money and of those accumulating it; on the other, there was that hard labor and constant patience of thousands self-righteous affected by their stupidity human beings who used to treat their destiny as a natural fact and uncomplainingly obeyed their masters".¹²⁸ Irina is about to come into the service to the Oligarchy and therefore repeat Maria's tragic destiny. However, at the time of this meeting she is still able to realize her powerlessness against the power of money and luxury.

The disunity within the resistance movement of the 1930s is demonstrated via a meeting of the representatives of the Central Committee of the underground Communist Party with local communists. The purpose of the meeting is to prepare a strike in Niccotiana. At that stage in the international communist movement, the leaders of the Communist Party demand a centralization of the process and a revolution that must establish a Dictatorship of the Proletariat. They oppose mere occasional acts of sabotage and are also against collaboration with the representatives of the political parties from the pre-war period, the Agrarian Party and the Social democrats. In the context of this approach, Max openly challenges the official line: "We are detached, we have become self-assertive and encapsulated; we have secluded ourselves in some kind of a revolutionary romanticism... That ideological relentlessness, that stubbornness and literalism is what we call, in our own language of scientific communism, dogmatism.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 102.

Dogmatism is a sign of fear and poverty of the mind, rather than power”.¹²⁹ Of course Max’s words are not welcomed and the leader of the communist group sends him away with a verdict “Your statement was good in form but wrong in content.”¹³⁰

The two worlds colliding

Despite the Communist camp’s initial rejection a strike takes place in Niccotiana. After Boris and the board of Niccotiana have neglected the wishes of the workers, the latter gather in a spontaneous demonstration in the center of the town. Irina’s father is called to take charge of the local police force set against the demonstrators. Again his image differs from the stereotypical image of a merciless agent of the oligarchy. Like his daughter, he is aware of the situation and has no illusions about the immorality that surrounds him. His thoughts, expressed just before he is called upon to smash the strike, reveal a structure of power he is forced to deal with: “First in the line, there was the district constable; above him there was the sheriff, above the sheriff there was a minister, above the minister it was the government and on top there was an invisible, almighty and merciless mafia.”¹³¹ Like Irina, her father is incapable of deserting his position and confronting the world of power. While he tries to peacefully resolve the tensions, a shout from the crowd mocks his morality by mentioning the relationship between Irina and Boris. The father loses his nerve and this ignites a skirmish. As a result of the violence he is killed. He is depicted as a policeman with realistic view of socio-political reality. He is being forced to use violence not out of political duty or because of hatred to the ordinary people, but because of his understanding of moral

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 80.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 85.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 120.

values.

After the Party meeting in which he is told by his comrades to shut up, Max is followed by the secret police and entrapped in his house. In order to preserve the secrecy of the Communist organization, he commits suicide. His death is not discussed in the novel. He is not idolized, but is removed from the narrative. Stefan faces a similar destiny. He is caught by the police and put into custody. The guards are aware of his relationship with Boris and restrain themselves from violence. In his final hours, Stefan is being torn apart by his own inability to act like the rest of the communist prisoners. He describes his cellmates: “Despite their simple origin, small pretensions and scarce education, these men were rugged and accomplished communists, real leaders of the hungry people.”¹³² Stefan gives up and contacts the assistant of his brother to arrange his release from prison. Already very sick, he dies before his release. It appears that from the perspective of the ideological dogmas of the 1950s, there is no future for Max and Stefan in the struggle against the oppressors. However, in the next part of the novel, Dimov introduces another brother of Boris and Stefan, Pavel. Pavel is not present in the first part of the novel and brings a new impulse in the part which tells the story of the mythological communist struggle in the early 1940s.

Four of the main characters die in the first part of the novel - Maria, Irina's father, Max, and Stefan. That conforms to the Communist Party's vision of historical predicament. The death of Maria reflects the downfall of her class with all her riches and melancholic outbursts. The death of Irina's father expresses the departure of the mentality formed around 19th century family values, in Marxist terms – of traditional family relations. Max and Stefan are part of this structure and therefore unable to lead the Communist Resistance. On the other hand, Dimov's analysis and representation of the conflicts contradicts the official Communist Party's literature. His revision of the 1930s fractures the mere dualism, proclaimed by the

¹³² Ibid., p. 135.

apologetics of the Zhdanov's principles. The internal conflicts are still present even in the so called glorious period of the communist movement in Bulgaria.

The second part of the novel follows the historical process. It starts when in 1941, the Nazi army passed through Bulgaria on its way to the southern front, and finishes with the communists' takeover in 1944. The two worlds respond in a different manner to these changes. The profile of the characters of the Capitalist world did not change drastically. The context gave an opportunity for Boris to take under its control the production of a leading Greek Tobacco Company. However, Dimov's representation of the resistance reflected that historical change related to the Nazi invasion in the Soviet Union. Not surprisingly, in that time the communist militants in Eastern Europe took center stage in the resistance. Control over their activity was conducted by the Third International. The leading communist organization ordered a unit of Bulgarian partisans to be sent in support of the Greek resistance. Here, the author mixes that space related to pre-1944 Bulgaria with the clash of the two worlds.

The Decay of Nicotiana and the Rise of the Communist Resistance

The position of the world of money in the class conflict remains central in the second part of the novel. Sofia is depicted as a place of entertainment of the elite in times of grave world crisis. This representation corresponds to the evaluation given. "Sofia has never been in that state of airily mood - candy stores and restaurants swarmed with elegant people; limousines with beautiful women and lofty gentlemen; Germans on motorcycles and military cars with its Axis' badges. The night life starts in cafeterias, continues in cabarets and whorehouses, and finishes when everyone is tired of all the screaming and shouting, then the

city falls into silence.”¹³³

Nothing is left of Boris’s energy and reason. He is depicted as mere alcoholic and lunatic. However, his stubbornness leads him to Greece where he hopes to sign a contract that will finally convert Niccotiana into the largest tobacco company in the Balkans. Irina dominates the second part of the novel. She became the focal point of the meeting between the two worlds. Even the death of her father did not shake her state of mind. In addition she has become a mistress for von Gayer. Despite her moral decline, Dimov depicts Irina’s duality. She is divided between her self-consciousness and outburst of apathy. “She felt a sudden desire to go back in those times of calmness and to wash all that mud she was covered in. But she realized that would never been possible. The mud had gotten too thick. The lust and egoism had grown into a force of habit. She was only capable of preventing herself from extreme forms of transgression, to respect other people’s dignity and not to act as bold and cunning as all those street whores used to do.”¹³⁴

The German characters also experienced changes. Von Gayer takes a central place in the narrative. Dimov takes away the judgmental contours of his image. Von Gayer is absorbed by his fascination with Irina and takes the image of an aging aristocrat enjoying what is probably the last love affair of his life. On the other hand, Dimov reflects on von Gayer’s disappointment with Hitler. After 1942, disunity in the Nazi camp reached its highest point as in 1943 a group of German aristocrats participated in organizing a coup against Hitler. The combining effect of politics and passion is reflected in von Gayer’s thoughts “He realized that these forces that turned him from a soldier into a retailer have turned Irina into indifferent and cosmopolitan rag. He knew that he was a slave of the corporations that ruled Germany. But now the

¹³³ Ibid., p. 130.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 140.

only thought in his mind was this woman standing next to him with her dead and wasted soul.”¹³⁵

As it was mentioned, the greatest change from the first part of the novel was the dogmatic representation of the Communist Resistance. All the existing tensions among the communists were omitted from the narrative. On the contrary, Dimov depicts a military organization with a strict hierarchy and leadership. Surprisingly, on its top is Pavel – the brother of Boris. He has spent most of his life in Republican Spain and the Soviet Union. His image reflects the mythological figure of the communist-emigrant. “That man was still a communist, but a different kind of communist: from a different school and from somewhere far in the free world, where the world was ruled by reason and predictability with no time for fanaticism.”¹³⁶

After his long absence, he visits his brother and remains surprised to see Irina. The meeting has the contours of both ideological discourse and eroticism. The corrupted body of Irina dressed in her nightgown against the strong features of a relentless communist leader. She felt under his physical charm, but he remained cold to her attempts of seducing him. She told him everything about his brother’s crimes, including the latter’s passive role during Stefan’s imprisonment. His distant reaction reflected the subjugation of his emotions to the communist struggle.

Historically, during the withdrawing of the Germans from Greece, the partisans controlled a territory between Kavala and Thessaloniki – a territory that was part of the ambitions of the Bulgarian foreign policy after the First Balkan War. When describing the resistance after 1941, Dimov focuses on its collective image. He shows the simplicity in the relations inside the group as their names are typical for people from the lowest social strata – Varvara, Michkin, Dinko and Shishko.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 150.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 160.

The change of the war's course defined the final outcome of the struggle between the two worlds. In a conversion just before Boris's death, Irina shares her predicament: "Our days are numbered. And our world will vanish along with us."¹³⁷ Soon afterwards Boris is on his death bed and the only person around him was the financial director of Niccotiana. Boris's screams and hallucinations are aimed to contextualize the horrifying end of the ruling class in Bulgaria. Similarly to Maria, the degeneration of his body represents the decay of an epoch.

Irina has to transfer the death body of her husband from Thessaloniki to Kavala. This puts her at the center of a direct confrontation between the two worlds. She is forced to meet her past. When the car with Boris' body is stopped by a patrolling partisan unit, one of its members recognizes Irina as the woman who saved his child a few years ago. She is asked to help a wounded member of the unit. The wounded partisan is one of her cousins. The meeting is a moment of revelation and reevaluation. Irina bursts into tears. Dimov depicts that moment of vulnerability as an act of coming to terms with one's political enemy. The funeral of Boris is the next scene, marking the vanishing of the old world. "The look of his face had lost its image, denying any sympathy. It was the face of a forgotten man whose passing away was of no importance to anyone and in those times of destruction it will be nothing more than a dog that died in the street."¹³⁸

Big changes follow quickly. The Red army entered Bulgaria and gave authority to the local communists. The latter were represented mainly by the partisans, while their political leadership was still in exile. After this victory of the communists, Irina restarts her practice and gives medical help to some members of the new power elite. She tries to rekindle her life but the unrequited love with Pavel marks

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 180.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 204.

her last days. She is unable interconnect with the new epoch. “All the hope and longing, slithering in her mind as a light leading to salvation, died away in the dark shadow of her past. Even after its fall, Niccotiana divides people. Even the smallest value of being human has gone to dust. Her vitality was running out.”¹³⁹

Irina’s death is announced to the reader in the form of a brief note, sent to Pavel to inform him about the death of his sister-in-law. His reaction is ideologically constructed. “The poison of Niccotiana exuded every fiber of her body and every corner of her soul. She was a corpse and leftover - the shadow of a woman, trying to save herself by poisoning him. He felt sorry for her but that did not grieve. She was just a woman who was bought and crushed by the oligarchy. It was the tyranny of the Oligarchy and the fight against it that was far more dramatic.”¹⁴⁰

Concluding Remarks

The subordination of the novel to the ruling notion of a class conflict is undoubted. In addition, the class conflict included a conflict between the old times and the new era of the victorious working class. The narrative develops in the scheme proclaimed by the Communist historiography as any activity in the 1930s was doomed until the historical conditions would allow the outbreak of the Revolution. In communist ideology, World War 2 was the surrogate of that Revolution. Not surprisingly, a resistance capable of overthrowing the capitalist class appeared only after 1939. That historical determinism is underpinned by the death of every protagonist related to the world of money and power exemplified by Niccotiana. These people were denied the chance of redemption. Having in mind the historical facts

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 234.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 250.

surrounding the People's Court, Dimov favored both the regime and his narrative by excluding the topic of what would have happened to the capitalists in the new world. The determinism surrounding the 1930s also included those members of the resistance whose loyalty to the Communist Party was questioned, in Lenin's words, by the force of habit. The author's judgmental language in relation to the socio-political elite is evident. Firstly, he imposed the notion of a dysfunctional bourgeoisie family. Secondly, he served the ruling idea of a collective guilt in his description of different sectors of the social life, especially the city's capital elite.

However, the moderate and in-depth depiction of the so called oppressors' camp represented a different approach than the proclamation of hatred typical for the first post-war decade. The author's sympathy towards Maria was visible in his description of her as a victim. Her tragic destiny developed in the context of a group of people obsessed with power and money. The judgmental language has been replaced by a detailed depiction of Boris's relations with his business partners. Boris was not only a vicious character, but also a confused mind. He is depicted as a complex personality in a turbulent social context that was no better than him. However, Irina remains the most vivid example of controversy in the novel. Dimov's sympathy towards her (she studied medicine as Dimov did himself) sharply contrasts to the criticism of the post 1944 Communist regime towards women of her origin. What converts his heroine into a strong subversive character is her nihilism. The role of nihilism in totalitarian societies is expressed by the philosopher Tzvetan Todorov as he claims that "The paradox of totalitarian ideology is that, in making unity its supreme ideal it ultimately returns to the same vision as that of democracy's conservative critics. For such critics, democracy's greatest flaw was the nihilistic individualism that fostered it. By imposing a single rule on a whole society and by requiring everyone in it to obey the party's directives, totalitarian state make individualism impossible; and by drawing its values from the cult of science and by

making them obligatory totalitarianism is supposed to eradicate nihilism as well.”¹⁴¹

The depiction of the 1930s communist resistance represents a detailed picture, contrasting with the mythology spread from 1948 onwards. It reveals the hardship of a would-be communist and the rejection that led to the death of loyal believers in the socialist cause. Also, in the first part of the novel there is no powerful character to oppose Boris or Irina. Even the appearance of Pavel in the second part did not develop into a battle between the old and the new. Moreover, to a certain extent Pavel plays a subversive role to the official dogma as Dimov contradicts the leading concept of the class origin by choosing the brother of a capitalist to be the leader of the communist movement. Secondly, the two brothers were never confronted so that Pavel can illustrate his supremacy. The only detailed picture of a meeting between the two worlds is that between Irina and Pavel. The scene favors Irina’s complexity and boldness presented against the ideologically framed mind of Pavel. Even the eroticism of the scene contrasts to the uniformity in the representation of the women’s body existing in the socialist realism canon.

In the Bulgarian case, a novel would never so explicitly overcome the dogmas of the present as did *Tobacco* in its first edition. In the next period of De-Stalinization, Czechoslovak literature would develop serious examples of conflicting points, while the next generation of Bulgarian writers would remain in the scope of the so called “allowed criticism.” But in this case, *Tobacco* shows a distinctly different approach towards the past than most of the writings in Eastern Europe.

The political conflicts of this era were to a large extent a product of the new situation after WWI. In Bulgaria, the controversy derived from the failure of the national project and from the economic troubles caused by reparations and sanctions. Czechoslovakia at that time was building a nation state which had

¹⁴¹ Tzvetan Todorov, *Hope and Memory* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 115.

problems with different nationalities - the Czechs, the Slovaks, the Hungarians, and the Germans. In the two states, writers were either politically engaged authors aligned with a particular cause (nationalistic, proletarian, anti-totalitarian, etc.) or they belonged to non-political artistic orientated groupings. The process of similar development was interrupted by the Second World War. In Czechoslovakia during the war, the division was no longer between engaged and non-engaged writers but between collaborators and non-collaborators with regime. As a result of the policy of non-engagement conducted by King Boris III, writers in Bulgaria were never involved in the deathly struggle experienced by their counterparts in Central Europe.

With the arrival of the communist regime the idea of “conflict” drastically changed in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia. The outburst of violence which followed was experienced in both countries during the first days after the entry of the Red Army. This violence was consequently legitimized by the People’s Courts. The disdain towards the recent past was the unifying factor in the FF. Afterwards, with the change of the historical context and the sovietization of Eastern Europe, the split between communists and non-communists marked the period between 1946 and 1948. The presence of a centralized oppositional party in Bulgaria converted this conflict into a political battle between the supporters of the Agrarians and the Communists. On the contrary, in Czechoslovakia the uniformity displayed within a political umbrella organization like the National Front created an opportunity for the conflict between the communists and its opponents to develop mostly outside of the field of politics - as part of aesthetic and philosophical debates on the future of politics and the arts.

After 1948, the traditional framework of conflict between the capitalist past and communist present was updated with a new element - search for “the enemy within”. As a result of the dependence of Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia on the Soviet Union and Stalin in particular, these elements were adapted

within the domestic context. In Bulgaria, the killing of Traicho Kostov provided an opportunity for the political stabilization of the new regime and its new leader Vulko Chervenkov. Since much of the process of cleansing in cultural life had already been completed from 1945-1947, the most important task in front of the cultural power wielders was the preservation of unity and the imposition of the democratic centralism. The scandalous cases of Zhendov and Dimov underlined the omnipresence of Chervenkov as both party leader and ideological mentor. The purges amongst the writers which were completed in Czechoslovakia around 1949 and the atmosphere created after the Slánský trial resulted in the emergence of a victorious grouping in the Czechoslovak Writers Union.

The period between 1919 and 1948 witnessed resilient patterns which would sporadically reappear during the period of communist rule. In Bulgaria, it was the peculiar tendency of writers to socially disengage and to try to form political contacts with power wielders. This model of peaceful coexistence between the politicians and the writers, set by the pre-war generation, was also adopted by the postwar writers. After 1948, the leadership fed this bondage between writers and party leaders as Vulko Chervenkov redeveloped the role of King Boris III. Along with a tradition of personal correspondence, Dimitrov and Chervenkov choose to publicly announce verdicts on writers and literary works. The public humiliation of Alexander Zhendov plus the attack against the literary critics served to underpin the omnipresence of the political leadership.

On the other hand, before 1948 the Czechoslovakian writers were fully involved in social and political life. Some of them were at the forefront of the conflict with the Nazi regime during the Protectorate. After 1945, the writers still participated in cultural debates related to the direction of cultural life in Czechoslovakia. After the communist takeover in 1948, the new regime successfully mastered and institutionalized cultural life. It was the heritage of the pre-war generation which would be developed as

major anti-establishment standpoint by the postwar writers after 1956. In this respect, the Writers Union became a stronghold of debates on literature. Rather than personally involving themselves, leaders like Novotný entrusted to the rank and file members to wield over literature.

Chapter 2: The Contradictions of De-Stalinization: Restoration and Containment of the Conflicts of 1953-1957

Introduction

The model imposed in the period from 1948-1953 changed the nature of the conflicts between writers and power wielders. Different approaches from the previous period such as “political engagement” and “the non-political aesthetic approach” of the writers disappeared into the totalitarian model of ideological and institutional control. The themes, the protagonists, and the structure of literary work were subjugated to the codification of Zhdanov’s normative, imposed during the 1934 Congress of Soviet Writers. Minor attempts of undermining this norm, as was the case with the novel *Tobacco*, resulted in debates about the author’s loyalty and about the proper expression of ideological tenets in his narrative.

The writers in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia were bound to the organizational life of the Communist State’s cultural apparatus. Any conflict was to be dealt with either within the Writers’ Union structures or, on rare occasions, during official meetings of the Communist Party organs like the Politburo and the Central Committee. The main difference in the relations between the writers and the power wielders in the two countries was the direct interference in cultural life by the general secretary of the Bulgarian Communist Party. Vulko Chervenkov established his authority in the cultural sphere and personally instigated the advent of the two major conflicts in the Stalinist period – the purging of the painter Alexander Zhendov and these around the novel *Tobacco*. In this period in Czechoslovakia, conflicts were dealt with mostly by principal party apparatchiks fashioned to supervise literature and culture like Ladislav Štoll, Václav Kopecký, and Zdeněk Nejedlý.

The following chapter reveals the process of instigation and containment of conflicts which took

place inside the writers sphere in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia. The time scope covers two major stages in Communist history. The first coincides with the struggles over Stalin's legacy within the CPSU and concludes with the 20th Congress of CPSU. The second focuses on the time between Khrushchev's speech (February, 1956) and the debacle of the Hungarian uprising (October-November, 1956).

The conflicts involving the writers in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia are contextualized in the historical framework mentioned above. Therefore, the analysis combines the impact of international politics with traditional domestic patterns of relation between power wielders and writers. The aim of the chapter is to illustrate the reshaping of both the "conflicting positions" and the "spheres of conflict" during the de-Stalinization period.

The changing character of conflicts in the post-Stalinist era will be revealed as part of three trajectories. In addition to a traditional form of conflict between political power and the writers, the chapter reveals another important confrontation - that between rank and file members and the Writers' Union rulers. In the third place, the chapter reveals the reflections of major political conflicts on the writers in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia. As a result of the active role of writers in Poland and Hungary, their counterparts in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia were placed under severe scrutiny. The different ways in which the Bulgarian and the Czechoslovak writers came to be involved in conflict situations led to different modes of reaction that correspond to the writers' activity in the next decade - the 1960s.

Global Politics and Impact

Stalin's death was an event whose impact was strong for both the political leadership and society in

Central and Eastern Europe, as fear and confusion in society and among the political elites spread in equal proportion. The first to react were the closest allies of the Soviet dictator. Three of them decimated Stalin's political authority – Beria, who preserved his leading position in the secret police and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Malenkov, who took control of the government, and Khrushchev, who became the head of the party apparatus.

In the spring of 1953, still under that triumvirate, the Soviet state launched the New Course. It represented a model of economic and political transition – from heavy industry to consumer goods and from state control based on the cult of personality, to collective leadership.¹⁴² Tensions within the new power-wielders, however, soon began to grow. The first wave of conflicts came during the debate about the character of the economic transition, but what instigated the dissolution of the triumvirate was the fear of both Malenkov and Khrushchev caused by the ever-growing power of Beria.

As a result, it was Beria who became the first political casualty of de-Stalinization.¹⁴³ He was arrested on 26 June, 1954 during a meeting of the Party Praesidium and executed a few months later. In the course of 1954-1955, Khrushchev proved himself an energetic leader. He devoted himself to the masses and was able to take the central control of both the Communist Party and the state. In order to do so, he had won control over the military and the secret police. As part of his political strategy, Khrushchev decided to expose Stalin's crimes, which he did during the 20th Congress of CPSU.

Various conflicts took place in Eastern Europe after Stalin's death. In Bulgaria, a strike of the workers at a tobacco company near Plovdiv took place on May 14, 1953. The aim of the protesters was the reduction of the working week to five days. The strike was violently suppressed by the police and at

¹⁴² Richard Crampton, *Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century*, (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 283.

¹⁴³ Robert Service, *Comrades: A History of World Communism*, (London: Macmillan, 2007), p. 307.

least 3 people were killed.¹⁴⁴ The political leadership of the BCP reacted to the instability at a Plenum of the Politburo of the BCP which took place on 11 June, 1953. The Communist Party's leading organ adopted the Soviet model of the New Course. It introduced changes in the economy and began procedures for closing down its concentration camps. Between August and September of that year, a large number of political prisoners were released from the labor camp in Belene and at the end of the year all the labor camps were temporary closed.

At the beginning of 1954, the Politburo of the BCP convoked a plenum during which it was to officially denounce the Cult of Personality. The political changes were cosmetic and Chervenkov retained his influence by taking a new post - that of the Prime Minister. However, the Plenum recognized the increased importance of Sofia's party organization leader Todor Zhivkov. The latter was entrusted with the control of the Party's Secretariat. In the course of the next year, Zhivkov tried to imitate Khrushchev's model. The would-be leader of the BCP acquired control over the party apparatus, the secret police, and the military by removing Chervenkov's supporters from all these three sectors.¹⁴⁵ Interestingly enough, during his ascent to power he ignored the intellectual sphere in which Chervenkov continued to preserve his leading authority.

In Czechoslovakia, the communist leader Klement Gottwald died only eleven days after Stalin, on March 16, 1953. Political power went into the hands of a dual leadership shared between Antonín Novotný and Antonín Zápotocký. In May 1953, in Pilsen, an uprising against the government's currency reform was violently suppressed by the police. More than 200 people were injured, though nobody was

¹⁴⁴ Iskra Baeva, Evgenia Kalinova, *Bulgarskite prehodi*, p. 79.

¹⁴⁵ Iliana Marcheva, *Todor Zhivkov, Putyat kum vlastta*, (Sofia: BAN, 2000), p. 15.

killed.¹⁴⁶ The power wielders in Czechoslovakia dealt with the conflicting situation in a similar fashion as their Bulgarian counterparts - by adopting the concept of the New Course and its economic and anti-cultist aspects.¹⁴⁷

The Power Wielders and the Writers: Preservation of Unity in the post-Stalinist Period

1953-1956

The changes did not impact cultural life so dramatically. In Bulgaria, the Communist Party kept its rigid control over literature and adhered to the slogan “Unity between the party and the people”. The system of control was not shaken and a new doctrine in cultural life was not imposed. This continuity with the Stalinist period was proven by the fact that relations between Chervenkov and the writers were still dominated by the case of the novel *Tobacco*.

In line with the recommendations that had been made in *Literaturen Front* in the course of 1952-1953, the writer Dimitar Dimov worked on the rewriting of his novel. After he finished work on the new version, Dimov wrote a letter to Chervenkov in which he tried to explain his reasons why the novel should not be discussed in the Writers’ Union, prior to its publication. He was afraid that most of the members of the Union might not accept the new version of the novel and Dimov pleaded for a personal intervention from Chervenkov, asking him to make sure that a debate would not start until the novel has been published: “Comrade Chervenkov, I have laid out the situation in front of you with full honesty and with the hope of getting your sympathy. I am fully aware that when the party orders, a communist must

¹⁴⁶ Bradley Abrams, “Hopes died last: The establishment of Communist Regimes in East-Central Europe” in *Stalinism Revisited*, (Budapest: CEU University Press, 2000), p. 323.

¹⁴⁷ Henry Gordon Skilling, *Czechoslovakia’s Interrupted Revolution*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976), pp. 30-31.

overcome all the odds – both subjective and objective. In the situation with *Tobacco*, however, this turns out to be beyond my strength and I would prefer to take the personal responsibility, rather than destroying the artistic unity of the work; rather than going for mechanical changes and simulating a conviction that I have fulfilled my duty”.¹⁴⁸

The archival sources do not provide details about the exact response of Chervenkov. What is known is that the work of Dimov was republished at the end of 1953, without being discussed in the Writers’ Union. The character of Dimov’s letter was symptomatic of the preservation of the Chervenkov model of interaction with the writers. In April 1954, the Prime Minister accused the leadership of the Writers’ Union of not taking all the necessary measures against those who in 1951 had condemned the novel *Tobacco*. He complained that the culprits continued to be members of the Praesidium.

The conflict between Chervenkov and the literary critics in the Writers’ Union marked the last days of Chervenkov’s political authority. During a meeting in January 1956 between the members of the Communist Party’s Politburo and representatives of the Writers’ Union, Chervenkov personally denounced Pencho Danchev as the leader of the circle of literary critics who had condemned the novel *Tobacco* and also as a traitor.¹⁴⁹ Even when the position of Chervenkov was in decline, the old guard in the Writers’ Union provided him with support. On 9, February, 1956, *Literaturen Front* published an article denouncing Danchev and his “gang.”¹⁵⁰ A month later, the chair of the Writers’ Union himself denounced the activity of the circle of the critics of *Tobacco*.

While the Bulgarian Communist Party was absorbed by the struggle for power, in Czechoslovakia the

¹⁴⁸ Prinudeni tekstove. Samokritika na bulgarski pisатели, p. 220.

¹⁴⁹ Vladimir Migeв, *Bulgarskite Pisатели i Politicheskia jivot v Bulgaria: 1944-1969*, p. 105.

¹⁵⁰ *Literaturen front*, 22 February, 1956.

new CPCz leadership was unified, and legitimized its control on the cultural front. In September 1953, the Politburo of the CPCz took the decision to merge the Department of Agitation with the Department of Education, Science, and the Arts. The new institution had to train over a hundred people to be able to propagate the ideas of the New Course. In December of the same year, the Communist Party's Politburo convoked an official meeting in relation to the political tasks in the ideological sphere. In his speech, Novotný underlined the dangers on the artistic front: bourgeois nationalism, social-democratism, Masarykism, and religious obscurantism. In addition, the General Secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party criticized the Writers' Union for the unfinished struggle in the establishment of Socialist Realism.¹⁵¹ The main report was produced by Kopecký. Referring to the political position of the writers, he defined the main enemy within their ranks - the social-democratism - a recurrence of prewar left-wing tendencies. With regard to literary style, he exposed three major problems - schematism, vulgarism, and greyness.¹⁵²

Undoubtedly the major socio political event of 1956 in Czechoslovakia was the 2nd Congress of Czechoslovak Writers. In the course of 1955, the process of preparation was led by the chairman of the Writers' Union Jan Drda and it imitated the model of the Congress of Soviet Writers. As an example, the historian Michal Bauer provides the titles of the papers which were to be presented at the Congress: "Rapprochement and cooperation in Czech and Slovak Literature", "Rightful representation of reality", "Current situation and tasks in front of literary theory and criticism."¹⁵³ Also, in the autumn of 1955, the organizers of the 2nd Congress went to Moscow to present the final plan of the Congress and, most importantly, to reveal to the Soviet authorities the list of those writers that were expected to be elected to

¹⁵¹ Jiří Knapík, *V Zajetí Moci*, (Prague: Libri, 2006), p. 225.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 226-229.

¹⁵³ Michal Bauer, *Kodifikace a variance ideologicko-estetické normy v české literatuře 50 let 20 století.*, p. 11.

the Praesidium of the Writers' Union.¹⁵⁴

While these preparations were taking place, two writers from two different generations fractured the unity expressed by the leadership of the Writers' Union. Firstly, on September, 14 1955 in Olomouc, the poet Jaroslav Seifert directly attacked the policies conducted by the communist leadership in general and Novotný in particular. At the end of the year, the young poet Milan Kundera published his article "On the Debates about Our Heritage." In this article, Kundera supported artistic experimentalism and argued that formalist experiments of the interwar poets could be used in socialist poetry.

Return of the Conflicts inside the Rank and File Members of the Writers' Union 1953-1956

In December 1954, the 2nd Congress of the Union of the Soviet Writers took place. It marked the generational shift that had taken place in the 1934-1954 period. Authors like Gorky and politicians like Bukharin, who had been amongst the main representatives of the 1934 Congress, had already passed away. Representing the new generation were authors like Ehrenburg and Tvardovsky. The position of the former was of particular interest, after his novel *The Thaw* stimulated the first public discussion in the Soviet literary sphere for more than two decades. His speech during the 2nd Congress of the Soviet Writers was as contradictory as his literary work. Firstly, Ehrenburg dismissed the official line pursued by the chairman of the Soviet Writers' Union, Alexander Fadeyev. Then, he spoke against dogmatism in literature and condemned the paternalistic attitude of the CPSU.¹⁵⁵ The Orthodoxy within the Soviet Writers' Union had the support of the political leadership and the controversy created by Ehrenburg did

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 21.

¹⁵⁵ John Garrard, *Inside the Soviet Writers' Union*, (London: Tauris, 1990), pp. 67-70.

not have any direct consequences.¹⁵⁶ But the open rivalry within the ranks of a previously encapsulated institution signaled the incoming changes in the relations between intellectuals and the power wielders within the Eastern Bloc.

The first post-Stalinist oppositional grouping in Bulgaria appeared as early as 1953. The historian Vladimir Migevev argues that the official report on poetry was attacked in the Writers' Union from both rightist and leftist positions.¹⁵⁷ For those representing the right, the report lacked focus on the importance of everyday life and ignored the appeal of the party in this respect (Dzhagarov). The representatives of the left wing criticized the report because it gave priority to theme over style (Radoev). Both of these tendencies were represented by young writers, but the left wing supported the idea of reevaluation of the solemn importance of the literary work while those on the right emphasized the need to adhere to the ideological discourse. The split in the ranks of the younger generation became clear when in 1955 Georgi Dzhagarov accused Ivan Radoev of setting up a grouping whose representatives translated, in his words, "the works of rotten poets."¹⁵⁸

The conflict which threatened the unity of the Bulgarian Writers' Union took place amongst the ranks of the prewar generation. The controversy opened in February 1956 during the annual discussion of the Union's official newspaper, *Literaturen Front*. Lyudmil Stoyanov, a highly respected figure in the Communist Party, accused Hristo Radevsky, the chairman of the Writers' Union, of interfering in the editorial work of the newspaper. In addition, Stoyanov characterized the situation in Bulgarian cultural life as a state of anemia. Interestingly, the younger generation represented by Emil Manov refrained from participation in the personal attack against the leader of the Writers' Union. Manov, however, supported

¹⁵⁶ Max Hayward, *Writers in Russia 1917-1978*, (London: Harvil Press, 1983), p. 104.

¹⁵⁷ Vladimir Migevev, *Bulgarskite Pisатели*, p. 102.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

Stoyanov's negative evaluation of literary life in Bulgaria.

On March 15, 1956, during the discussion of Radevsky's tenure as chairman of the Writers' Union, Stoyanov openly demanded that Radevsky retire. Moreover, he proposed that the post should be given to the main rival of Chervenkov in the literary sphere – the literary critic Pencho Danchev. The majority of the leadership of the Writers' Union rejected the proposition. Although the members of the Praesidium accepted the presence of some shortcomings in the work of the leader of the Writers' Union, they reconfirmed Radevsky in his post.

The contradictions in the Praesidium of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union were not as drastic as those amongst their counterparts. Jan Drda was nominally the chairman of the organization, but after 1951 his influence in the Praesidium was overshadowed by that of Jiří Taufer. The considerable unity in the organization was illustrated during the meeting which took place on 3 March, 1956. In contrast with the rivalry between Stoyanov and Radevsky in Bulgaria, the main controversy in the Praesidium of the Czechoslovak Writers was related to problems such as the distribution of various literary works and the financial constraints made by the Ministry of Culture. However, tension was raised when Jan Mareš argued that when it came to publishing literary works there was a group of writers under special patronage.¹⁵⁹

On the eve of the 20th Congress of the CPSU, uniformity was preserved in the political and cultural life of both Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia. Novotný had consolidated his power while Zhivkov had almost concluded his journey to power. The literary scene in the two countries was unquestionably subjugated to the political leadership. However, the period 1953-1956 allowed the appearance of some fractures within

¹⁵⁹ LA PNP, f. SČSS, Zápis ÚV SČSS, dne 4. dubna 1956, p. 38.

the unity imposed by the Communist Party. While in Bulgaria these gaps in the political control were absorbed by squabbles between the writers, in Czechoslovakia they brought about to the reopening of previously closed topics such as the prewar literary heritage.

The year 1956

The political status quo established in the period 1953-1956 was changed abruptly with the secret speech of Nikita Khrushchev during the 20th Congress of CPSU about Stalin's crimes. In order to preserve the unity of the Communist Bloc and the undisputed role of the Communist Party, the Soviet leader outlined a model of anti-cult discourse. As pointed out by the historian Robert Service: "He (Khrushchev) gave the impression that only several thousand innocent functionaries in party army and government had been killed or sent to the labor camps in the 1930s and 1940s."¹⁶⁰

In his interpretation of communist doctrine, Khrushchev confronted the atrocities of Stalin with the concept of a Leninist heritage. However, he did not expect that a number of philosophers and writers would use the conflict between Leninism and Stalinism as a starting point in their polemics with the power wielders in Eastern Europe. The process of rehabilitation, proposed by Khrushchev was also limited. As pointed out by the historian Adam Westoby, only secondary figures in the communist movement were rehabilitated, while influential communists like Trotsky and Bukharin were still considered enemies of the state.¹⁶¹ The accusation of Trotskyism, for instance, continued to represent an important instrument in the preservation of ideological unity. But in contrast to Khrushchev's initial

¹⁶⁰ Robert Service, *A History of Modern Russia from Nicolas II to Putin*, (London: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 311.

¹⁶¹ Adam Westoby, *Communism since World War 2*, (New York: The Harvester Press: 1981), p. 124.

intentions, the rehabilitation of the victims of the Stalinist purges became a major theme in a number of anti-establishment books and films inside the Socialist Bloc.

The April Plenum of the BCP

Some historians argue that the April Plenum of the BCP initiated important social and economic reforms in Bulgaria; others narrow its impact to Zhivkov's victory over Chervenkov.¹⁶² The Communist Party had depicted the event as the arrival of the generation of a new era – the April Generation. This generation was represented by the forty-five year old Todor Zhivkov. Behind the restricted economic reforms, the Communist Party converted the April Plenum into an instrument through which it legitimized itself in the post-Stalinist period.

The conflicts during the April Plenum were strictly limited to personal accusations against Vulko Chervenkov. The indisputable position of the Communist Party in the country was preserved and the main critique against Chervenkov was that he had constantly disregarded the opinion of the members of the Politburo and the Central Committee of the BCP. In a similar fashion, Zhivkov blamed the shortcomings in ideological work on Chervenkov's authoritarian methods: "The cult of the Personality generated a feeling of depression amongst the creative forces, which in its turn prevented the activists in the cultural sphere from properly expressing their abilities. The evaluation given by comrade Chervenkov and his sympathy towards some activists of the ideological front together with his destructive criticism of others has forced some distinctive figures in cultural life to adjust themselves to the visions of comrade

¹⁶² Iliana Marcheva, Todor Zhivkov: putyat kum vlastta, p. 38.

Chervenkov and to subjugate their artistic work to the Cult of the Personality.”¹⁶³ Zhivkov referred to the situation in the Writers’ Union, stating that “due to Chervenkov’s Cult of Personality, the situation in some artistic organizations, as it is the case with the Writers’ Union, displays signs of decay.”¹⁶⁴ In his conclusions, Todor Zhivkov underlined that there were limits to the anti-cult practices: “To fight the Cult of Personality and its remnants does not mean to disrupt the unity of the Party or to make compromises with the ideological issues.”¹⁶⁵

Chervenkov’s methods of power-wielding in cultural life were also criticized by the ex-editor in chief of the communist party daily newspaper *Rabotnichesko delo*, Atanas Stoikov. He claimed that Chervenkov had negated the principle of “convincing the public” and instead personally imposed his opinion regarding matters in areas in which he had no expertise. Stoikov also commented on two major controversies in cultural life during the period 1948-1953 – the case of the novel *Tobacco* and the purging of the painter Alexander Zhendov. He expressed his approval of Chervenkov’s criticism of the literary critics of *Tobacco* but condemned what he saw as extreme measures: “Was it right for Zhendov to be left without a job and to be anathematized? It might have been better if he was left to understand his mistakes by continuing to work.”¹⁶⁶

Despite his open support for Chervenkov, Hristo Radevsky’s involvement in the event was limited to occasional quarrels with some of the speakers. The dogmatic character of the event was evidenced also by the lack of any discussion on topics related to the arts. The statements of Zhivkov about the ideological front became part of the Plenum’s Final Resolution: “The Cult of the Personality and the monopoly

¹⁶³ F.1B, op. 5. f. 195, p. 47.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 49.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 58.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 115.

obtained by one single person to speak and advise the workers in the cultural sphere, bypassing the Central Committee, had brought some artistic organizations to the state of silence.”¹⁶⁷

Zhivkov’s limits imposed on the interpretations of the conclusions of 20th Congress were tested in the following period, which was defined by the BCP Politburo as a period of “clarification and implementation” of the decisions of the April Plenum. Dimitar Ganev - the General Secretary of the Ideological Department of the Politburo of the BCP - conducted two meetings with the Writers’ Union Party Organization. During these meetings, Emil Manov and Lyudmil Stoyanov challenged a number of official decisions. Their resistance brought about the danger that the Final Resolution of these meetings would contradict the Politburo’s official directive. As a result of these tensions, Ganev did not complete his task.¹⁶⁸

Emil Manov continued to ask for changes in the political leadership’s method of work. “Between the party leadership and the masses lays a gap”, he stated, “therefore the problem is not related to the personality of Chervenkov or whoever it might be in his post but it is about the guarantees we can get so the previous methods are not to be used again.”¹⁶⁹ Lyudmil Stoyanov abandoned his previous personal accusations of Radevsky and called for clear division between literature and politics.¹⁷⁰

On April, 17, the first meeting of the Praesidium of the Bulgarian Writers’ Union after the CP April Plenum took place. The chairman Radevsky was not present and the members postponed the originally scheduled discussion of the organization’s annual plans. Instead, the Praesidium dealt with its financial matters and voted for an increase of the monthly salary of the chairman of the Writers’ Union. The

¹⁶⁷Ibid., p. 119.

¹⁶⁸Vladimir Migevev, *Bulgarian Writers*, p. 137.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

debates of the Praesidium meeting were influenced by the general atmosphere of uncertainty amongst the power wielders in Bulgaria which was related to de-Stalinization in socio-political life. The situation became more serious after a series of events which took place firstly in Czechoslovakia and then in Poland and Hungary.

The 2nd Congress of the Czechoslovak Writers

In contrast with the conflicts that existed amongst the writers in Bulgaria, their counterparts in Czechoslovakia appeared to be united under the leadership of the Czechoslovak Writers Union. As was stated above, the preparation of the 2nd Czechoslovak Writers' Congress confirmed its prearranged schedule. The opening speech was given by the President of Czechoslovakia, Antonín Zápotocký. He spoke about the political situation using the official party language: "The Party has never prescribed and never will prescribe to writers what they should write in their literary work. We believe that the writer must enjoy full freedom and that he must march on alone in his artistic development".¹⁷¹

The chairman of the Writers' Union, Jan Drda, presented a report about the state of Czechoslovak literature within the terms of the official discourse of limited criticism. He accepted some mistakes of the past and at the same time reconfirmed that the party was always right.

But the pre-arranged schedule of the Congress was disrupted by the statements of three prominent prewar writers, Vítězslav Nezval, František Hrubín, and Jaroslav Seifert. The historians Michal Bauer and Alfred French both argue that it was Vítězslav Nezval's speech which broke the official character of the

¹⁷¹ Alfred French, *Czech Writers and Politics*, p. 112.

Congress. In French's opinion, in the first part of his speech, Nezval accused younger critics such as Ivan Skála and at the same time made a plea in defense of the writers of his own generation who had been victims of the Cult of Personality.¹⁷² He claims that actual criticism of the regime appeared in the second part of Nezval's speech. In his analysis, French focuses on Nezval's use of Mallarme's sonnet *The Swan* as a metaphor by means of which the writer spoke about the current state of the Czechoslovak writers.¹⁷³

Apart from using a metaphorical language, Nezval directly attacked some of the, until then unassailable, ideological tenets. He attacked the leading concept of the Communist political discourse - anti-cosmopolitanism, by claiming that it had degenerated into provincialism. Also Nezval criticized the official guiding concept of the literary heritage - Ladislav Štoll's doctrine *Thirty years of struggle for socialist literature*, as he rejected Štoll's criticism of the poet František Halas. Lastly, as part of his remarks on the writer's social position, Nezval referred to pre- 1948 literary tradition's positive examples of Neruda, Seifert, and Biebl. He linked their social position with that of the three representatives of the anti-establishment socialist poetry such as Vladimir Mayakovsky and Nazim Hikmet.¹⁷⁴

Hrubín and Seifert developed Nezval's speech. In doing so, Hrubín used Hans Andersen's story of the Emperor's New Clothes to emphasize the position of the poet as the voice of truth.¹⁷⁵ Jaroslav Seifert's self-criticism added to Nezval's and Hrubín's disruptive narrative: "I am afraid we have not fulfilled this role for many years: we have not been the conscience of many; we have not even been our own conscience... If an ordinary person is silent about the truth, it may be a tactical maneuver. If a writer is

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 113.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 114.

silent, he is lying.”¹⁷⁶

The historian Vladimir Kusin underlines the symbolical meaning of the event. He claims that this was an attempt by the Czechoslovak writers to replace the Stalinist concept of “the writer as an engineer of the human soul” with the prewar concept of “the writer as the conscience of the nation.”¹⁷⁷

The 2nd Czechoslovak Writers’ Congress was an attempt at reconciliation between the past and the present. Namely, a return to the traditional prewar position of the writer within the mechanisms established after 1948. However, the development of the situation in the Socialist Bloc in the autumn of 1956 and especially the advent of the Hungarian Revolution resulted in a new wave of restrictions and containment of the conflicts. The April Plenum of the BCP and the 2nd Congress of the Czechoslovak Writers revealed a considerable amount of continuity with the prewar period. While in Czechoslovakia the writers looked to the past in order to redefine their position in society, their Bulgarian counterparts remained close to the traditional engagement between the intellectuals and the power wielders. As a result, the writers in Bulgaria remained subjugated by the struggle between Todor Zhivkov and Vulko Chervenkov. At the same time, the political leadership in Czechoslovakia momentarily lost its grasp on cultural life, as the CPCz leaders allowed a major event such as the 2nd Congress of the Czechoslovak Writers to develop into an arena of criticism and conflicts.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷Vladimir Kusin, *The intellectual origins of the Prague Spring*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 54.

The Aftermath

The month of May 1956 in Bulgaria was dominated by the BCP's attempts to preserve the ideological and political order. The destabilizing effect of the events taking place in Czechoslovakia and Poland was a central topic of the meeting of the Politburo which took place on May 25. Zhivkov said that the Cult of Personality in Bulgaria had been much harsher than in Poland and Czechoslovakia and therefore the struggle against it had to be much more forceful.

Information disseminated in Bulgaria about the 2nd Congress of Czechoslovak Writers was censored. The strategy was seen in Stoyan Karolev's report "Notes on a Congress" which was published on June, 2 1956 in *Literaturen front*. Karolev omitted Nezval, Hrubín, and Seifert's speeches, and instead focused on controversies which lay outside of the political arena. He pointed out Buriánek's argument that class conflict had been transformed into an inner conflict of the self. He also wrote about Peter Karvaš's and Ladislav Stehlík's papers on the representation of conflict in Czechoslovak drama.

Karolev's interpretation of Vladislav Mináč's speech summed up the broad implications of the Czechoslovak Writers' Congress. Karolev was one of the literary critics antagonized by Chervenkov during the controversy about the novel *Tobacco*. Karolev used Mináč's speech about literary criticism to support the Bulgarian literary critics' role in cultural life, which had been undermined in the previous period: "Mináč's words do not contradict the Marxist theory; they do not mean any condescension towards the writer. On the contrary, Mináč spoke with anger against kind-heartedness of literary critics. Similar proclamations were part of other speeches and reports. I listened and I could not believe what I heard. Afterwards I enjoyed the company of the Czech and Slovak writers even more and understandably

so.”¹⁷⁸

On June, 12, 1956, The Praesidium of the Writers’ Union discussed its annual plan. It was prepared in the Writers’ Union Secretariat in order to be approved by the Praesidium. The discussion was mostly related to organizational matters – financial problems, the dissemination of literary works and the position of the Secretariat inside the Writers’ Union structure. Despite the fact that the text in section 1 of the official document dealing with the Cult of Personality repeated the April Plenum resolution, this issue raised some tensions. The controversy was opened by the young journalist Boris Delchev. In his overview of the theoretical and practical implications of the Cult of Personality, Delchev criticized the fact that the slogans from the April Plenum were being repeated in the official document of the Bulgarian Writers’ Union. The document says: “Undoubtedly, the problem of the Cult of Personality was not so much theoretical as it was practical. It must be dealt with not on the basis of our doctrine but on the basis of what we allowed to happen. The main question is: Does the problem of the Cult against which we must fight relates to the problem of artistic freedom or does it not?”¹⁷⁹

Delchev’s attempt to instigate a discussion was resisted by the rest of the members of the Praesidium. Even oppositional voices like Manov remained passive. Therefore, the Praesidium’s members proceeded to the next section of the schedule – purchasing a Resort House at the seaside for the members of the Writers’ Union.

The next meeting of the Writers’ Union Praesidium which took place on 22 June, 1956 was marked by another conflict between rank and file members and the chairman. Radevsky was attacked by the party poet Orlin Vasilev. After his self-criticism in 1950, Vasilev had become a politically committed poet and

¹⁷⁸Literaturen front, 02.06. 1956. p.2.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

the author of glorifying verses about Chervenkov, Stalin, and the Soviet Union. In the opinion of the literary historian Plamen Doinov, what had turned the Stalinist poet into an oppositionist was the fact that authors like him felt under threat of being exposed for having been too close to the previous regime.¹⁸⁰ In his speech Vasilev spoke about the degradation of literature in the last three years. He claimed that “our literary life has been filled with deathly silence” and that “writers had put their flags down.”¹⁸¹ He blamed the problem on Radevsky and asked for the latter’s resignation. His demands were not taken into consideration by other members and so he remained another example of a lonely oppositional voice.

Another heated debate during the same meeting flared up in connection with the publication of the first issue of the literary magazine *Plamuk*. The magazine’s budget became the subject of controversy. Representatives of the older generation such as Angel Karaliichev protested against the number of appointments to the editorial board which in his opinion would drain the Writers’ Union budget. The majority of those present, however, approved the magazine’s structure and budget. Another small rift took place during the discussion of potential members of the Union’s Children’s Literature Section.

The two meetings which took place in the period from June to September 1956 revealed disunity in the oppositional message. Debates about the Cult of Personality did not include subversive arguments. The 1956 April plenum guidelines and limits, personally imposed by Todor Zhivkov, were not challenged either by free minded younger generation authors like Manov or by oppositional voices of the old guard like Stoyanov. In Vladimir Migev’s opinion, despite some moments of sharp criticism, the sectarianism in the Writers’ Union had prevailed.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ F.551, op. 5. f.181, p. 15.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., p. 25.

¹⁸² Vladimir Migev, *Bulgarskite pisateli*, p.144.

On 12 October, 1956 in connection with a scheduled meeting on ideological matters, the leadership of the BCP instructed the Chairman of the Writers' Union to hold a meeting with the Communist Party members of the Writers' Union. Vladimir Migevev argues that this was a sign of taking the pressure off the writers, but the initiative can also be seen as a manifestation of the power wielder's vigilance in the context of an open revolt of intellectuals in Central Europe – Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary. In contrast with the previous two meetings of the Writer's Praesidium, the discussion was vivid and put the regime under threat.

Lydumil Stoyanov repeated his arguments about the burden of the Cult period on literature. He demanded a public debate, as in his opinion, discussions behind closed doors had proven counterproductive. Orlin Vasilev accused the power wielders of middle-class aristocratism. He supplemented his accusations with negative high school records about the behavior of nomenclature children. For his part, Emil Manov said that the secretaries of the artistic unions were not to be blamed since the problems were due the method of governance by the party-state leadership. The results of the meeting were disturbing for the BCP political leadership but they were not published.¹⁸³

The atmosphere amongst the Czechoslovak writers was dominated by the expectations raised after the 2nd Congress. The first post-Congress meeting of the Praesidium of the Czechoslovak Writers took place on May, 24, 1956. The election of a new governing body of the Praesidium did not bring any controversy. Jan Otčenášek was nominated by Nezval as a candidate for the post of chairman of the Writers' Union – a fact that underlined that the reformists had won. Michal Bauer defines Jan Otčenášek as a figure of compromise.¹⁸⁴ Otčenášek's controversial novel *Citizen Brych* is considered by literary historians as a

¹⁸³ *Idid.*, p. 146.

¹⁸⁴ Michal Bauer, *Kodifikace a variance ideologicko-estetické normy*, p. 22.

Czechoslovak example of an early anti-cult novel.¹⁸⁵ The main speakers during the meeting were Nezval and the ex-chairman Jan Drda.

In his opening speech, Nezval reconfirmed his position as a leading figure behind the reforms. On the one hand, he used an anti-cultist's discourse. He called for a struggle against bureaucracy and demanded vigilance in order to make sure that freedom does not degenerate into anarchy. He also condemned sectarianism and defined freedom in Marxist-Leninist terms. Nezval defended his own past and insisted that he had never accepted Zhdanov's theory or any "isms" in his writing. In his concluding remarks, he posed a rhetorical question – Should or should not the Writer's Union be an organization based on ideas?

In his speech, Drda focused on the role of truth in literature. His concluding part in which he claimed "I want to be that type of writer who in literature always gives the leading role to truth, even if it is evil or tragic" was interrupted by Nezval's comment "As it has been in the last seven years." The ex-chairman was critical of Nezval's questioning the position of the Writers' Union as an organization based on ideas.

Nezval's response was that the Writers' Union was not a syndicate and he had never denied its institutional role. He used the Marxist-Leninist discourse: "We are a type of organization based on ideas, but the word 'idea' we must feel as inspired spirit, the spirit of Marxist consciousness."¹⁸⁶ He blamed the writers' shortcomings on social-democratic remnants in literature.

Nezval's statements reflected Khrushchev's paradigm of conflict between Leninist legacy and the Stalinist Cult of Personality. It also included domestic rhetoric about social-democracy being an internal enemy. Drda's position represented an attempt of moderate self-criticism by an overthrown power

¹⁸⁵ Alfred French, *Czech Writers*, p. 89.

¹⁸⁶ LA PNP, f. SČSS, Zápis ÚV SČSS 24. 05. 1956.

wielder.

In addition, the new atmosphere in Czechoslovakia's cultural life was reflected in *Literární Noviny*. On 1 June, 1956, the newspaper published a detailed report about the meeting of the Writers' Union Praesidium. Within it, the Writers' Union official organ published extracts from Drda's and Nezval's speeches.¹⁸⁷ The publication of internal controversies of the institution was a major breakthrough in comparison with the debates in Bulgaria which continued to take place behind closed doors.

On June 9, 1956, *Literární Noviny* published controversial articles by Ladislav Mňačko and Peter Karvaš. The former was entitled "Citizen's Voice of the Writer", the latter "Unity's Consequences to Our National Culture"¹⁸⁸. Both dealt with the post-20th CPSU Congress changes in literature's social role. The main argument of Mňačko and Karvaš was about the reestablishment of the importance of writers and literature within society.

The Controversial Autumn of 1956

The events that took place in Poland between March and October 1956 were the first blow against the unity of the socialist bloc.¹⁸⁹ First, in March in Poznan, the workers' social demands developed into mass protests of an anti-Soviet, national, and religious character. At that time, the ex-political prisoner Wladislaw Gomulka became an embodiment of those feelings and therefore people's favorite in the Communist Party's struggle for power. The events in October 1956 became even more dramatic when the

¹⁸⁷ *Literární Noviny*, 01. 06. 1956.

¹⁸⁸ *Literární Noviny*, 09. 06. 1956.

¹⁸⁹ Richard Crampton, *Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century*, p. 153

Soviet leadership tried to intervene directly against Gomulka's election as a new leader of the Polish Workers' Party. The popular support for Gomulka forced the Soviets to recognize him as the leader of the PWP. However, as argued by historians, Gomulka's position was not as radical as was expected by his supporters. The divisions within the anti-Stalinist opposition in Poland reflected a division which Pavel Machcewicz defined as a gap between the social masses and intellectuals.¹⁹⁰

Machcewicz defines three major dividing lines within the mass movement which appeared on the streets of Poland and in the attitudes of the leading intellectuals. Firstly, the Polish historian argues that in contrast with the general anti-Soviet mood in the country, Polish intellectuals proclaimed a Socialist Revolution. The aim of which was to restore the pure tradition of the Bolshevik October. Also, he provides evidence that the intellectuals refused to support the nationalist and religious language and symbols, which had been used by the masses, during the events in Poland. In conclusion, Machcewicz argues that even though some intellectuals admitted that Poland was a victim of Soviet domination, they supported the idea of the restoration of equality within the Eastern Bloc rather than questioning the authority of the Soviet Union.¹⁹¹

At first glance, the intellectuals' position in Poland resembled the position of the reformist writers in Czechoslovakia. Major oppositional voices like Nezval took part in the battle between the Leninists' ideological legacy and Stalinism. On the other hand, in 1956, Czechoslovak writers redefined their leading position amongst intellectuals as an important segment without a connection to politics, while in Poland the intellectuals were close to Gomulka's position of an anti-Stalinist leader.

The position of the Bulgarian writers differed substantially from that of their Polish counterparts.

¹⁹⁰ Pavel Machcewicz, "Intellectuals and mass movements," in *Contemporary European History*, vol.6, 1997, p. 25.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

Firstly, nationalistic and anti-Soviet feelings never appeared as part of national discontent in Bulgaria. Also, the intellectuals were never involved in a public debate and even moderate revisionism was absent in 1956. The linking point, however, was the role of the political leader and the position of the writers. Zhivkov managed to embody the process of change, as did Gomulka. Both of them managed to quell the unrest and restore the Communist Party's unity.

The event that shattered the unity of the Socialist bloc was the Hungarian Revolution. The political context in Hungary was similar to the political context in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Bulgaria. After the death of Stalin, the political leadership of the Hungarian Workers Party (HWP) introduced the New Course. The political leadership was shared between Matias Rákosi, who was Head of the Hungarian Workers' Party, and Imre Nagy, who took the position of Prime Minister. After two years, Nagy's ideas became too radical and the Stalinist leader Matias Rákosi removed him from the Party.

However, Khrushchev's speech had shaken the legitimacy of Rákosi and the latter was forced to start a campaign to preserve his power. Rakosi's political maneuvers included the rehabilitation of political prisoners and concessions to Hungarian intellectuals. As a result, in March 1956 he had allowed the formation of a debating club which was named after the head of the national revival Sándor Petőfi. The club became a centre of political dissent and subsequently played a major role in Rakosi's resignation. In June 1956, Rákosi's legitimacy received a final blow as a result of open rebellion of the writers who were members of the Circle. With Soviet approval, Emro Gero was elected as General Secretary of the HWP. Gero was considered by the Soviets as a figure of compromise.

During the meeting of the Hungarian Writers' Federation on 17 September, 1956, members of the organization demoted Gero and declared their support for Imre Nagy. The pro-Nagy campaign climaxed

during the reburial of László Rajk and three other victims of Stalinist purges. Imre Nagy's party membership was restored as the HWP's leadership hoped that this act would bring stability.

By that time, Imre Nagy had radically changed his political views: he stopped being a Stalinist and became a "full blooded national communist of the Titoist variety."¹⁹² Therefore, he welcomed the nationalist feelings which were strengthening in the masses. After the initial fighting between the Hungarian insurgents and the Soviet troops, which took place on the streets of Budapest, Imre Nagy formed a new government of the Patriotic Popular Front. However, despite popular support, Nagy's authority was questionable. On the one hand, he was forced to coordinate his decisions with the radicals of the National Revolutionary Committee. On the other, the Communist Party was divided between the centrists gathered around Kádár and the revisionists led by Nagy. The political circumstances, including the Suez Crisis, left Nagy without Western support and on November 7, 1956, Kádár triumphantly arrived at the Communist Party's headquarters, signaling the demise of the Hungarian Revolution.

The events in October 1956 impacted writers in two ways. In the first place, the events underlined the similarity of the positions of the Hungarian and Czechoslovak writers in socio-political life. In his article, the Hungarian writer and dissident Árpád Goncz underlines the role of the Hungarian Writers' Federation, which had become a vehicle of reforms in the period 1953-1956.¹⁹³ He argues that in 1956, the Hungarian writers came to understand their historical role deriving from the 19th century tradition of the Hungarian national revival and as a result they spearheaded the Hungarian revolution.¹⁹⁴ On the other hand, the conflict between the centrists and the historically driven revisionists in Hungary contrasted with the situation in Czechoslovakia. The position of Nezval and the anti-establishment Czechoslovak writers

¹⁹² Árpád Goncz, "Politics in Literature, Literature in Politics" in *The Georgia Review*, vol.5, 1991, p. 10.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

resembled a centrist model of looking for solutions inside the Communist present, rather than undermining it. The Bulgarian writers' positions also differed substantially from the revisionism of the Hungarian writers. The attitude of the oppositional voices such as Manov and Stoyanov was closer to the centrist approach of the Czechoslovak and Polish writers.

The Impact of the Hungarian Revolution in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia

On November 20, the leader of the Bulgarian Writers' Union Hristo Radevsky published an article under the title "About the Questionable and the Unquestionable." In it, he revealed his position of restrained conflict. "In literary life, there are questions which are important to be discussed and on which as many opinions as possible should be heard. There are some questions, though, which for us – the communists, are unquestionable and it would be counterproductive to argue about them because having joined the Communist Party, we have accepted them as unquestionable."¹⁹⁵

The stabilization of the HWP was a process presided over by Kádár. His policy was marked by the preservation of the 1953-1956 social reforms and by brutal acts. For example, Imre Nagy was executed in 1958. The situation in Hungary was closely watched by the political leadership in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia.

The BCP reacted to the events of October 1956 in a predictable fashion. On October 30th, the Politburo issued its official statement. The situation in Poland was described as an attempt by the petty bourgeoisie to revise the Marxist-Leninist doctrine. The events in Hungary were defined as a counter-

¹⁹⁵ Literaturny front, 20.11. 1956. p.3.

revolutionary revolt against socialism. In November 1956, the political leadership tightened the control over intellectual life. On November 5th, Todor Zhivkov used the situation in Hungary to underline the importance of the April 1956 Plenum and to display the unity inside the Communist Party: “The events which took place in Hungary have convinced us how wise and righteous are the decisions which were taken at the April Plenum... From the highest organs of the Politburo and the Central Committee to the smallest party organizations, the events have found our party united.”¹⁹⁶

The Communist Party’s unity led to the re-introduction of political repression. On November 17, 1956, the camp for political prisoners in Belene was reopened. In the course of 6 years 1200 people were incarcerated and 150 died there as result of repression by the prison guards.¹⁹⁷

A propaganda campaign was also launched. A number of intellectuals gave support to the struggle against revisionism and counter revolution. On November 15, *Literaturen Front* devoted its cover page to the events that had taken place in Hungary. Main rivals such as Radevsky and Stoyanov offered very similar opinions on the Hungarian question, thus manifesting the unity of the Communist Party.

The voice of the opposition within the Writers’ Union, Lyudmil Stoyanov, expressed his position not only as a writer but also as a member of the World Committee for Peace: “Those days of a stormy counter-revolution in Hungary represent a lesson for the countries now building the new socialist world. It is also a lesson for the countries fighting for freedom and independence.”¹⁹⁸ In his conclusion, Stoyanov argued that the events in Suez and Budapest were plotted by the forces of Western imperialism. Hristo Radevsky reconfirmed the Communist Party’s general line as did the old-guard writer Georgi Karaslavov.

¹⁹⁶ F.1B, op.3, f. 18, p. 5

¹⁹⁷ Iskra Baeva, Evgenia Kalinova, *Bulgarskite prehodi*, p. 45.

¹⁹⁸ *Literaturen Front*, 15. 11. 1956, p. 3.

Similarly in Czechoslovakia, on November 10th, *Literární noviny*'s leading comment on the events in Hungary was made by Jiří Hájek. In his article entitled "In that moment", Hájek expressed the official Communist Party line on the Hungarian revolt.¹⁹⁹ Most of his arguments were similar to those expressed by Stoyanov and Radevsky. He blamed the situation on the cold blooded and cynical approach of the imperialist forces that were trying to take advantage of the reform attempts which occurred after the 20th Congress of the CPSU. Hájek also portrayed the Soviet military intervention as "dictated by heart and reason" and deriving from "proletarian honor and responsibility."²⁰⁰ In the final part of his article, Hájek focused on the role of the intellectuals and writers in a situation of crisis. He emphasized the unity between the working intelligentsia and the working classes. "Some wrong tendencies and feelings, divisions created recently between us, now fell apart. The working class and its revolutionary avant-garde must know that in that moment the Czech and Slovak writers and the working class find themselves as an inseparable unit and that they want to be the workers' loyal voice and walk with them side by side."²⁰¹

Hájek's words underlined the unity between political leadership and intellectuals seen in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia during the Hungarian uprising. Yet, the Czechoslovak writers preserved the freedom gained after the Second Writers' Congress. At the time of the Hungarian revolution, in Czechoslovakia, the literary magazine *Květen* was launched as a tribune for radical young poets. The return of prewar literary heritage was again deemed acceptable and authors like Halas were again published. *Literární Noviny* started publishing philosophical discussions on Marxism which went beyond of the official Communist Party ideology.

The next meeting of the Praesidium of the Czechoslovak Writers took place on 22, February, 1957.

¹⁹⁹ *Literární noviny*, 10. 11. 1956, p. 4.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

Important figures of the postwar generation such as Miroslav Holub, Jan Procházka and Ivan Klíma were accepted as members of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union. Some of the topics discussed during the meeting reflected two controversial aspects of 1956 – the rehabilitation of prewar writers and the creation of groupings outside the Writers' Union. In the first place the membership committee of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union proposed the rehabilitation of Jaroslav Durych. The latter was amongst the most prominent catholic poets in the 1930s along with Jan Čep, Jakub Deml, and Jan Zahradníček. The proposition was read by Nezval and presented in a tactical manner as Nezval did not get immediate support from within the Praesidium. In Nezval's opinion, Durych's mistakes were not so grave as to make his acceptance by the Writers' Union impossible. Nezval underlined the fact that the conversation about admitting Durych in the Union should be conducted during a personal meeting without “dishonoring Durych.”²⁰² Rehabilitation without public self-criticism would have been a new approach within the Czechoslovak Writers' Union. After the Polish October, the catholic tradition was seen as potentially dangerous by the Communist regimes in Central Europe. So, the decision to admit Durych was postponed and the following period of stagnation in cultural life did not allow the acceptance of Durych.

In his contribution, Jiří Hájek expressed his support for writers' groups existing outside of the institution of the Writers' Union and welcomed the idea of informal interaction between different representatives of cultural life. Also, he acknowledged as positive the existence of different groupings around literary newspapers and magazines in Czechoslovakia. In his opinion, these groups were part of the 19th century literary tradition in Bohemia. His statement challenged the official party line of anti-nationalism since the power wielders in Eastern Europe saw the existence of the Petőfi club as a mistake in Hungary's cultural policy.

²⁰²LA PNP, f. SČSS, Zápis ÚV SČSS, 22.2.1957.

The thaw of the mid 1950s was put on hold as a result of another political conflict which took place inside the political leadership of the Soviet Union. In May 1957, a group led by Malenkov and Molotov tried to overthrow Khrushchev. After losing the battle in the Politburo with seven votes in favor of his resignation, the Soviet leader turned for support to the Central Committee.²⁰³ With the use of a whole gamut of apparatchik maneuvers, Khrushchev managed to preserve his leadership. Henceforth, his policy underwent a major change as for the next four years of his reign he would exercise rigid political control over the country. This was a position which was welcomed by the Eastern European political leaderships which were in need of regaining their authority as it was the case with Zhivkov in Bulgaria, and especially with Novotný in Czechoslovakia.

The political leadership in Czechoslovakia took action. In June 1957, the Politburo's ideological secretary Hendrych seriously attacked the events which had taken place in Czechoslovak intellectual life: "The advocates of revisionism have used as a pretext for their activities the conclusions of the CPSU congress, in particular its criticism of the personality cult. They have tried to distort the conclusions of the Congress in an opportunist, capitalist way, to falsify and exploit them in the form of a general attack on all basic principles of scientific Socialism."²⁰⁴

Although the political leadership in Czechoslovakia postponed for a few months the restoration of control over cultural life, the Czechoslovak Communist Party's position on the events in Hungary did not differ from that of Zhivkov and the BCP leadership. The CPCz's official organ *Rudé Právo* in a series of November issues expressed its support for the Soviet intervention and praised the benefits of the Kádár's normalization. Novotný himself used the situation as an opportunity to deny the existence of national

²⁰³ Volfram Egeling, *Politika i kultura pri Hruscheve i Brezhneve 1953-1970*, (Moskva: Airo, 1999), p. 100.

²⁰⁴ Vladimir Kusin, *Intellectual origins of the Prague Spring*, p. 21.

communism as the latter represented the greatest threat to Czechoslovakia's Party and State unity.²⁰⁵

The situation in Hungary was not dealt with during the meetings of the Bulgarian Writers' Union Praesidium which took place in the autumn of 1956. Its members were engaged in discussions relating to administrative changes. On 30 November, 1956, the Praesidium gathered to vote on the new structure of the Praesidium. In his overview on "encouragement of the artistic trends", Hristo Radevsky sketched out the official line on what the writers' public position should be: "Encouragement of artistic trends means that when I have a method of writing which does not contradict the socialist ideology, but which is not appreciated by other authors, I will have the right to go and defend it in the press and publicly to express my opinion."²⁰⁶

The definition was not debated by the rest of the members and the discussions dealt only with administrative changes. However, Radevsky was personally attacked by his rival Lyudmil Stoyanov: "We act like a strategist who has lost the battle but keeps on trying to return to his previous concepts with the hope that this will repair the situation."²⁰⁷

The position of the Union's leadership as expressed by Radevsky's views was to continue establishing the model of restrained conflicts. Opposition as expressed by Stoyanov was still superfluous and did not pose a threat to the ideological and political establishment.

In December 1956, the BCP Central Committee sent a questionnaire to every cultural organization. It consisted of general questions about the state of the arts and socialist realism. Lyudumil Stoyanov, Emil Manov, and Emilian Stanev published their answers in *Plamuk's* second issue. Their openly apolitical

²⁰⁵ Alfred French, *Czech Writers*, p. 137.

²⁰⁶ F.551, op.1, f. 90. p. 55.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

standpoints and criticism of the role of socialist realism as a leading method in literature brought them into conflict with the power wielders.

The attack was conducted by Zhivkov's new favorite among the writers, Georgi Karaslavov. The latter classified the questionnaire answers as a "Yugoslav approach": "That practice was introduced in Yugoslavia, as there every author freely chooses his own method and the Party considers that it is not its business to intervene. Practically, that denies the Party's leading role over literature and the arts. In our country, the party does not impose the method to the writers but it guides literature on to the path of socialist realism since that is the only rightful artistic method."²⁰⁸

In January 1957, Lyudmil Stoyanov publicly defended the writers from the attacks of the power wielders. On January 2, 1957, he published his article "Towards ideological clarification" as an answer to Radevsky's article "About the Questionable and the Unquestionable". After taking into consideration Radevsky's remarks about the importance of the 20th CPSU Congress, Stoyanov subjected him to severe criticism. Firstly, he accused Radevsky of insincerity "He is writing without a shadow of a doubt as if it was not him who supported the Cult of Personality." Unlike in previous controversies, this time Stoyanov went beyond the discourse of personal accusations. In contradicting Radevsky's criticism of the writer's need to step aside from actual politics, Lyudmil Stoyanov provided a coherent argumentation about the role of the writer: "As communists, we live with the problems of our time and our way of thinking is political. At the same time, if we are willing to create literary works that would be rich in content, deeply influenced by ideas and bursting with vivid characters as Sholokhov's *Quiet Don*, Fadeev's *Defeat* and Vazov's *Under the Yoke*, all of which were political in their nature, we need to focus on the living material as the main source of images in the arts. As far as ideas are concerned, we can rely on Marxist-

²⁰⁸ Literatures front, 02. 01. 1957. p.3.

Leninist ideological support – political in its foundation. Is that last thought truthful? I think that not only comrade Radevsky but every Marxist of his rank must accept this.”²⁰⁹

In his conclusion, Stoyanov blamed the masses’ disenchantment with politics on the Cult of Personality, supported by people like Radevsky. However, he remained an optimist since the overcoming of mistakes was, in Stoyanov’s opinion, a logical step on the road to communism. The article of Lydmil Stoyanov, along with the views on Socialist Realism expressed by Manov and Stanev, suggested the appearance of a conflict which would develop outside of the framework which had characterized the whole period of 1953-1956.

Unlike in Czechoslovakia, the political leadership quickly reacted to those signs of disunity which appeared despite Zhivkov’s propaganda about unity. The historian Natalia Hristova reveals that Stoyanov was summoned by the Central Committee and was severely criticized.²¹⁰ The pressure led to his self-criticism produced on March 7, 1957.

In Plamen Doinov’s opinion, Stoyanov’s self-criticism was part of a general wave of the post-April Plenum redemption acts. The atmosphere resembled the 1948-1953 witch-hunts in cultural life. Therefore, Stoyanov’s statement represented a return to the dogmas of the Stalinist period. Similarly to Karasinsky’s self-criticism in 1946, Stoyanov rejected any deliberately destructive remarks in the statements he had made about the relation between literature and politics. Focusing on the text which was quoted above, he wrote: “If anyone has seen it as a slogan or an ideological principle I must confess I have committed a mistake. But this was a mistake provoked by sensibility and not by reasoning – a mistake for which I am

²⁰⁹ Natalia Hristova, *Vlast i inteligentsia*. (Sofia: Letera, 2005), p. 166.

²¹⁰ *Ibid* p.169.

ready to make severe self-criticism.”²¹¹

In addition, Stoyanov reminded the power wielders of his devotion to the communist cause. He also mentioned that he had supported the Soviet intervention in Hungary. The text written by Stoyanov was signed by a number of writers including Emil Manov and Emilian Stanev. As a result, that act of a collective drive for the liberalization of literature was quickly suppressed by Zhivkov’s Communist regime.

As part of the post 2nd Congress discussions, *Literární Noviny* published the opinion of the old-guard apologist of the BCP, Todor Pavlov. His main criticism was that the Czechoslovak writers were now defining socialist realism not as a ruling method, but as a world view. However, Pavlov’s article was not coordinated with the Writers’ Union Praesidium.²¹² The publication in *Literaturen front* of Hájek’s article allowed the Bulgarian public to be directly introduced to the situation in Czechoslovakia’s cultural life.

Hájek’s conflict with Pavlov took place in the area between politics and the writers and in relation to the question of literature’s role in socialist society. Hájek’s criticism was based on the idea of opening up the arena of socialist literature. In his article, Hájek would often use the word “They” in order to place Pavlov in a group of intellectuals aiming at the restoration of Stalinist practices. Firstly, the Czechoslovak literary critic argued that there is a difference between debates on literature and political standpoints: “After we have already realized literature’s need of vivid and constant exchange of visions, artistic competition, discussion, and overcoming of contradictions, we should not allow what Todor Pavlov is doing, namely putting an equation sign between the class struggle and the struggle for different visions in

²¹¹ F.1B, op.5, f. 195, p. 6.

²¹² Natalia Hristova, *Vlast i Inteligentsia*, p. 171.

literature.”²¹³

In the second part of his article, Hájek called for an inclusive rather than segregating role of socialist literature. He presented his idea as a counterbalance to Pavlov’s isolationism. Hájek expressed the opinion that coexistence between socialist and Western literature was possible. Also, the article of the Czechoslovak literary critic focused on the interwar period, as Hájek claimed that the literary heritage of the 1920s and 1930s had to be reviewed in a search of examples of progressive and socialist writings. The final part of the article was related to the main accusation of Pavlov related to socialist realism’s role as a world view: “The difference between socialist and idealistic objectivistic art must be seen in the fact that it is our duty not to collapse in front of the contemporary man’s social and inner life complexity, and we must strive towards a variety of knowledge, visions and standpoints. We defend that standpoint against those who try to substitute a complicated and variable, artistic justice, with another form of justice based on logical concepts, newspaper articles or straight decisions.”²¹⁴

Although Pavlov’s position was not shared by the majority of the writers in Bulgaria, Hájek’s article revealed a gap between the reformers in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia. Although the next wave of restrictions deriving from the Soviet Union would slow down the pace of reforms in Czechoslovak artistic life, the foundation of the 1960s challenge made by the Czechoslovak intellectuals against the Communist Party’s rigid ideological stand was visible in this article. Unlike in Czechoslovakia, the Bulgarian writers were unable to lay down reformist grounds for the 1960s generation.

²¹³ Literatures Front, 25. 05. 1956. p. 4.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

Concluding Remarks

In this period, the conflicts in Central and Eastern Europe developed in relation to the changes on the Soviet political scene. They were influenced by the death of Stalin, by Khrushchev's struggle for political survival, and by the CPSU 20th Congress. Khrushchev's reforms led to the danger of disunity within the Socialist Bloc. Therefore, the idea of the unification became the main argument of propaganda in Central and Eastern Europe. Disunity was dealt with by force by the Soviet regime in the case of Hungary. However, after 1956 a number of possibilities for maneuvers and solutions did appear on the Socialist states' domestic scene. The success of Gomulka in Poland demonstrated that it was possible for political leaders in Central and Eastern Europe to conduct moderate reformist policies without jeopardizing the Socialist System's unity.

In cultural life as in politics, the most influential voices of change were the representatives of the prewar generation many of whom in one way or another were victims of the Stalinist period. Therefore, the people who spoke most openly during the 2nd Czechoslovak Writers' Congress were people like Nezval and Seifert. But in Bulgaria, the prewar generation of writers did not pose challenges. An interesting insight into that disengagement was provided in the memoirs of the postwar writer Atanas Slavov.²¹⁵ In the part dedicated to his adulthood, Slavov recollected the impressions from his father's generation. Slavov was the son of a person sentenced for alleged espionage during the Traicho Kostov trial. He described his father's return from prison and a group of his friends, all of them former communists. In the form of stories, they told the young writer about the methods of surviving physical pressure as creating a parallel reality for themselves. These people had regained their freedom, but that escapism persisted in their lives, preventing them from taking part in any conflicts with the regime. In

²¹⁵ Atanas Slavov, *S treva obrasli*, (Paris, 1983), pp.125-135.

Slavov's words, instead of becoming politically active, the released prisoners had decided to stay home to play cards and backgammon. In conclusion, he expressed a rather pessimistic view on confronting the Communist regime: "Was it better what Nagy and Gomulka had done in Hungary and Poland raising once again the hopes of their people for a better life under the dominion of the Kremlin? I do not know! I am not so sure!"²¹⁶

However, the younger generation was active in Czechoslovak cultural life. Jiří Hájek and Milan Kundera took part in the liberal efforts of 1956. They confronted the hegemony of socialist realism with coherent arguments about literature's character. On the other hand, the most openly rebellious young writer in Bulgaria, Emil Manov, criticized the regime without concrete ideas how to change cultural life. With the appearance of the magazine *Plamuk*, a platform for confrontation with the regime was created. However, in Bulgaria the power wielders responded quickly and pacified the rebellion of the writers even before it had taken shape.

The activity of the writers in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia in the period 1953-1957 reveals two major reasons why Bulgarian writers were unable to confront the regime's policy in cultural life. In terms of the Communist regime's foreign policy, the writers in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia remained loyal to power wielders. Nonconformists such as Jiří Hájek and Lyudmil Stoyanov did not question the Soviet intervention in Hungary. The main difference appeared in the process of the emulation of Khrushchev's speech on the domestic stage. In Bulgaria, Zhivkov managed to unite the intellectuals in favor of his struggle for power while the leadership of the CPCz lacked a specific program through which to counter the chaos which originated in the country after the 20th Congress of CPSU. In that respect, Zhivkov's policy was much more successful. He condemned Chervenkov and the arguments presented at the April

²¹⁶ Ibid. p. 135.

plenum turned into an ideological fortress of the Communist regime and the writers proved unable to break it.

Besides, the objective obstacles posed by the Communist regimes in the period of 1953-1956 revealed another dividing line related to the writers' ability to formulate and publicly articulate coherent visions of literature's position in the Socialist state. The writers in the two countries belonged to what the Polish historian Pavel Machcewicz defines as a centrist wing. However, the ideas expressed by the most prominent representatives of the Czechoslovak writers during and after the 2nd Czechoslovak Writers' Congress were based on two major concepts – the revision of the prewar literary tradition and the establishment of the role of the writers as a conscience of the people. For their part, the writers in Bulgaria were involved in personal squabbles as it was notably exemplified by the Stoyanov - Radevsky controversies. At the same time, the message of the writers of the postwar generation such as Delchev, Ralin, and Manov was not coherent. In the 1960s, the writers in Czechoslovakia challenged the Communist regime on the basis of their prewar historical experience and as a part of a struggle to challenge the system from the inside. In contrast, rather than contradicting the Communist regimes' dogmas, the postwar generation of Bulgarian writers merely tried to outwit Todor Zhivkov and his ideological advisers.

The first wave of the De-Stalinization witnessed the appearance of a new model of relations between power and writers that would dominate in the next decade. Gradually, Zhivkov developed his model of informal relations with the writers. In difference with Khrushchev, the Bulgarian leader was not afraid of the intellectuals and he was ready to exploit their weaknesses. Zhivkov's model did not eradicate conflicts between power and writers, but through his personal intervention the Bulgarian communist leader was able to set the perimeter of the conflict. In this relation the writers in Bulgaria were to be involved in a

struggle for power within the institution of the Writers' Union. In contrast after the turmoil of 1956 the writers in Czechoslovakia would remain outside of the scope of the political leadership of CPCz. Therefore, the next period will reveal the formation of the writers in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia.

CHAPTER 3: The writers in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia during the second wave of De-Stalinization 1958-1964

It is better for us to avoid any unreasonable boldness and try and keep the things simple. Just as in the case of ungrateful spouses it is better to fight for the marriage, rather than going through other marriages and constant divorces. I am not a conservative I am only being sensible.

Ilia Bezhkov

Introduction

This chapter will reveal the formation of the conflicts in the post 1956 framework. The power wielders in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia faced new challenges due to changes following the debacle of the Hungarian Revolution. In addition, the late 1950s and the early 1960s marked a generational change in different spheres, including cultural life. The combination of these two factors resulted in different conflicts between the power wielders and the intellectuals.

In the history of Eastern Europe, the period 1958–1964 developed from the restoration of political

control as an aftermath of the Hungarian uprising until the coup against the Soviet political leader Nikita Khrushchev. The period was marked by fluctuations in the political order in Eastern Europe. Firstly, there were global conflicts that set the pace of the changes in Eastern Europe. A decade after the end of World War II, the nature of the conflict had changed, and so did the instruments of its protagonists. A whole gamut of negotiations and mutual allowances was accompanied by repetitive signals of mistrust and by serious confrontations between the Soviet Union and the United States. Secondly, the battle for power inside the Communist Party had still dominated the domestic policy in Eastern Europe. Its pace and final outcome differed substantially in both countries. In Bulgaria, it was still related to Todor Zhivkov's personal quest, while in Czechoslovakia it was a part of general problems, related to the functioning of the Czechoslovak state. Thirdly, cultural life in Eastern Europe underwent some changes. On the one hand, the general atmosphere of changes allowed some clashes of opinions and some literary achievements. However, this was also a time of strict monitoring combined with fears of a possible repetition of the events of 1956. The struggle against revisionism dominated the discourse in the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, and Czechoslovakia. State institutions still wielded considerable power, influencing the development of cultural life in both countries. The impact of their decision-making still differed in Bulgaria and in Czechoslovakia.

The thaw and the international context

The Hungarian crisis showed that Western politicians would refrain from any involvement that could lead to a potential military conflict with the USSR. Moreover, the years between 1958 and 1962 witnessed the first stage of a political thaw which led to a number of meetings between American president John F.

Kennedy and Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev. One of the major reasons for stability in the late 1950s was the rise to key positions of a new generation of political leaders, as the majority of them had not been involved in the creation of the post war status quo. By pointing to Stalin's associates from the prewar generation as culprits guilty of his crimes, the Soviet leadership adapted itself to the general idea of a generational shift in Europe's political order. The meetings between Khrushchev and Kennedy gave birth to a new formula - a peaceful competition between two rival systems. As a result, not only did Eastern Europe partially open its borders both politically and culturally, but also the idea of challenging Western domination became the starting point for a number of reforms inside the communist regimes in the region.

The new geopolitical constellation did not, however, prevent the appearance of significant political conflicts. The balance of power was shattered at the beginning of the 1960s by the erection of the Berlin Wall (1961) and by the Caribbean Crisis (1963). Not surprisingly, the first calamity was related to Berlin. The position of the German city was problematic from 1948. The Soviet blockade and the response of the Western allies represented the first major postwar conflict. From the 1950s onwards, an ever-increasing number of people fled from the Soviet part of the city to the Western part. The erection of the Berlin wall was the outcome of numerous complaints made by East German communist political leaders, and Walter Ulbricht in particular.²¹⁷ Their main line of argument was that a wave of fugitives on such a large scale created the danger of turning East Berlin into some sort of ghost town. In addition, Khrushchev was convinced that it was necessary to reestablish the authority of the Soviet Union. He supported the East German political leadership. Therefore on the eve of 13 August, 1961, he authorized the building of the Berlin Wall.

The western reaction was immediate but still confined within the post 1956 paradigm of conflicts. In

²¹⁷ Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945*, (New York, Penguin Books, 2005), p. 302.

his famous speech, given in Berlin in 1961, the American president John F. Kennedy repeatedly used the phrase “Let them come to Berlin” as a signal for a peaceful competition in a bipolar world. Although the erection of the Wall created a political division, its acceptance by the West averted the danger of a military conflict in the heart of Europe. Areas of conflict were moving away from the Old Continent. In 1963, the world faced the prospect of a conflict that could have led to the extinction of a large part of the world’s population – a nuclear war.

Although propaganda in both Western and Eastern Europe exaggerated the impact of the Caribbean crisis, the latter was as close as it could get to a war threat. In order to avoid it, both sides made allowances – the Soviets sacrificed their ambitions for a dominant role in the Pacific Ocean, while the Americans gave up their plans to build a military base on the shores of the Black Sea. The outcome of the crisis signaled the actual start of a period known in historiography as “the Thaw”.

Despite preserving its leading role, the Soviet Union had to endure a significant loss of influence in Eastern Europe. Strangely enough, the focal point of the loss was not the rebellious Central Europe, but the Western Balkans – a region traditionally under strong Russian influence. Firstly, the uncompromisingly independent policy of Josip Broz Tito was enhanced by changes in the international context. In the first half of the 1960s, the Yugoslav leader along with India’s president Nehru, and Egypt’s Al Nasser spearheaded the creation of the non-alignment movement. After 1956, in exchange for his support for the suppression of the Hungarian uprising, the Romanian communist leader Georgiou Dej convinced the Soviet political leadership to withdraw its military contingent from Romania. Consequently, his successor Nicolae Ceausescu pursued a nationalist policy that culminated in 1965 with the country’s break-up with the Warsaw Pact. In addition, under the umbrella of the Sino-Soviet split,

depicted by the historian Robert Service as Mao's escape from the Soviet's intellectual trusteeship,²¹⁸ the Albanian leader Enver Hoxha also took his country outside of the Soviet orbit. As a result, in the last days of his reign, Khrushchev retained control only over the three countries in Central Europe, among which was Czechoslovakia, and over a sole loyal satellite in the Balkans, Bulgaria.

The struggle against anti-party activity played a dominant role in the confrontation discourse in the CPSU. By using it, Khrushchev accomplished his struggle for power, and in 1958 dethroned the Soviet Prime Minister, Nicolai Bulganin. However, the Soviet leader had unwittingly paved the road to power for Leonid Brezhnev. After becoming Khrushchev's protégé, the latter had strengthened his position and in 1963 his influence in the party was comparable to that of Khrushchev. The latter was ousted during a plenum of the Central Committee of the CPSU that took place in December 1964.

Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia

During the last years of Khrushchev's regime, Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia came under severe scrutiny. However, the internal dynamism in the two countries was different, mainly because of the political struggle that had assumed dramatic proportions in Bulgaria. First, in June 1958, Zhivkov removed from positions of influence three of his main rivals – Chankov, Panov, and Terpeshev. In addition to the accusations of anti-party activity, the Bulgarian communist leader underlined the importance of promoting young people to the highest organs of the BCP. Therefore, he installed new figures such as Mitko Grigorov and Stanko Todorov. The last of the victims was the old guard communist and an ex-

²¹⁸ Robert Service, *Comrades: A World History of Communism*, p. 223.

Minister of Interior Affairs Anton Yugov. Yugov was ousted during a plenum meeting of the BCP in 1962. The journalist and historian Hristo Hristov argues that Zhivkov liquidated the old party members who had constantly underestimated him.²¹⁹ During that plenum, the 49-year-old Zhivkov claimed his role as a defender of a new generation of communists against the dangers of the past.

The nature of these conflicts explains the process of de-Stalinization in Bulgaria. Not only did it allow the next generation of communist politicians into power, but it also left the new CP leadership without serious voices of discontent. The new members were connected to Zhivkov and his authority remained undisputed in the next decade. The only vehicle of political controversy – the struggle for power, was liquidated.

Unlike Zhivkov, Novotný never presented himself as a reformer. A large number of the leadership of the Czechoslovak Communist Party was involved in numerous atrocities in the pre-1956 period.²²⁰ Their mutual inter-dependence created a status quo which secured the stability of Novotný's regime until the mid-1960s. In 1960, the regime prepared the new Constitution of Czechoslovakia. As Golan notices, Novotný reestablished the power of the conservative wing inside the leadership of the CPCz.²²¹ On the other hand, the activity around that new Constitution revealed a pattern of behavior similar to that of the BCP. Namely, the leaders of the CPCz shared the aim of preventing the outburst of social conflicts. Therefore the Czechoslovak leadership said that Czechoslovakia had managed to emulate the Soviet example, stating that the goal of socialism had been reached and the next target was Communism.

In practice, the new Constitution failed to resolve the problem of Slovakia. Its territory was left under

²¹⁹ Hristo Hristov, *Todor Zhivkov: Biografia*, (Sofia: Ciela, 2012), p.38.

²²⁰ Karel Kaplan, *Antonín Novotný: Vzestup a pád lidového aparátčíka*, (Brno: Barrister & Principal, 2011).

²²¹ Galia Golan, *Reform Rule in Czechoslovakia: The Dubcek Era 1968-1969*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1973) p. 22.

the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Interior. In the opinion of Mary Heimann, this only increased the mistrust of the Slovak population towards the Czechs.²²² As a result, the Communist Party not only did not solve one of their main problems, but allowed a space for potential conflicts.

In 1962, the leadership of the Czechoslovak Communist Party initiated a process of revision of the practices of the Stalinist period. However, the regime did this within the de-Stalinization framework by finding a culprit, the Minister of Interior Rudolf Barák. Barák was condemned by the Politburo for allegedly concealing information. Novotný accused Barák of making personal decisions without taking into consideration the Central Committee. Many scholars, however, point out that the leadership concentrated on political goals. Their aim was to distract the population from wider economic problems. The American historian Tony Judt says that it was the role of the Barák Commission to recognize that the past of the regime was criminal without losing control over the present.²²³

However, mistakes in dealing with Slovak issues fractured centralized control and generated conflicts. In 1963, a new generation in the Slovak Communist Party challenged the members of the old guard, many of whom were closely related to Novotný. In that period of confrontation, the figure of Alexander Dubček was considered as an acceptable candidate both by the liberal and conservative wings. He had managed to remain outside of the vicious confrontations during the Barák case. William Shawcross provides an explanation for Dubček's position of a sideler, namely that the provincial tempo of Bratislava suited Dubček much better than life in Prague.²²⁴

Another reason for conflict which fractured the political unity was the economic situation in the

²²² Mary Heimann, *Czechoslovakia the State that Failed*, (Yale: Yale University Press) p. 211.

²²³ Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Eastern Europe*, p. 480.

²²⁴ William Shawcross, *Dubček and Czechoslovakia*, (London: Hogarth Press, 1990), p. 81.

country. Unlike Bulgaria, prewar Czechoslovakia was amongst the most industrialized countries in Central Europe. Ota Šik proposed a stimulus outside of the command economy. He argued that factories' income should be calculated on the basis of a certain amount of profit. Although the idea had been ruled out as too radical, the spirit of reform in the economy was transferred into socio-cultural life. This linkage was the core of the reformist movement in Czechoslovakia in the 1960s.²²⁵ That interdependence was evidenced by Zdeněk Mlynář's demand for a political reform which was to accompany the economic one. Kieran Williams argues that the political leadership in Czechoslovakia had to attempt some reforms in order to balance between the Czech and the Slovak interests.²²⁶

Liberalization and Preservation of Political Unity inside the Soviet Union

In the period 1958–1964, cultural life in the Soviet Union developed in different directions. On the one hand, Stalinist stagnation in artistic life gradually decreased. After a long absence, a large number of classical Russian poets and novelists could be published again. However, Khrushchev had still closely scrutinized artistic life. In the second half of the 1950s, he associated himself with the hardliners within the Writers' Union that were led by Alexander Tvardovsky.²²⁷ The outbreak of criticism against Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* witnessed the presence of that double standard in Soviet cultural policy. Khrushchev never publicly articulated his reasons for condemning *Doctor Zhivago*.²²⁸ Recently, in Khrushchev's biography, written by his son, it has been stated that Khrushchev had been misled by his advisers as they presented him only with short extracts from the novel. Their aim was to convince

²²⁵ Mary Heimann, *Czechoslovakia the State that Failed*, p. 482.

²²⁶ Kieran Williams, *The Prague Spring and its Aftermath*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

²²⁷ Robert Service, *A History of Modern Russia* pp. 364-366.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 365.

Khrushchev that the novel was anti-political. In addition, the special character of de-Stalinization in the Soviet Union may provide an additional explanation for Khrushchev's sanctions against Pasternak. Namely, he disliked the fact that the novel had focused on the philosophy of the communist system and questioned the unity of its founding myth – that of the Bolshevik revolution. The situation became even more critical when on October 22, 1958, Pasternak was awarded with the Nobel Prize. Not only was the writer not allowed to receive the prize, but he was also forced to write a letter in which publicly denounced it. A week later, Boris Pasternak was expelled from the Soviet Writers' Union. By the end of his life, the writer was closely monitored by the KGB.

Khrushchev changed his rigid policy a year later when he came to support the liberal wing within the Soviet Writers Union. Moreover, in 1962, he publicly welcomed Alexander Solzhenitsyn's novel *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*.²²⁹ Unlike *Doctor Zhivago*, that novel was not aiming to provide a general evaluation of the system. It targeted a particular case – the camp system under Stalin. Also, at a time when his position was under a serious threat, the appearance of an openly controversial novel cemented Khrushchev's reformist image. However, another conflict between Khrushchev and some Soviet intellectuals restored his orthodox image. In March 1963, a group of unorthodox sculptors and painters had prepared an exhibition in the Manezh Exhibition Hall. The news of the success of the event soon reached the power wielders in the Kremlin. Khrushchev decided to visit the exhibition and was shocked by what he saw. In his infamous speech he brutally attacked the organizers: "We have the right to send you out to cut trees until you have paid back the money the state has spent on you. The people and the government have had a lot of trouble with you and you pay them back with this shit."²³⁰ He finally became a victim of his own strength – his ability to construct and to control the terms of every major

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Men and His Era*, (New York: Free Press, 2003), p. 235.

conflict, both on the international scene or inside the Soviet Union.

The Writers in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia in the age of victorious socialism

The image of Zhivkov as Khrushchev's disciple was embedded not only in politics, but also within the BCP policy on the cultural front. In the words of Natalia Hristova, the period from 1958 until 1964 legitimized the dissident character of the April '56 Generation.²³¹ That process was orchestrated in the form of a generational conflict. Emil Manov was the first who established himself as a symbol of the opposition in the Zhivkov era. Not surprisingly, it was his novel *A Case of Dubious Veracity* (*Edin nedostoveren sluchay*), published in 1957, that generated the first collision after the dramatic events of 1951 related to the novel *Tobacco*.

Manov's novel was written in the style of de-Stalinization literature. It developed around the character of a young communist who had lost his faith during the Stalinist period. However, the stagnation of the Bulgarian literary scene, combined with the personality of Manov generated a controversy around the *Case of Dubious Veracity*. After the fall of communism, the dissident and first democratically elected president Zhelyo Zhelev underlined the importance of Manov's work as "the first case of open expression of thoughts and ideas outside officialdom."²³² After a series of meetings between Manov and the editors of the magazine *Plamuk*, order in the system was restored.

A year after the 1956 events in Hungary, the unity of the young Bulgarian writers was fractured by some young and loyal members of the Writers' Union. The April Generation suddenly turned into an

²³¹ Natalia Hristova, *Spezifika na bulgarskoto disidentstvo*, (Sofia: Letera, 2000), p. 80.

²³² *Ibid.*, p. 85.

object of attacks due to the unacceptable behavior of some of its members. Amongst the culprits was the young poet Konstantin Pavlov. His official credibility was cemented by the poem he had written in support of the defeat of the Hungarian Uprising. In the period from the autumn of 1956 until the spring of 1957, Pavlov decided to confront the demands of official censorship in his writings. He answered the critics who complained about a lack of ideas in his works by saying “For some people, the codex of ideas in literature is a policeman’s book. If that is the meaning of ideas, the young poets should not obey ideas and need to cross the street outside of the allowed perimeter.”²³³ This was only the beginning of a controversy between Pavlov and the regime which made him a cult figure of the underground poetry in the 1960s.

However, the most drastic case of a conflict between the regime in Bulgaria and a poet was that of Penyo Penev. He was twenty-six years old when his collection “Good Morning, People” was considered the highest achievement in the genre of poetry for workers. Soon afterward, his personal life got out of hand. Not only were his problems with alcohol not tackled by the Party, but the latter even subsidized his vice.²³⁴ Penev repeatedly damaged “the good image” of the Party with his public behavior and the authorities turned from favors to sanctions. The chairman of the Writers’ Union, Karaslavov, constantly complained of Penev’s behavior and so Penev was sent to a psychiatric institution. After six months, however, he was released. He wrote a letter to Karaslavov asking for forgiveness. Penev argued that he become involved with “people that were able to give up their love for the people in exchange for a glass of wine.”²³⁵ He added a dose of conspiracy to his situation, claiming that “Drinking in that company was not about the drinking itself, but it served to generate in me feelings of insecurity, disappointment, and

²³³ Konstantin Pavlov v bulgarskata literatura i kultura, ed. Plamen Doinov, (Sofia: Kralitsa Mab, 2009) p. 33.

²³⁴ Plamen Doinov, Penyo Penev: Literaturna lichnost i yadra na socializma”, in Kultura, vol. 9, 2000, p. 2.

²³⁵ F. 551, op. 1, f.113, p. 3.

blindness.”²³⁶ Written within the genre of self-criticism, the letter had a particular target. Plamen Doinov thinks that Penev wrote this letter because he had financial problems after his release from hospital.²³⁷

However, the regime was incapable of handling the situation. A cat and mouse game between Penev and the regime ended tragically when in March 1959, the poet committed suicide. In his memoirs, the poet and a contemporary of Penev Lyubomir Levchev dwelled on Penev’s death. On the one hand, Levchev considers the death of the poet to be in line with the tradition of playing with death, which was typical for Essenin. On the other hand, Levchev examined the reality faced by Penev. “Any hypothesis had lost its meaning. Horrified by what had happened to his dreams, Penyo escaped the new reality by choosing a very familiar path. That was symbolic. He gave a warning to every one of us who was still writing with faith.”²³⁸ The role of the regime in Penev’s death is described by the literary historian Michail Nedelchev as a problem related to “forbidden spontaneity.”²³⁹

In 1958, many important members of the prewar generation were struggling to retain authority in the writers’ ranks. For instance, Todor Pavlov continued to argue against the editors of *Literaturen front*, who in 1957 had allowed the publishing of an article written by the Czechoslovak critic Jiří Hájek. Pavlov had written a letter threatening the newspaper with sanctions. The Secretariat of the Bulgarian Writers’ Union convened a meeting in which the chairman of *Literaturen Front* Slavcho Vasev defended the newspaper by claiming that it is impossible to publish reactions to every article written by an external collaborator. The potential threat was averted through a personal meeting between the members of the Secretariat and Pavlov. The downfall of Pavlov was symbolic for the ever-increasing role of the April’ 56 Generation.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Plamen Doinov, “Literaturna lichnost i yadra na socializma”, p. 4.

²³⁸ Lyubomir Levchev, *Ti si sledvashtiat*, (Sofia: Trud, 1998), p. 124.

²³⁹ Michail Nedelchev, Penyo Penev: Vtorata golyama personifikatsia na sotsioculturnata figura na bulgarskata lyava kultura, in *Kultura*, vol. 9, 2000, p. 6.

In March 1958, Todor Zhivkov took part in the annual meeting of the Writers' Union. His opening speech witnessed the return of the slogan, widely used in the period of 1944-1945, "Get closer to the people". The researcher of socialist culture Ivan Elenkov suggests an additional value to Zhivkov's speech. In the first place, the need for popular culture can be created only as a result of direct collaboration between the intellectuals and the Party, he says. Secondly, Elenkov claims that within that paradigm the regime aimed to set up the stage for the next generation of writers, which was notably different from its predecessors in terms of education, social status, and working conditions.²⁴⁰ In addition, Zhivkov personally attacked Emil Manov and Valeri Petrov for the quality of their involvement in the political process. At the end of his speech, the communist leader went into a Stalinist kind of stylistic analysis by condemning the bourgeois-formalistic approach allegedly used by some literary works.

Soon afterwards, Zhivkov institutionalized his leading position in cultural life. The problem was the leader of the Writers' Union, Hristo Radevsky, who had never denied his close relations with Vulko Chervenkov. In April 1958 the Politburo of the BCP sanctioned the removal of Radevsky from the position of Chair of the Writers' Union. The superiority of the prewar generation was preserved and the supreme power was given to Georgi Karaslavov. Therefore Karaslavov became the mediator between the ideological dogma and the intellectuals.

In 1959, the new leader of the Bulgarian Writers' Union presented the topic "Get closer to the people" for discussion. In his opening speech, Karaslavov argued that "fiction can get much deeper into life than any other literary genre."²⁴¹ Therefore, the Praesidium took the decision to send writers to different places in the country to do manual work and get to know the working class environment. An

²⁴⁰ Ivan Elenkov, *Kulturniat front*, (Sofia: Ciela 2008), pp. 191-192.

²⁴¹ F. 551, op. 1, f. 113, p. 11.

atmosphere of subjugation to the new leadership governed the meeting. The only voice of dissent was that of the previous leader of the Writers' Union, Hristo Radevsky. He did not share the enthusiasm towards the new directive. His argument was that the work of the Union was to run its periodical newspapers and magazines and to supervise literary works through literary criticism. In his opinion, the writers were supposed to travel and describe but not to be included in manual work. The absurdity of the topic discussed during the meeting cannot hide the unity around the dogma and the disappearance of potentially destabilizing content from the debates.²⁴²

On April 29, 1959 the Praesidium of the Writers' Union held another meeting in which it discussed the need to improve its functionality. In addition to some organizational issues, the meeting focused on the role of the Praesidium in the field of ideas. The members of the Praesidium discussed the need of the organization to take control over topics related to artistic and ideological issues, without giving up its role as an organ of control. The Union moved towards centralization. This reflected in the enhanced powers of the chairman of the Writers' Union. Karaslavov was placed in charge of both ideological matters and problems related to the functionality of the institution. Since Karaslavov was closely associated with Zhivkov, the new system was reminiscent of the democratic centralism of the Stalinist period. In that same meeting of the Writers' Union, the Praesidium accepted as members two new writers, both of whom were important figures in the personal circle of Todor Zhivkov – Slavcho Chernishev and Georgi Dzhagarov.²⁴³

Change manifested itself through the revival of literary criticism. The literary critics who had been victims of Chervenkov's policy during the *Tobacco* case seized the opportunity to reestablish their

²⁴² Ibid., p. 17.

²⁴³ Ibid., pp. 23-34.

positions. Pencho Danchev was able to read a report which was now allowed to focus on the past. Danchev claimed that almost every literary critic had been a victim of accusations of revisionism. They were all criticized for questioning the image of a proper communist. He pointed out that sectarianism in the previous period had dominated in literary life. In the final part of his speech, Danchev defined the relationship between the work of a literary critic and the stability of the political system: “Literary critics do not work with artistic images but with ideological ones. They are absolutely aware of the political nature of their work.”²⁴⁴ On the one hand, his speech evaluated the mistakes of the Chervenkov era. On the other hand, it did not leave any doubt that the communist party would continue to exercise its influence over the arts.

On the eve of the 1960s, the regime in Bulgaria had already publicly articulated a new image of the cultural sphere. Zhivkov’s involvement, marked by personal relations, brought about some important changes in the organizational life of the writers. However, behind the official image there were fractures. Previous victims of the regime had regained authority but the regime was capable of restraining their ambition for revenge. The strict centralization of power was aimed at minimizing the risk of conflict.

The principle was officially proclaimed during a meeting in February 1960. The decisions of the Secretariat were to have a propositional character. The organ responsible for all decision making was the Praesidium of the Writers’ Union. An important decision was taken for three young writers to become candidate-members of the Writers’ Union - the poets Lyubomir Levchev and Damian Damyanov, and the novelist Yordan Radichkov.²⁴⁵ However, the desire for revenge was still present. Therefore, on April 16, 1960, in a special resolution, the Politburo expressed its fears with regard to certain groupings inside the

²⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 35.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., f. 127, pp. 126-143.

Writers' Union.²⁴⁶ The tension reached its peak on the eve of the annual election in the Writers' Union. On 17 June, 1960, Todor Zhivkov held a meeting with the Praesidium of the Writers' Union. He repeatedly emphasized the importance of the annual meeting. He said that the organizers must prevent the appearance of such groupings, demanding revenge.

Later in the same month, Karaslavov told the members of the Praesidium that it had been recommended to him that he should extend the membership total to thirty-three people. The rehabilitated novelist Dimitar Talev and the authors of the two most controversial literary works in the 1950s, Dimitar Dimov and Emil Manov, were co-opted into the leading organ. However, the author of *The Peach Thief*, Emilian Stanev, was left out of the list due to problems with his discipline. Again, the voice of dissent was that of Hristo Radevsky. He complained that the extended list was unworkable. He claimed that it had been created in order to prevent some members from being offended. However, the validity of his arguments was overshadowed by his fears of being cast away by the new political organ. Other people also objected, saying that the Praesidium should co-opt some young writers. However, Karaslavov made it clear that the list had already been discussed with "a variety of institutions and cannot be changed"²⁴⁷. As the members of the Praesidium were aware of Zhivkov's warnings, the discussion did not extend outside that meeting.

On 8 February, 1961, the Praesidium of the Writers' Union dealt with the discipline amongst the young writers. The organization proposed three forms of control. In the first place, a new organ was to be created that would monitor any undesirable activity of the young writers. Also, older writers were expected to closely supervise the work of their younger colleagues. As a whole, the meeting was

²⁴⁶ F. 357B, op.1, f.71, p. 192.

²⁴⁷ F. 551, op. 1, f. 127, pp. 96-107.

dominated by negativism coming from the prewar generation. Angel Karaliichev complained about the unprofessional attitude allegedly displayed by most of the young writers. In addition, he claimed that these writers regarded the Writers' Union as a household that had to constantly provide for their needs. Although being part of a generational conflict, the words of Karaliichev revealed some tendencies to corrupt the new generation of writers.²⁴⁸ The problem would blossom in the mid 1960s when the April Generation had finally taken over the literary stage.

On 16 May, 1961, the Writers' Union Bureau of the Communist Party responsible for the writers convened a meeting with the task of punishing Pencho Danchev and Emil Manov. The organization confirmed the accusations in anti-party activity and approved their eventual expulsion from the BCP. Manov was accused of disregarding the decisions of the 1956 April Plenum, while Danchev was blamed on the basis of his service to the Cult of Vulko Chervenkov.²⁴⁹ On the one hand, the decision served as a warning that for a short while calmed the tension inside the organization. On the other hand, these constant tensions destabilized Karaslavov's position as chairman of the Writers' Union.

During a discussion about the annual awards for literature, some minor tensions appeared in the Praesidium of the Writers' Union. The conflict arose during the nominations for poetry prizes. Competing for the award were Valeri Petrov and Pavel Matev.²⁵⁰ The former was known for his talent and controversial attitude, while the latter was associated with the post-1956 group of power wielders. Renowned writers such as Emilian Stanev and Dimitar Dimov openly supported Petrov's candidature. However, the majority of the members decided to award their protégé Pavel Matev. Another proposition that brought controversy was that concerning the award for literary criticism, which was given to another

²⁴⁸ Ibid., op. 2, f. 2, pp. 3-29.

²⁴⁹ F. 357, op. 1, f. 74, p. 122.

²⁵⁰ F. 551, op. 1, f. 127, p. 48-55.

figure close to the regime – Georgi Goshkin. Despite being criticized by Stanev and Dimov, Goshkin won the nomination.

In order to combine Zhivkov's political success with total control in the sphere of culture, the secretary of the CP Department of Propaganda Mitko Grigorov conducted a series of meetings with different parts of the cultural front. The writers were chosen to conclude this series of meetings, a fact that underlined their importance to the BCP. During the session with the writers Slavcho Vasev condemned some literary works for expressing mistrust of Communism. Vasev turned his attention to the young poets who, in his opinion, "had succumbed to skepticism". He personally attacked the promising young writer Yordan Radichkov by characterizing him as a person who had been mesmerized by success and thus lost his political motivation. In conclusion, the representatives of the Writers' Union discredited Manov's writings.

This meeting was followed by a larger session conducted by the Central Committee of the BCP and the majority of members of the Bulgarian Writers Union.²⁵¹ Officially, the meeting was advertised as an instrument where the writers were to be instructed by the leadership of the BCP. Besides, the Central Committee had to demonstrate its role as an arbiter in the conflicts of the last two years. Georgi Karaslavov opened the discussion. In line with the discourse of the period of the Cult of Personality, the leader of the Writers' Union firstly underlined his unquestionable loyalty towards Zhivkov. This was followed by a fierce attack against his rivals inside the Writers' Union, which included the literary critics and the writer Emil Manov. They were described as "a small group known to be very active and aggressive whose main aim was to subvert the constructive character of work inside the Writers'

²⁵¹ F.1B, op. 5, f. 492, pp. 1-280.

Union.”²⁵² Stoyan Karolev was singled out as the leader of that subversive group. On the other side were those who were on the receiving end of the criticism. Those under attack did not go in for self-criticism but demonstrated a great amount of self-confidence. Emil Manov countered with the claim that if there was any faction inside the Writers’ Union it was led by Karaslavov, Pavel Matev, Slavcho Vasev, and Lozan Strelkov. These four, in Manov’s words, had organized a hunting group and carried out monitoring and supervision. In conclusion, Manov condemned Karaslavov for using the “scarecrow of revisionism.”²⁵³

In defense of his loyalty to the post-Stalinist period, Lyudmil Stoyanov told the story of his brother who had been killed during the Great Terror. Afterwards, he attacked the policy of the leadership in the Writers’ Union, conducted since 1956: “For a long period Radevsky was trying to convince Karaslavov to take over the leadership of the Union. In my opinion this was an attempt to preserve his privileges and control over the writers’ destiny.” Stoyanov characterized most of the literary works, produced in the last decade, as having been written for the purpose of benefiting their author’s career. He pointed out the existence of “a group of four people who not only controlled the writers but also constantly terrorized literary life itself.”²⁵⁴

In response to Manov and Stoyanov, the views of the majority of the speakers ranged between moderate criticism and loyalty to the power wielders. For instance, Veselin Andreev defended his generation, requesting that criticizing people for mistakes committed in the past should be put on hold. “Why are we still digging for actions from the past, which their perpetrators had already denounced?” On the other hand, he defended the poet Konstantin Pavlov. “With the right approach we could have changed

²⁵² Ibid., p. 35.

²⁵³ Ibid., pp. 55-63.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 68.

him, but no one tried to help him.” The speech of Dimitar Dimov was characterized an attempt of rational presentation of arguments. The writers should not succumb to schematics and also they should shy away of the bourgeoisie. On literary criticism, Dimov was moderate. Instead of attacking the literary critics who had denounced his novel *Tobacco* in 1951 and forced him to rewrite it, he defended the autonomous role of the writer. In his conclusion Dimov pleaded for peaceful relations between the different sections in the Writers’ Union: “In my opinion, modesty and calmness provide the main evidence for the presence of talent in both writers and literary critics.”²⁵⁵

Instead of taking sides, a number of writers preferred to reject the very idea of conflict. In this connection, Blaga Dimitrova criticized Karaslavov and Stoyanov, claiming that the confrontation between them was part of a tradition deriving from the period of Cult of Personality. In her opinion, that atmosphere caused a general communication breakdown inside the Writers’ Union. Dimitrova illustrated the situation with the example of the young writer Ivan Radoev whose work and activity had become an object of criticism precisely due to the lack of understanding on behalf of the Praesidium of the Writers’ Union.

Todor Zhivkov did not engage in direct conflict.²⁵⁶ During his speech, Zhivkov did not express support for the leadership of the Writers’ Union, and repeated some general slogans and words of encouragement. Vladimir Migevev considers Zhivkov’s actions to be a part of his political maneuvering aimed at getting the support of the young writers. Evidently, Zhivkov aimed to temporarily stop the pressure on cultural life. In addition, the meeting between the highest party officials and the highly influential writers underlined the characteristic feature of the existing constellation of socio-political life

²⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 77.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 277.

in Bulgaria. Namely, in order to prevent conflicts from getting out into the open, the Politburo acted as an arbiter in the writers' conflicts and kept them within the confines of organized cultural life.

The absence of party support for the leadership of the Writers' Union was illustrated during the meeting of the Praesidium of the Writers' Union which took place on 15 May, 1962.²⁵⁷ The organization had to discuss the acceptance of young writers to the Bulgarian Writers' Union. The attempt of Karaslavov to organize the election without a debate was averted and followed by a wave of criticism. The poet Mladen Isaev reacted: "Comrades, please be more scrupulous. No one has made any objections and you have already excluded some people from the nominations." The tensions reached their peak during the discussions of Konstantin Pavlov's candidature. Slavcho Vasev argued that the problem poet needed to be "domesticated." Of similar nature were the words of Georgi Tzanev: "Let's bring him amongst ourselves so we can criticize him". The opposition against Pavlov was vivid. Kamen Kalchev countered that Pavlov was already in the system of the Writers' Union, but before being promoted the poet needed to provide more material. Karaslavov applied the same criteria when denying Pavlov membership in the Writers' Union. In the end, his candidature was rejected by a close margin. On the other hand, the meeting paved the way to power for Georgi Markov. The latter was proposed for promotion by Karaslavov. In addition, Markov was allowed to pass directly from a candidate-member to a member of the Bulgarian Writers' Union. The arguments in his defense underlined the righteous character of Markov's personality – although being diagnosed with T.B., he kept performing his duties as an engineer in a factory near Sofia and had managed to write a novel which focused on contemporary life. He was accepted with the votes of all the members of the Praesidium. In addition, his novel "Muzhe" (*Men*) was voted as the second best novel of 1962. As a result, Markov started his career in the system of

²⁵⁷ F. 551, op. 2, f. 33, pp. 32-71.

the Writers' Union as a power wielders' favorite. His perfect record made him the perfect choice for the execution of the political demand that young writers should be promoted.

In his biographical records, Markov underlined his personal ambition to enter the structures of the Bulgarian Writers' Union as "a desire for progress in a society marked by inequality and absence of rights; a will for recognition in a regime that did not take your existence into consideration; a result of well-calculated practical reasons, due to publicly recognized modes of corruption."²⁵⁸ The different outcome of the election of the poet Konstantin Pavlov revealed the BCP leadership's line between the acceptable and the unacceptable. It was based on the candidate's political CV – Pavlov had openly challenged the regime, while Markov was the archetype of a communist. The following years, 1962 and 1963, were the time when Pavlov was temporarily excluded from artistic life.

For their part, the power wielders kept on asserting their authority through the institutional frameworks. The Central Committee of the BCP invited members of the Praesidium of the Writers' Union to approve an institutional change. The Praesidium of the Writers' Union was converted into the Board of the Bulgarian Writers. The main result of the restructuring was that Karaslavov was removed from his post. The process took place in a series of meetings of the new Board of Bulgarian Writers. First on 4 July, 1962, Karaslavov read a report in which he recognized the lack of unity inside the Writers' Union. Five days later, in another meeting, Kamen Kalchev was proposed as the new chairman.²⁵⁹ Due to his moderate character, Kalchev was seen as a vehicle of generational change. Also, he had to bring unity inside the organization. However, Kalchev had been heavily involved in the controlling of cultural life in the past ten years. He managed the party organization of the Writers' Union and chaired the publishing

²⁵⁸ Georgi Markov, *Zadochni reportazhi za Bulgaria*, (Sofia: Ciela 2008), p. 285.

²⁵⁹ F. 551, op. 2, f. 33, pp. 87-102.

house *Bulgarski Pisatel*.

Karaslavov retained his importance in the organization. He was defended by Kamen Zidarov who claimed: “He (Karaslavov) is still part of the new leadership and he can put an end to the slander against him. Karaslavov will prove himself as a dynamo that will ignite the work of the Writers’ Union”.²⁶⁰ Unity prevailed and there were no conflicts during the meeting. An attempt to raise the tension was made by Dimitar Asenov. He attacked the candidature of Slavcho Vasev for the post of secretary of the new Board of the Bulgarian Writers with the argument that too much power was being concentrated in the hands of a single person. In response, Kalchev defended his choice by underlining Vasev’s most important quality, “patience and broad mindedness.” Asenov withdrew his criticism with the argument “so we can achieve that proper understanding that we all talk about”. The majority of those present supported Vasev’s candidature.

In his inaugural speech, Kalchev underlined the importance of unity inside the Bulgarian Writers’ Union as instrumental for the accomplishment of all ideological and artistic tasks. “Our criteria will no longer be based on speeches and meaningless meetings. Our credibility will be derived from our literary works. Kalchev said that the greatest enemies were “idleness”, “amateurism”, and “compromises with ideology.” Despite being related to traditional generational conflicts, a new zone of conflict was now related to unpredictability.

In the spring of 1963, an outburst by Todor Zhivkov witnessed the duality of the policy of the BCP. Zhivkov gave his speech on 15 April, 1963. Some researchers claim that the speech was an “artistic interpretation” of Khrushchev’s speech, given a few weeks earlier. In fact, Zhivkov’s speech was to a

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

great extent a moderate version of the criticism of artistic life in the Soviet Union, voiced by the Soviet leader. Also, Zhivkov was fully in control of the pace of the conflict. Similarly to Khrushchev, he criticized particular literary works and particular authors. However, Zhivkov's style of work was noticeable when he spoke about the role of satire. "We should not be afraid of satire. We need to get accustomed to satire even if some of the content may appear unpleasant and bitter. We must be patient and we must swallow some bits because satire is satire and it cannot praise. Recently, I met Radoi Ralin. We had a conversation and I told him: 'Listen, everything is fine and I totally agree with your work - but do your satire from the party's point of view.' And he answered me: That is right – it will be based on the party's view'."²⁶¹

In order to demonstrate his readiness to be uncompromising, the leader of BCP denounced the literary critic Boris Delchev. However the actions taken against Delchev were nothing like the public stigmatization of Zhendov. Natalia Hristova claims that Zhivkov's sanctions were part of a tactical maneuver. In addition the fact that he kept good relations with many of the intellectuals provided him with stable support, when a few months later Khrushchev was forced to resign.

Alfred French calls the years of de-Stalinization in Czechoslovakia a period of illusions. In 1958-1964, however, the institutional life of the writers in Czechoslovakia did not undergo drastic changes. After the dramatic events during the 1956 Writers' Congress, the predictability of the organization had been restored. The obedience of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union was also indisputable.

However the situation inside the Praesidium of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union revealed a number of fractures that remained hidden from the public representation of cultural life. In first place, the tensions

²⁶¹ Natalia Hristova, *Spezifika na bulgarskoto disidentstvo*, p. 251.

were related to the position of the Slovak and Czech members in the Writers' Union. In 1958, during a meeting in Bratislava, the Slovak writers expressed their dissatisfaction with the priority given to their Czech counterparts. In response, the Praesidium of the Czech Writers Union took action. Firstly, the Slovak writers had to write on Czech topics and vice versa. Secondly, the Praesidium sent a letter to the chief of Czechoslovak Television, urging him to allow broadcast of the Slovak play *Saint Barbara*. In addition the media was instructed to cover most of the meetings of the Czech and Slovak writers.²⁶²

In 1959, the Praesidium was preoccupied with organizing a Conference of the Czechoslovak Writers. The main purpose was to avoid the turmoil which had taken place in 1956. In this connection on 6 February, 1959, Ladislav Štoll presented his report titled "Tasks in front of our literature" to the Praesidium of the Writers' Union.²⁶³ Along with the ideological framework, his paper revealed three main spheres of confrontation. Štoll personally attacked Jaroslav Seifert for the latter's involvement in the 1956 Congress of the Czechoslovak Writers. His main argument focused on interpretation, rather than on content. In this connection, he accused Seifert of being irresponsible by damaging the international image of the organization. Consequently, Štoll blamed *Literární Noviny* for publishing the articles related to the 1956 Congress without a proper critical comment.

Štoll criticized those issues that were part of the critical discourse in the last three years. Firstly, he went against the notion of 'lost illusions'. In his opinion, the idea itself developed in people who were incapable of analyzing society and grasping reality. His main concern was how writers highlighted the importance of the concept of truth. Štoll's believed the problem was that the critics were going beyond the criticism of schematism. This, in his view, led to some "false tales about truth". Moreover, he claimed

²⁶² LA PNP, Zápis ÚV SČSS, 01. 10. 1959.

²⁶³ LA PNP, Zápis ÚV SČSS, 06. 02. 1959.

that any historical truth was relative in its nature. He argued against Seifert's self-criticism by stating "Our literature is not a lie – it is the literature of a great era. That is how it should be defined".²⁶⁴ Following the logic of the 1956 events, in the concluding part of his report, Štoll rejected the role of the writer as the conscience of the people. With the use of the paradigm of conflict between the old times and the new times, he denied the existence of such a concept outside of the Communist milieu. The birth of the concept, in Štoll's opinion, could be traced back to 1938 and the Manifest of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. Therefore, any use of the term outside of that framework represented an attempt to de-ideologize the role of the writer. Hence, every activity in that direction meant the highest form of revisionism.

Štoll's speech dominated the Conference of the Czechoslovak Writers. In addition, with the lack of spontaneity and confrontation at the conference, the report can be seen as evidence used by a number of scholars who have argued that the reformist movement of 1956 had failed. Yet, despite the general image of Czech literary life going backwards in terms of reforms, the beginning of the 1960s brought a symbolical step forward. In January 1960, the Praesidium of the Writers' Union admitted Miroslav Holub, Jan Procházka, and Ivan Klíma as candidate-members of the Writers' Union. In addition, in the 1959-1960 season, the future playwright Václav Havel took a stage-hand position at the ABC Theatre.

Novotný's efforts to maintain unity at the beginning of the 1960s influenced the work of the Praesidium of the Writers' Union. During the meeting of the organization in December 1961, the official report read by the Slovak writer Karol Rosenbaum²⁶⁵ was similar to the reports read in the Praesidium of the Bulgarian Writers. Rosenbaum not only underlined the role of the CPSU, but he also highlighted the

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ LA PNP, Zápis 02. 09. 1961.

role of the CPCz in overcoming the difficult period after 1953.²⁶⁶ Rosenbaum's speech dealt with topics such as the Cult of Personality, dogmatism in literature and the main danger in front of Czechoslovakia – revisionism. The report did not deal with any tension amongst the members of the Praesidium.

Similarly to Bulgaria, in the early 1960s, the role of the new socialist man in the present day socialist reality was of main concern of power wielders in Czechoslovakia. The task was introduced as part of the preparations for the 3rd Congress of Czechoslovak Writers. The issue was set as the agenda in the introductory part of the two-day meeting of the Praesidium of the Writers' Union that took place on 24 and 25 April, 1962.²⁶⁷ The chairman of the organization, Ivan Skála, read a report entitled "The topic of the present-day in our literature." Firstly, Skála outlined the importance of the 12th Congress of CPCz in the preparations for a shift towards a new era in the development of Czechoslovakia. Next, he followed the official line highlighting the importance of the "socialist morality" as guiding instrument for writing about the present day. Skála argued about the importance of literature in "the formation of the new man who had to be prepared to fight for the greatest cause." His main argument was that each new époque created its own field of conflicts and therefore literature must react in accordance with this. Hence, he turned his attention to the young authors, the mentality of whom was damaged by western influence. In this connection Skála claimed that literary critics wrongly underestimated this danger. In the last part of his report, Skála focused on the role of the Writers' Union in controlling the debates relating to the theme of modernity. In order to confront the needs, the Writers' Union announced the setting up of a magazine devoted the issues of modernity, *Nová Tvorba*.

Although the report was widely accepted by the members of the Praesidium, there were some

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ LA PNP, Zápis ÚV SČSS 24. 04. 1962.

fractures in the course of the meeting. Pavel Kohout dwelled on the factors which had caused the new generation of Czechoslovak writers to become apolitical. He claimed that his generation was politically active in the establishment of the communist state, while at present young writers were not even members of the Communist Party. Instead of criticizing youth in general terms, Kohout turned his attention to the role of the Writers' Union as the only vehicle which should be able to bring these authors in contact with the world of politics. Jiří Hájek also underlined the influence of young writers in the last three years. He said that the change they had brought into the literature was "a deep sensitivity towards certain ethical problems, part of a reality that did not exist before." In addition, the meeting dealt with the traditional question about the role of the Writers' Union. Officials like Drda and Štoll stated that democratic centralism was *a sine qua non* for the functioning of the Praesidium of the Writers' Union. The liberal wing did not come up with an alternative view.

On the one hand, the 3rd Congress of the Czechoslovak Writers was predictable. It was dominated by party slogans and repeated devotional statements to the Communist Party. The leadership of CPCz was represented at the Congress by the second man in the Party's hierarchy, the chief of the Ideological Department of the CPCz – Jiří Hendrych. On the other hand, the atmosphere of the event was marked by tolerance. Milan Kundera demonstrated his provocative approach with a speech aimed against the provincialism of Czechoslovak literature.²⁶⁸ In addition, Karel Ptáčník and Josef Škvorecký were rehabilitated. However, the two writers did not involve themselves in conflicts with those who had punished them. In conclusion, the 3rd Congress of the Czechoslovak Writers reconfirmed a generational change, witnessing the entering into power of those writers born in the mid-1920s and in the early 1930s.

On November 13, 1963, the newly elected leadership of the Praesidium of the Czechoslovak Writers'

²⁶⁸ Alfred French, *Czech Writers and Politics*, p. 173.

Union held a meeting to introduce a new program presented by Ivan Skála. However, the event did not develop as it was planned. Firstly, a secret meeting conducted at the beginning of November between the new leadership of the Praesidium of the Czechoslovak Writers and the communist leader Novotný resulted in discontent in the ranks of the organization. The main problem was that the meeting was unofficial. Eyebrows were raised over who participated. In this atmosphere of mistrust, the mode of functioning of the organization was put into question. The most critical speech was that of Adolf Branald. His main argument was that the Czechoslovak Writers' Union neutralized grass root initiatives in the process of its decision making. The authority of the organization was defended by Ladislav Mňačko. He argued against the need for participation of the writers in the administrative process claiming that this would result in inability to produce literary works. In addition, he relied on the fact that the Czechoslovak Writers' Congress had elected a particular leadership, with the task of managing the work of the Writers' Union. Therefore, in Mňačko's opinion, the members of the Praesidium were obliged to accept the program. Secondly, when dealing with the foreign relations of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union, Ivan Kříž underlined a tendency of mistrust towards Czechoslovak writers within the socialist bloc. He compared that attitude to the one demonstrated towards the Polish writers in 1957.

On the one hand, the problems inside the Czechoslovak Writers Union shown in the course of 1963 did not generate conflicts in the political system. On the other hand, it became obvious that the organizational life of the writers continued to operate without a general vision about its role in the socialist system. Thus, the leadership of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union could not cope with the problem of combining the traditional role of the Czechoslovak writers with their present-day administrative role. As a result, the functions of the organization remained unspecified. Therefore on the eve of the next general shift of the political context in Eastern Europe – the fall of Khrushchev and the

beginning of the Brezhnev era, the regime in Czechoslovakia was still incapable of coming to terms with the intellectuals, generating a conflict that four years later shattered the unity of the Eastern Bloc.

On the other hand, the attempt of Novotný to take control of culture resembled Zhivkov's policy. However, starting from 1956, the Bulgarian communist leader conducted a long term policy in his relations with the intellectuals, balancing between the public and private modes of communication. But Novotný's proposition for monthly meetings between him and a group of writers appeared as an abrupt intervention in an already established climate of a relative institutional independence of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union. The promotion of Škvorecký was similar to that of Markov and part of a general tendency of domesticating controversial authors, rather than getting into a confrontation with them. Nevertheless, the results were different. Many of those Czech writers promoted in 1962-1963 formed the oppositional group of the 1967 Congress of the Czechoslovak Writers, while the 1956 April Generation in its major part would become loyal to Todor Zhivkov.

Conclusions

The conflicts inside the Bulgarian Communist Party were still a major controversy in the socio-political life in Bulgaria. Not only did Todor Zhivkov clear the last remnants of opposition inside the Party, but he also managed to install a network of close associates in every important sector of life. Although the Barák affair was a successful attempt on behalf of Antonín Novotný to channel the criticism of the Stalinist era towards a particular culprit, he did not manage to stabilize his authority in socio-political life. Moreover, the controversy in Czechoslovak political life was converted into a wider social debate. It included a call for social reforms and changes in the economy and a debate about unsolved problems in the Czech-

Slovak relations. These matters eventually shattered the stability of the regime in Czechoslovakia. In the second half of the 1960s these unsolved problems created a groundwork for political change. Not surprisingly, Dubček's political career developed as a result of that instability.

On the one hand, there were still a number of similarities between Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia in relation to the organizational life of the Writers' Union. In the first place, the Writers' Union in both countries had managed to prevent the inner debates from spilling into the open. Reports given by Pencho Danchev, Kamen Kalchev, Ladislav Štoll, and Ivan Skala showed that cultural life in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia was institutionally managed by the Praesidium of the Writers Union and ideologically subjugated to the imperatives determined by the Communist Party leadership. Also, the regimes of Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia were using forms of restraint elaborated in the Socialist Bloc after 1956. The scarecrow of Hungary 1956 was flagged in opposition to any tendencies towards rebellion. The accusation of revisionism was a straightjacket, preventing the writers from going beyond an ideological boundary. In addition, the leaders of the Writers' Union in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia at the beginning of the 1960s fitted in the context of the "thaw." Neither Skála nor Kalchev resembled the image of an orthodox bailiff presiding over cultural life as represented by their predecessors - Karaslavov and Drda. They were conformists, struggling to achieve a balance between the orthodox and the liberal circles and preventing the outburst of conflicts.

But the major difference between Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia was in the implementation of controls over cultural life. While the writers in Bulgaria were connected to the top Party hierarchy, their counterparts in Czechoslovakia were still subjugated to control inside the Writers' Union. Not only had Zhivkov personally controlled the apparatus of the Writers' Union, but he had also set up the ideological guiding line. He masterminded the schedule of some of the meetings inside the Praesidium of the Writers'

Union. Unlike Novotný, he demonstrated a capability of communicating with many of the writers without the intervention of mediators. Again, this was aimed at restraining the development of serious conflicts.

In addition, generational change was connected with political change in Bulgaria. Zhivkov created for himself the successful image of a promoter of the postwar generation. As a result, the April' 56 Generation had become a group of protégés of Zhivkov. The case of Penev showed, however, that this image was false. Unlike Zhivkov, Novotný never managed to cut himself off from his dependence on the Stalinist past. As a result, the development of Czechoslovak cultural life could not subordinate to controls set up by the regime.

On the other hand, the atmosphere that dominated the Czechoslovak socio-political life unveiled the reformist character of Czechoslovak politicians and intellectuals. There was unspoken unity about the need for changes and detailed revision of the last 25 years. On the contrary, in Bulgaria 1967 witnessed the highest stage of the policy of allowed criticism. In the same time the non-conformist writers developed the Aesopian language whose perimeter was also monitored by the state. As a result both power wielders and writers seemed to have adapted to the state of political equilibrium.

A Representation of socio-political conflicts in the post 1956 novel: Case study of Georgi

Markov's Men

Introduction

This part of my work adds to the explanatory framework of the post 1956 areas of conflict. There are three factors that provide Markov's novel *Men* with credibility as a source that may shed light on the

period from 1957-1964. In the first place, its author Georgi Markov was among the most prominent young writers; secondly, the characters of the novel are young people searching for realization in the social reality of the late 1950s; lastly, the conflicts in which the protagonists are taking part appear to be similar to those confrontations that existed in the Writers Union. The most important aspect of *Men* can be seen in Markov's own explanation of the purpose of writing his novel. In the 1970s, while in exile he explained his motivation of writing *Men* as part of his weekly reportages on the BBC. In his presentation, Markov admitted there were ideological flaws in his work. But he also stated that his ambition had been to describe the conflict between the individual and the collective - seen from the perspective of the former. In this context, the following analysis will demonstrate Markov's attempts to theorize the conflict between the individual and the collective. I will reveal the conflicts inside the novel on the basis of that complex interrelation between Markov's subjugation to the rules of socialist realism and his desire to transcend it and provide a realistic depiction of the destiny of those young individuals who had to face the post-Stalinist reality.

The novel unfolds around the transition from military service to civil life experienced by three friends – Ivan, Mladen, and Sasho. Its focus is the individual struggle of each of the protagonists to adapt themselves to the set of norms and conditions established in Bulgaria after 1956. In the case of two of the main protagonists - Ivan and Mladen - the collective was represented as part of a particular institutional format. In the case of Ivan, it was a scientific institution, while Mladen's life developed inside the premises of a local plant. Moreover the two protagonists were involved in conflicts that were similar to those that had existed inside the Writers' Union. In the case of the third character Sasho - the clash between the individual and reality developed around a small town in the provinces. I will show how his transition to the capital was represented as a stage in which the individual had finally come to terms with

reality. On the other hand, this can also be seen as a process in which he gave away his individuality in service of the collective.

The structure of the novel resembles traditional works of socialist realism. The first part is entitled “*Three men who seek*”, and introduces the protagonists during their stay in the army as they feel comfortable with fixed rules and clear goals; the second, “*Three man who fight*”, shows the struggle of the three protagonists with socio-political reality around them; the last part of the novel develops around the aftermath of these clashes and bears the title “*Two men who won.*” As a result the framework: “seek – fight – won” guarantees the unity of time. In his seminal work, *Culture and Ideology*, the literary critic Eduard Said underlines the importance of the roles of different protagonists as instruments of ideology in the historical novel.²⁶⁹ Here, Markov also remains close to the norms of socialist realism as his protagonists are constructed in line with the official doctrine. In this respect Ivan is honest and grounded in reality. He is an idealist communist. However, he lacks energy and demonstrates passivity when confronted with daily life. In contrast, Mladen is an active and capable young man, but he lacks Ivan’s idealism. The third main character, Sasho, is a loyal friend, but he lacks both the straightforward mind of Mladen and the sense of loyalty to the communist ideal, which is typical for Ivan.

The supporting characters also play a part in this ideological construction. The most vivid example is that of the colonel of the military unit where Ivan, Mladen, and Sasho serve. He has no name and his only identity is that of a protector of the ideology. The colonel is the voice of socialist morality and appears every time the three young men are experiencing some doubts. His guidance is illustrated by different narrative forms. The protagonists communicate with him both directly and indirectly. For instance, while

²⁶⁹ The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism, ed. by Vincent B. Leitch, 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010) pp. 1888 – 1905.

Ivan plays chess with him, the young man questions the situation of the individual in this particular period of the communist era. The response of the colonel conforms to his role in the narrative

”Why wondering? Why these unnecessary questions? You do not need to search for this life – You just have to live it. End of story”.²⁷⁰ The female characters are mainly in the narrative in order to restrain the three leading protagonists and to keep the young men inside the ideological perimeter. Marta with her energetic temper counteracts Ivan’s passivity. Dancheto represents a woman who wants to share her life with someone and contradicts Sasho’s profile of a disengaged young man. Violeta, the blind daughter of the director is set against Mladen’s unrestrained ambitions.

In order to represent the political reality in Bulgaria, Markov places special attention to the role of spaces. Therefore, I claim that Markov’s escape from socialist realism lies beneath the plot structure. In order to prove my argument I use the second principle established by Eduard Said in his analysis of Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park*. Said claims that by relying heavily on temporality as a plot structure “we have overlooked the function of space, geography and location”²⁷¹. In this respect, Said states that “as many novels *Mansfield Park* is very precisely about a series of both small and large dislocations and relocations.”²⁷²

On that basis, Markov’s protagonists experience particular relocations related to the context of the early 1960s in Bulgaria. After finishing military service, Ivan returns to the Institute for Metals in Sofia. There he faces a cold welcome and corruption that had spread all over the Institute. Mladen begins his career in a plant near the military station. His hopes for a rapid promotion, however, bring him into

²⁷⁰ Georgi Markov, *Muzhe*, (Plovdiv: Hristo Botev, 1990).

²⁷¹ The Norton Anthology, p. 1890.

²⁷² Ibid.

conflict with the workers' collective. Unlike Ivan and Mladen, the third character, Sasho, prefers to remain in the countryside without giving himself up to a particular institution. In this respect, the author compares and contrasts the countryside with institutional life. In addition, each location serves to underline a fixed class denomination. The working class inhabits the plant; the scientific intelligentsia is located inside the Institute; while Sasho attempts to escape his predestination as he unsuccessfully tries to accommodate himself in the countryside, rather than joining a particular institution.

Ivan – An honest communist

Ivan's image of an honest and respected communist is underlined by the respect of the rest of the soldiers towards him in the army. His relocation to the Institute for Metals is traumatic as he is involved in a series of conflicts revealing an atmosphere of hypocrisy and mistrust. The image of the scientific intelligentsia is pivotal to the communist discourse. In the first place, due to its role in the scientific progress, and secondly because of the role of science in the context of the Cold War military competition. The main point of Markov's clash with the officialdom is his focus on the flaws in the system of recruitment and the modes of corruption symptomatic for every sphere of organized intellectual life during the second wave of de-Stalinization in Bulgaria. On the one hand, Ivan is welcomed as a hero, on the other he condemns the space of the capital city: "These new buildings were so confusing, with all their coldness and the smell of lime – bringing an air of both completeness and emptiness." Markov represents political change by depicting the replacement of Stalin's portrait with that of Lenin. Ivan's disdain of the new people in the new intelligentsia is expressed by his contempt for the director of the Institute "For those like him, socialism is only an idea that needs to be carried out. For us, socialism is ultimate reality." His resentment of the power wielders and their servants is expressed in these lines:

Instead of working - they serve

Instead of thinking - they obey

Instead of deciding – they prearrange

Instead of living – they exist.²⁷³

These conflicting pairs suited the official normative. The negative connotations are related to the passivity of the individual who dithers between ‘life’ and ‘existence’. Markov’s attack against the functioning of the system is represented as the division between ‘decision’ and ‘prearrangement’. Most importantly, the deepening alienation of Ivan from the collective corresponds to Markov’s attempts to write from the perspective of the individual. The confrontation between Ivan and the power wielders bursts into the open when the leadership of the institute promotes an unsustainable scientific project in order to serve the interest of a group around the director of the institute. The only person who has dared to express open dissent – Ivan Ruzhezki, has been expelled from the institute. As a result, our Ivan spearheads a rebellion in Ruzhezki’s defense. “Not for Ruzhezki, not for me, but for the things in which I believe and live for”.²⁷⁴ Ivan’s laboratory fights against the circle of power around the director. Similarly to a number of conflicts inside the Praesidium of the Writers’ Union, the final battle takes place during the annual meeting of the organization. Here, at the end of the second section, Markov gives an insight into Ivan’s private life. The focus rests on the conflict between passivity and activity. Firstly, Ivan is described as an alienated man of science who enjoys his own company as he reads novels and strolls in the park. However, his calmness is constantly interrupted by waves of fear which are related to the international

²⁷³ Georgi Markov, *Muzhe*, p. 25.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

context - the development of the atomic weapons and the constant threats surrounding the socialist world. When thinking about the forthcoming meeting in the institute, Ivan is described as an individual who passively accepts reality: “The meeting is on Wednesday and everything will be decided there. No. Nothing is there to be decided – it has already been decided. But no one can prevent the prevailing of truth. It may take years or centuries, but sooner or later truth will come out.”²⁷⁵ His rejection of the confrontation with injustice and his shying away from the importance of the present-day are interrupted by the sudden arrival of Marta. She ignites Ivan’s revolutionary spirit. The ideological discourse is omnipresent as Marta compares the role of Ivan to that of Cuba – a place set against mighty power wielders.

The chapter describing Ivan’s confrontation with the leadership of the Institute opens up with a quotation from the Captain – “We know how difficult the transition to socialism is. That it takes a lot of energy and faith. End of story. But no one allowed some people to use this transition as an excuse.” In addition, Ivan comes to the meeting with a letter from the Captain with the words – Fire!

The annual meeting of the Institute resembles the annual meetings of the Praesidium of the Writers’ Union. It starts with a report from the director of the institute, Hadzhikostov. In this report, he talks about international political problems and then focuses on the work of each section in the institute. Markov uses his author’s voice to describe Hadzhikosotov’s speech. “Every great demagogue is known for his ability to misuse the notion of truth.” Markov continues with sharp criticism of the practices that prevent the conducting of a substantial analysis using the concepts of objective and subjective reasoning. He describes the forms of “objective reasoning as dancing a passionate *horo*”²⁷⁶ and the subjective reasons

²⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 63.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 75.

were “hugged as in a romantic tango.”²⁷⁷ The former describes a traditional excuse which refers to the general context; the latter represents individual responsibility hidden under the vest of a collective responsibility. All in all, they serve to describe a systematical distortion of the truth in different sectors of social life.

Ivan’s speech interrupts the predestined direction of the meeting. He starts by accusing the institute of lying. He argues against the systematic infringement of rules and blames the supervisors of scientific work – as people “ruled on the telephone and playing games of give and take”²⁷⁸; he also accuses the management of being “an incubus for protégés whose main virtue is their readiness to serve.”²⁷⁹ The next line of Ivan’s criticism also appears to have been taken from the experience of life in the Writers’ Union – low quality of the academic publications and inactivity of the editorial board. At the end of his speech, Ivan goes into conflict with the party secretary of the institute and accuses him of being irresolute and weak.

The conflict with the power wielders results in Ivan’s expulsion from the Institute. At that difficult time, the colonel offers him work in a local facility. As a result, Ivan suffers his final relocation - back to the small town where he can live under the protection of his ideological guardian.

Sasho – A road to domestication

At the start of the novel, Sasho is described as a young man governed by his passion for sports and

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 95.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

women. He attempts to escape from the military in order to meet Dancheto - a married woman from the local village. The terminology associated with his escape is military - “checking the perimeter;” “covering your back;” “crawling in order to reach the target.”²⁸⁰ However, at this early stage, the author reveals Sasho’s feelings to be more than a simple flirtation. After the end of his military service, Sasho returns to his native town in the mountains. He remains outside of any institution and tries to find his own path. The second part of the novel focuses on the troubled existence of Sasho. He spends his free time with a group of friends, committing petty crimes and chasing women. Here, Markov reaches close to the archetype of an existentialist character. But as a result of a small series of adventures during which Sasho saves a girl from rape and carries on his back a severely injured old woman over two kilometers, he begins to feel the necessity of belonging. After some more casual sex with a local girl, Sasho experiences the turning point in life: “He was lying next to the stove – weary and hungry for peace of mind; longing for a moment of solitude that men in his state usually search for. Someone has drained his own warmth; someone has robbed him of something very important. But why was he thinking about it, wasn’t everything a simple game of give and take? Yes, the moment of reevaluation always arrives. Once he used to feel happy and relaxed. But that was before.”²⁸¹

The split between Sasho and his parents concludes his life in the countryside. His father is a financial clerk while the mother is a housewife. So by acting as a young rebel, Sasho also fulfills an ideological duty to desert his backward family and focus on his progress. He decides to leave for Sofia and to ask Ivan for help. The domestication of Sasho’s temper is expressed in the line “There comes the time when your life will ask you – Are you mine or do you belong to someone else?”²⁸² At this moment, Sasho

²⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 15.

²⁸¹ Ibid., p. 45.

²⁸² Ibid., p. 65.

ceases to be a young and rebellious man. Instead, he strives for some organizational boundaries. The destiny of Sasho may appear unexpected when seen from the perspective of the existentialist novels that boomed in the West in this period. However, Markov's revision of the meeting between rebelliousness and political reality corresponds to the political reality in Bulgaria. In the totalitarian state, the energy of youth is seen as precious for the development of socialism. From the beginning of the 1960s, Todor Zhivkov devotes great attention to the organizations responsible for controlling young people. In this connection, the result of Sasho's confrontation was to be expected. His choice of domestication is not only rational, but the only possible happy ending in a political system that relies on the idea of organized socialization.

Mladen – adaptation versus confrontation

Mladen represents another popular notion amongst young people, namely that one's progress through the social hierarchy depends on one's ability to escape confrontations with the collective. Mladen focuses on the awareness of the importance of collective judgment. This is expressed in his fears related to the relationship between him and Violeta "It would be wonderful if they see our friendship from its good side, otherwise there will be terrible consequences."²⁸³ Markov decides not to focus on the development of their relationship and it only serves the reader to help him to evaluate Mladen's human side.

Like Ivan, Mladen continues to be part of institutionalized locations. After ending his military service, he joins a metal plant. He sees the latter as the place where his adaptability can be rewarded. The plant's management and its workers form two mini locations. In both of them, the success of Mladen depends on

²⁸³ Ibid., p. 35.

proper patronage. On the first level, Mladen have already found his patron – Violeta’s father. He finds it much more difficult inside the workers’ sphere. Here, Markov pays tribute to the leading role of the working class by depicting the workers in idealistic colors. The only instrument of promotion inside this group is hard work. Mladen chooses as a mentor one of the most excellent workers - Manush. The latter’s patronage represents a chance for Mladen to connect with the collective and gain the respect he needs. Mladen is overwhelmed by Manush’s devotion and hardworking attitude. He becomes obsessed with the idea of using Manush as an instrument in his quest for promotion. “Firstly I need to get under the skin of Manush, so he can no longer live without me. Secondly, no one needs to know about our friendship because they will become envious – something I surely do not need. Thirdly, if we finally become close I need to remain a bit distant from him.”²⁸⁴ His ambition is vested with well-calculated self-restraint. Unlike with the careerists in Ivan’s institute, Markov focuses on Mladen’s work ethic and on his personal qualities.

In the second section of the novel, Mladen’s ambition leads him into what he has feared most – confrontation. The reason is his plan for optimization that provokes mistrust amongst the workers. The colonel appears to represent the righteous side of the workers. He opposes Mladen’s proposition with a very popular argument that every important change in the factory must be promoted as a proposition coming from the workers ‘collective. His claim echoes the slogan “In our country the power rests in the working class.”²⁸⁵ Instead of acceptance, Mladen faces rejection. One of the workers inside the plant confronts him with the words “You do not act like a comrade, you only pretend to be one. You may be smarter than some of us but you cannot be smarter than all of us.”²⁸⁶ The solution proposed by the colonel

²⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 55.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 65.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

is that Mladen should conduct a personal conversation with the workers so he can convince them that his proposal is sound.

In the last part of the novel, Mladen has to face a discussion about his admittance in the Communist Party. The predominant ideological discourse is seen in Mladen's observations. Firstly, in connection with his appearance: "These shoes – they may be warm and comfortable but you cannot visit friends or go to the theater in them – these shoes are meant for work, for marching or for war."

The greatest shift comes when Mladen faces the party members in the plant. The first observation is based on Mladen's fears: "Looks that welcome you, looks that cannot understand you and looks that suspect you." His next reaction, however, is ideologically constructed and represents an ideal image of the communist – every one of the party members is seen as an honest and hardworking individual. Before coming to terms with the official narrative, however, Markov creates one last contradiction – the recruiting system based on a solid political biography. Here the author questions a major instrument of the Communist Party – the political cadres. By representing Mladen's sarcastic thoughts, during the time when his CV is being read, Markov manages to generate a conflict between truth and reality. "Mere facts are not necessarily the truth but they are respected and accepted by everyone." The scene, when Mladen listens to that part of his CV that underlines the devotion of his father to the communist ideas, represents the creation of a political identity that does not match the personal identity of the individual. In reality, Mladen remembers his father as a person that detested political parties, politics and humans in general. At that moment, Mladen's mind goes back in time as he remembers the exact words of his father - that the only political organization for him are the stones in the mine where he works while the raising of his children is what defines his relation to politics. Also Mladen recollects his father's sense of misanthropy: "When drunk my father used to say that people get together in collectives because of their

weaknesses.”²⁸⁷ Yet, it is this all-important official CV which allows Mladen to start a career because his father that antiparty, backward individualist was of a working class origin. Every element of Mladen’s CV serves to underline the notion of conflict between facts and truth. However, in the last part of the chapter, Markov reestablishes a link with the official narrative. Suddenly Mladen’s communist soul is revived. The collective takes a different shape in front of him. The faces are no longer faces of enemies. The room is no longer dark. He sees those honest people around him, and finally understands them. Finally, Mladen is happy because people approve of him by voting for him to become a member of the Communist party – not because he sees this as a chance but only because those people have accepted him as one of them.

The end of Mladen’s quest may appear successful – he has gained his promotion and become a full member of the Communist Party. He deserted his individualistic credo in the name of acceptance. A cynical but realistic evaluation of reality is followed by his decision to become a part of the collective. In this respect, Markov’s novel reveals the incapability of young and ambitious men to preserve their seeds of individualism. They are not to be judged on their own qualities but on the basis of their eventual participation in the organization forms inside Bulgaria. Mladen’s attempts to conquer the system with passivity have resulted in the system conquering him.

In the first place, the young protagonists of the novel do accomplish their ideological transformation. They experience a journey in which they manage to restore the primal state of order. The collective wins over the individual. The individual ambition, of each of these three young friends, has been channeled to serve the cause of communism.

Behind the official narrative, the author successfully reveals some of the faults that existed in

²⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 85.

Bulgaria during the de-Stalinization years. Firstly, when dealing with the topic of individual promotion, Markov points out to a main weakness of the communist system in Bulgaria – the nurturing of the struggle for power in each section of socio-political life. This is evident by the conflict between Ivan and the newly recruited personnel of the Institute for Metals in Sofia and also by the strategy of Mladen to fight for promotion at any price. In addition, the image of Sasho introduces a rather hidden topic related to the lack of perspectives in front of the young people in Bulgaria at the beginning of the 1960s

Also, the outcome of the challenges faced by the three young friends represents a realistic depiction of the situation in Bulgaria. Mladen rejects the individual ambition in exchange for the communist collective; the honest communist, Ivan, who has dared to confront the injustices that existed inside his Institute, preserves his belief in communism with the help of his ideological mentor – the colonel. Rather than fighting with the social ostracization, Sasho chooses to be domesticated.

Markov's protagonists illustrate the passive acceptance by the Bulgarian baby boomers of the turmoil that have spread in Europe during the 1960s. Also, Markov's analysis is pointed at his fellow writers. The choice to live under the system that protects you reveals an analogy with the development of the relationship between the writers and the power wielders in the next two decades. This exchange of individual ambition for personal stability would develop through the 1960s, reaching its peak during the 1968 Prague Spring.

Each of Markov's protagonists experienced some problems faced by the young people in every historical age - lost illusions, too much ambition and disorientation in the social context. However, Markov shows that in the age of victorious socialism, the young people in Bulgaria were bound to conformism and were ready to give up their individualism.

CHAPTER 4: The Writers and Politics: Transition, Restoration and Re-evaluation (1964 – 1967)

Introduction

This chapter traces the conflicts in the political and cultural life in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia from the downfall of Khrushchev (1964) until the Plenum of the Czechoslovak Communist Party (1967). In the first place, I will reveal this period as a time of general shift in the postwar political context. Secondly, I will reflect on the impact of regime change for intellectual life. When discussing the political conflicts, I will compare the political stability in Bulgaria with the ever-growing crisis of authority experienced by the leader of CPCz Antonín Novotný. In addition, I will discuss the battle for power that intensified in the second half of the 1960s. When dealing with the confrontation between Dubček and Novotný I will shed light on the conflicts within political life in Czechoslovakia. I will also show the situation in the writers' sphere in Bulgaria in the mid-1960s. I will compare the model developed by Todor Zhivkov to the inconsistent policy of Antonín Novotný towards the Czechoslovak writers. Here I will trace the chain of small events that contributed to the changing situation in Czechoslovakia's cultural life. In conclusion I will demonstrate that the Fourth Congress of the Czechoslovak Writers became a milestone which separated the paths of the writers in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia. As a result of the comparative framework, this chapter will show the extent of the differences between Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia that paved the way for the conflict that engulfed the two countries in 1968.

The Political Context

In his last words in front of the leadership of the CPSU, Khrushchev claimed that his greatest victory was the peaceful character of the transition of power in the CPSU.²⁸⁸ On the one hand, the plot against Khrushchev was an eloquent example of the technology of power used in the CPSU. The latter was still an authoritarian organization where every major political act came as a result of secret maneuvers and manipulations which were coordinated within the structures of the party apparatus. Also, the changes underlined that were to follow underlined the predominant role of Khrushchev's legacy. Much of the criticism against the ex-Soviet leader was constructed within the same anti-cultist discourse which had been created by Khrushchev himself while he was busy consolidating his power in the period 1953-1956. The new power wielders accused Khrushchev of creating of an atmosphere of mistrust; promoting family members; damaging the organizational work inside the CPSU; replacing Stalin's cult with a cult of his own personality.²⁸⁹ Brezhnev's circle came to power with the agenda of restoring the collective leadership - which was created and consequently abandoned in the Khrushchev era. But unlike in 1956, the focus on the faults of the previous leadership did not turn to personal slander and public stigmatization. No witch hunt took place after the fall of Khrushchev and criticism ended shortly after the conclusion of the plenum.

The structure of power and the relations between the members of the Soviet leadership were similar to those in the period between 1953 and 1956. The new collective leadership included Leonid Brezhnev as the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU; Sergei Kosygin as Prime Minister and Nicolai Podgorny as Head of State. In addition, the confrontation between Brezhnev and Kosygin

²⁸⁸ Robert Service, *A History of Modern Russia*, p. 376.

²⁸⁹*Ibid.*, p.378.

resembled the rift between Khrushchev and Malenkov. Kosygin's efforts to reform the Soviet economics collided with Brezhnev's attempts to preserve stability and security in the Central Party Apparatus. During the 23rd Congress of the CPSU, Brezhnev retained many of the members of the Praesidium and thus guaranteed himself a loyal Politburo. As a result much of the decision making was directed to the Politburo. With the support of the latter and that of the Party Apparatus, in 1966 Brezhnev upgraded his title - from First Secretary to General Secretary. Within two years Brezhnev became the indisputable leader of the Soviet Union. Despite losing political power, Kosygin preserved his role in the economic life of the Soviet Union. As Thomas Crump points out, there were no serious political conflicts inside the Soviet Union because Kosygin was isolated from political decision making and Podgorny was made subordinate to Brezhnev. In addition, the international context was also favorable – Brezhnev managed to avoid significant confrontations with the United States.²⁹⁰ Along with his personal skills, Brezhnev's rationality made him significantly different from his unpredictable predecessor.

But in the mid-1960s the post-war status quo in the Western part of the bipolar world was put into question. Europe became a fertile ground of political and social disunity. In the mid-1960s President Charles de Gaulle, led by his ambition to enhance the role of France in international politics, tried to dismantle the spheres of influence which had been established during the postwar decade.²⁹¹ The culmination of his policy came in September 1966 when France left NATO. This decision received an over 70 percent support amongst the French. De Gaulle had the support not only of the traditional nationalists, but also of the generation of the baby boomers. The decision to leave NATO came as a result of de Gaulle's anti-Americanism. The researcher of social and political ideas in the 1960s Mark Kurlansky claims that the seeds of independence originated in those countries which believed they had

²⁹⁰ Thomas Crump, *Brezhnev and the Decline of the Soviet Union*, (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 79-88.

²⁹¹ Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, (London: Simon and Shuster, 1994), p. 735.

won the war.²⁹²

However, unity between the French people and the power wielders was shattered only a year later. Postwar mass education had turned the universities in Paris into a fertile ground for youth movements. The political status quo of the 1950s and the 1960s was gradually shaken and de-Gaulle's anti-Americanism was followed by protests against his authoritarian practices. Kurlansky claims that at the core of the criticism that spread in France in 1967 was the need for a change in the relationship between the state and its citizens: "A younger and more urbanized generation in Western Europe became conscious of the vast social changes that had taken place since the war and demanded that politics and the law catch up."²⁹³ On the one hand, the situation in France was an example of the dormant spirit of revisionism that was present in Europe. On the other hand, the political failure of de Gaulle demonstrated that nationalistic policies were no longer enough to attract the support of the population and that of the young generation, in particular.

Similarly in the United States, the administration of the president Lyndon Johnson experienced serious problems with its public image. Popular support for the American military intervention in Vietnam declined and, as Henry Kissinger said, "each new administration obliged to deal with Indochina seemed to become more deeply drawn into the morass."²⁹⁴ In addition, domestic problems such as racial segregation had turned into a major social issue. Radicalism intensified and in 1968 the American state was on the verge of a civil war. Again a major role was played by the baby boomers who demanded, like the young people in France, a reconfiguration of the relations between the power wielders and the citizens.

²⁹² Mark Kurlansky, 1968, *The Year that rocked the world*, (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2005), p. 210.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

²⁹⁴ Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, p. 643.

The international system changed its character – the model of the thaw was replaced by *détente*. A new system of political communication based on transparency and most importantly on the limitation control nuclear weapons had been established. While there were conflicts in the West, Brezhnev's first years in power witnessed a restoration of restrictions imposed on the domestic culture of politics in Russia.

In order to avoid serious social tensions, the regimes loyal to the Soviet Union were forced to come up with solutions to preserve their integrity. Central Europe started to pursue its own national path to socialism.²⁹⁵ On the one hand, this included coming to terms with the presence of the Catholic Church. Also the new framework allowed the political leaderships to look for models in which to incorporate economic reforms into the Marxist-Leninist state framework. In Hungary, Janos Kádár created the so called 'goulash communism' which was marked by the incorporation of market practices and liberalization in the sphere of the human rights. However, the presence of Soviet troops in Hungary after 1956 constrained Kádár's room for maneuvers. He did not allow the appearance of a cultural thaw. In the opinion of Lasko Gonz, the intellectuals in Hungary were too much involved in politics to represent a threat to the power wielders. In Poland, Gomulka managed to restore the unity in the country as he was able to reach a certain understanding with the Catholic Church, marked by the release from prison of Cardinal Wyszyński. On the other hand, Gomulka "was succumbing to delusions of Polish grandeur and to old-fashioned neo-Stalinism."²⁹⁶ Despite the restoration of the political control in the first years after 1956, the spirit of the Polish October was still present in the country.²⁹⁷ In 1964, Leszek Kolakowski together with Jacek Kuron issued: *An open letter to the Party*. In it they were arguing for a new form of

²⁹⁵ Robert Bideleux and Ian Jeffris, *A history of Eastern Europe: Crisis and Change*, (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 489-504.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 555.

²⁹⁷ Barbara Falk, *The Dilemmas of Dissidence in East-Central Europe: Citizen Intellectuals and Philosopher Kings*, (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2003), p. 13.

distribution of power and for a restructuring of its bureaucracy. Despite the critical reaction of the communist power wielders, Kolakowski kept publishing until 1968.

The Restoration of control over the public sphere inside the Soviet Union

Brezhnev's regime retained its vigilance on the domestic scene. Robert Service sums up the situation: "The avenues of consultation with the country's supreme political leadership that had been kept semi open under Khrushchev were being closed."²⁹⁸ A new wave of restrictions marked the political course, taken by the new leadership in the Soviet Union. The highlight came in the spring of 1965 with the trial of the poets Andrei Sinyavski and Juli Daniel.

The two writers were incarcerated after they were accused of publishing abroad a series of texts with critical thoughts on the political situation in the Soviet Union. In contrast to the peaceful regime change at the top of the Russian political hierarchy, the trial of Sinyavski and Daniel had the characteristics of the 1950s Stalinist trials. The judicial procedure was marked by fabricated accusations, false testimonies and public stigmatization. The two poets were convicted on the basis of writings that were not related to the current Soviet leadership but to the atrocities of the Stalinist period. Tony Judt argues that the Sinyavski-Daniel trial marked the beginning of the era of dissidents in Eastern Europe.²⁹⁹

The conflicts between the regime in Moscow and the intellectuals soon risked becoming too visible internationally. This damaged the image of the Soviet political leadership abroad. Serious international pressure after Synavski-Daniel trial forced the regime in Moscow to be much more moderate. One of the

²⁹⁸ Robert Service, *A History of Modern Russia*, p.381.

²⁹⁹ Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Eastern Europe since 1945*, p. 425.

direct consequences of that external pressure was the release from prison of the poet Joseph Brodsky. The fact that Brodsky had been sentenced during Khrushchev's reign and now released provided the new Brezhnev regime in Moscow with the image of a fighter against injustices committed in the past. On top of this, the freeing of Brodsky served to show that the Soviet power wielders were in full control and able to apply both the carrot and the stick in their relations with the intellectuals. In fact, Brodsky was under strict surveillance by the KGB until 1972 when he was finally allowed to leave the Soviet Union for the United States. The case of Brodsky underlined the tradition established in the previous period – whenever possible to prevent conflicts with intellectuals. Also the factors that brought Brodsky's freedom demonstrated an interconnection between traditional elements of the Soviet political system and the new geopolitical requirements. The former were expressed in the model of blaming your predecessors for injustices committed against individuals, the latter was evidenced by the subjugation of the Soviet policy to the international demands for transparency. By releasing Brodsky the Soviet political leadership enhanced its authority and in the next few years there was no serious dissent in the country.

Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia

The political leadership in Bulgaria sought to adapt itself to the political conditions established by the new regime in Moscow. Zhivkov's adviser at that time Niko Yahiel remembers that after his first meeting with Brezhnev, the Bulgarian communist leader was "more than happy to have gained the reassurance he needed."³⁰⁰ However, in 1965 Zhivkov's stability came under threat when, having been inspired by Khrushchev's dethronement, a group of communists from the state military command attempted to

³⁰⁰ Hristo Hristov, Todor Zhivkov Biografia, p. 92.

organize a coup against the political leadership of the BCP. State Security spotted the activities of the organizers and captured them before they were able to begin their campaign. On the back of these events, the Bulgarian leadership welcomed Brezhnev's policy of centralization and stabilization. Not surprisingly, in April 1965, the BCP conducted its congress under the slogan: "The further development of the leading role of the Communist Party." It was the centralization of power which was predominant in the political discourse in Bulgaria at this time.

The Czechoslovak political leadership also adapted itself to the changes in the Soviet Union. At the beginning of 1965, the regime in Moscow recognized Novotný as the legitimate leader of Czechoslovakia.³⁰¹ Officially, he did not step back from the promises to carry out economic reforms, given in 1963, but he became much more reluctant to support the ideas proposed by Ota Šik. On the other hand, the Soviet support came at a time when the regime in Czechoslovakia experienced difficulties in promoting a doctrine proclaiming the transition from the dictatorship of the proletariat to an inclusive state in which all citizens should have a share. Novotný's main concern was that such a theoretical construct jeopardized the main pillar of the Communist system - the leading role of the Communist Party.

The Thirteenth Congress of the CPCz which took place on 31 May – 4 June 1966 was expected to deal with these new problems. Here for the first time the political regime in Czechoslovakia recognized the changes which had taken place within society. Instead of class antagonism, the congress officially proclaimed adherence to socialist democracy. In the opinion of Mary Heimann, the name of Alexander Dubček appeared for the first time among the candidates for power inside the Communist Party. He came to be seen as the perfect compromise candidate who could balance between the numbers of different

³⁰¹ Harold Gordon Skilling, *Czechoslovakia's interrupted revolution*, p. 84.

interests existing within the party.³⁰² It was also the style of Dubček's speeches that was liked – they were short, simple and balanced. He managed to represent himself as a reformist by arguing that the Czechoslovak Communist Party should put an end to the campaigns of slander. Also, Dubček rejected some nationalistic tendencies amongst the Slovak political leaders.

Novotný accused Dubček of anti-socialist attitudes and attempted to stage a coup against him in the Slovak Communist Party.³⁰³ Not only did his intervention fail, but it provided Dubček with the image of a victim of the Czech power wielders. As William Shawcross points out, the situation helped Dubček align himself with the Slovak nationalistic cause.³⁰⁴ As a result, in 1967 Dubček made his most nationalistic speech. Inside he claimed that the Slovaks had been betrayed and that although they had won and managed to create the socialist regime they had fought for, they had been denied their full rights as a nation.³⁰⁵ This speech was not just a nationalistic outburst. It was a well calculated move on his road to power.

The fall of Novotný was brought about by a chain of political events. The first major confrontation between the current leader and his rival took place during the CPCz plenum in September 1967. Dubček relied on his new rhetoric of nationalistic sentiment. In his speech he underlined the need for the government to accentuate regional development and provide more investment for Slovakia.³⁰⁶ During Novotný's outburst against the Czechoslovak writers that took place in September 1967, the Slovak leader remained silent. As a result, he legitimated himself not only as fighter for the rights of the Slovaks, but also as a moderate political leader with respect for the freedom of opinion. The last stage of Novotný's

³⁰² Mary Heimann, *Czechoslovakia: The State that Failed*, p. 225.

³⁰³ William Shawcross, *Dubček and Czechoslovakia*, pp. 92-93.

³⁰⁴ Harold Gordon Skilling, *Czechoslovakia's Interrupted Revolution*, p. 86.

³⁰⁵ William Shawcross, *Dubček and Czechoslovakia*, p. 105.

³⁰⁶ Harold Gordon Skilling, *Czechoslovakia's interrupted revolution*, p. 164.

downfall was the 1967 October Plenum of the CPCz.

The event highlighted the divisions in the top hierarchy of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. One of the spokesmen for Novotný was the chief of the ideological department of the CPCz Jiří Hendrych. He was tasked to read out an action plan which had been drafted in the CPCz politburo. The document emphasized the importance of the preservation of the leading role of the Party; a better implementation of decisions. Most importantly the inner life of the party was to be improved. Hendrych also attacked some party members for their passivity. In the words of Gordon Skilling, at this stage Dubček provoked an unprecedentedly bitter discussion. He blamed the authors of the program for failing to provide working solutions for the regional party organizations such as those in South Moravia and Eastern Slovakia.³⁰⁷ He argued for national equality of the Czechs and the Slovaks but he also underlined the importance of a unified Czechoslovak state. The Slovak leader demanded that important changes be made in running the country. He said that the party must lead, and not direct, society. He argued for a reorganization of the relations between the highest organs of the party. His speech did not have a direct outcome but it demonstrated that Dubček was an accomplished political leader. He was loyal to his national position, but he was also concerned about the state of affairs inside the party. Novotný accused Dubček of behaving like a nationalist.

At the beginning of December 1967 the Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev came for a short visit to Prague. During his stay he did not meet with the whole Politburo. He conducted individual meetings. What became clear then was that the Soviet Union had decided to abandon Novotný – the Czechoslovak political leadership was now isolated. On December 19 1967, shortly after Brezhnev's visit, the Central Committee of the CPCz held a meeting that turned into an arena of criticism of the CPCz's policy. This

³⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 166.

time the main speaker was the economist reformer Ota Šik. Šik emphasized the need for decentralization. Like Dubček, Šik argued for changes in the work of the CPCz Central Committee. Dubček represented politics, Šik the economy. Novotný held on to power until the end of 1967, but his rivals ascend within the Party Apparatus was unstoppable.

The Writers and Power

Bulgaria

The changes in the global political context made impact on cultural life in Bulgaria. The policy of the regime was marked by the preservation of organizational unity and also by the intervention of Todor Zhivkov in the personal lives of some prominent members of the Writers' Union. This connection between the institutional order and the leader's personal contacts with writers marked the next twenty years of Zhivkov's reign in Bulgaria.

From the mid-1960s onwards the leader of the BCP opened his circle of protégés to some young and productive writers. In his memoirs, the writer Georgi Markov writes about the scale of Zhivkov's engagement with the writers. He describes the period between 1964 and 1968 as a time of regular excursions, organized by Todor Zhivkov. Markov participated for the first time in an event like this in December 1964 – only a few days before the official removal of Khrushchev. Markov remembers the unexpected character of the invitation. He says he could not believe his eyes when he sat next to Todor Zhivkov in the official state limousine.³⁰⁸ The route of the road trip was designed to cover the movement

³⁰⁸ Georgi Markov Zadochni reportazhi za Bulgaria, v.2, pp. 289-364.

of the communist leader's guerrilla unit in 1944. From the beginning of their conversation, the writer notices that Zhivkov behaved differently in a personal conversation compared to when he gave his numerous speeches and especially his most recent outburst against the writers in the autumn of 1963. The first thing that stroke Markov was Zhivkov's ability to be a good listener. The communist leader calmly answered a number of unpleasant questions posed to him by the writers who were with him. He assured them that their voices were being heard. Secondly, Markov remembers his fascination with Zhivkov's approachability and the ease with which Zhivkov dealt with all the topics of the conversation.

However, there were areas in which the leader of BCP remained reluctant to accept critical thinking. For instance he denied the existence of general faults in Bulgarian literature. Markov remembers the cooling of the otherwise relaxed atmosphere when he took the courage to ask, in front of Zhivkov, for a general permission for the writers to travel abroad. The communist leader responded in a harsh voice, arguing that the Bulgarian writers belong only to Bulgaria and do not need to be brainwashed by western influences. Afterwards, Zhivkov strategically shifted the direction of the conversation. He humorously asked about Markov's opinion on the promiscuity amongst his colleagues.

The meeting reveals some important aspects of the situation in the Bulgarian Writers' Union in 1964. In the first place, during the conversation Zhivkov outlined his closest circle and especially his relationship with Georgi Dzhagarov. It became obvious that the Communist leader had organized informal dinners in which he discussed the situation in cultural life. Moreover, Zhivkov underlined his familiarity with Dzhagarov by telling stories about the latter's drinking habits. In the conclusion of his account, Markov defines Zhivkov's strategy for the Bulgarian cultural sphere as a new model in which the dictator balanced between his own cult of personality - which had to be recognized - and his willing flirtation with the intellectuals.

The year 1965 marked the stage in which the Bulgarian intellectuals adapted themselves to the model of Todor Zhivkov. The literary historian Plamen Doinov criticized the memoirs of poet Lyubomir Levchev in which the latter claimed that in 1965 he and his generation had lost interest in the world of politics. On the contrary, Doinov rightly points out that in the mid-1960s the April 1956 Generation, exemplified by Levchev and Jagarov, took a dominant role in the wielding of power. Not surprisingly, Levchev's career in the Writers' Union developed together alongside Dzhagarov's road to power. In addition, Dzhagarov not only represented the victory of the April 1956 Generation in the Writers' Union but also symbolized how important it was now to be a part of the personal circle of Todor Zhivkov.

Those authors who remained outside the April 1956 Generation grouped themselves around the literary magazine *Septemvri*. Temporarily the magazine became a source of independent thought. In addition to the publishing of Bulgarian authors, the magazine turned into a source of valuable information about cultural developments elsewhere in Eastern Europe. For instance there were analyses of the new wave in Czechoslovak cinema which revealed to the Bulgarian public the changes that were taking place in the culture of Central Europe. The magazine published a positive review of the Czechoslovak film *Coach to Vienna*. However, *Septemvri* remained strictly confined to writing about the arts and did not publish any subversive writings related to the functioning of the system.

Septemvri became the tribune for a group of young literary critics who were under suspicion as Zhivkov himself was resentful of many of them. Some texts by young critics such as Toncho Zhechev, Krustyo Kuyumdzhiev and Tzvetan Stoyanov called for reevaluation of the prewar literary heritage. The topic turned into a manifestation of an independent approach outside of the traditional Marxist paradigm. What triggered a major attack against *Septemvri* was an article by the oppositionist Emil Manov. In his article "My Hero of Our Time", he criticized the stereotypical approach in the depiction of the positive

hero in the socialist era. Taking into consideration the reaction of Zhivkov in his conversations with Markov, such general claims were unwelcomed by the political leadership and the General Secretary of the BCP.

In December 1965, Todor Zhivkov reconfirmed his public image as a reformist. He declared that the party would be hostile to those members of the Writers' Union who had abused their political post as well as to those who tried to monopolize the interpretation of the party's official line. In addition, he presented himself as a protector of the young generation of writers. Thus, at the end of 1965 the communist leader acted in support of two potentially destabilizing social groups – the youth and the intellectuals. After the dramatic events of 1963 and 1964 the relations inside the Praesidium became intense. The Praesidium issued a statement emphasizing its loyalty to the political course established during the Congress of the BCP that had taken place in May 1965. But within the organization, there were serious misunderstandings and factional infighting.

During the first meeting of the leading organ of the Bulgarian Writers' Union in 1966, the main topic was the reorganization of the distribution of power. The ex-leader of the organization Georgi Karasalov criticized the absence of communication between the three leading organs of the Writers' Union – The Council, The Bureau and The Secretariat. He claimed that these structures were isolated and worked separately. In addition, he claimed that centralization of power in the hands of the Council was taking place. Another critic of the new policy of the Writers' Union was the orthodox literary critic Georgi Goshkin. He questioned the model of the election of new members and also speculated about a noticeable change towards a more didactic policy in the Writers' Union. The magazine *Septemvri* became an object of serious criticism by the communist hardliner Nikolai Staikov. Firstly, he attacked Yordan Radichkov and his short story *Privurzaniat Balon*, published earlier that year in the literary magazine *Septemvri*. He

underlined that such a satire directed against the past creates dangerous associations with the present. “If we interpret his view as an observation on the present of the present times then we are witnessing a libelous campaign.” In addition, he complained about the absence in literary works of the archetype of socialist shock workers. The meeting also focused on the young literary critics writing for *Septemvri*. The first target was Krustyo Kuyumdzhiev and his study *Innovation and national traditions*. He was accused that under the cloak of literary criticism, he had attacked his personal enemies amongst the writers.

On March, 15, 1965, Petar Pondev furiously attacked a group of young literary critics around Kouymjiev: “Especially amongst young literary critics we can witness a new trend of essayistic writing which has assumed epidemic proportions. A form of a maniacal verbal twist has overtaken the content of many critical writings and review.”³⁰⁹ Pondev insisted that the circulation of ideas without Marxist content in the Bulgarian press should be immediately banned. The rest of the rank and file members of the Writers’ Union refrained from expressing their opinion of Pondev’s outburst. This may be due to the fact that Pondev was out of favour and was considered a representative of the old guard. The isolation of Pondev was similar to that experienced by Todor Pavlov during his criticism of Jiří Hájek in 1957. In both cases, there was silence not in defense of the accused but rather in opposition to the accuser.

The situation changed in the next meeting of the Praesidium of the Writers’ Union (March, 26, 1965), devoted to work with the press. The leading role this time was assumed by Georgi Dzhagarov. It was suspected that his message came directly from Todor Zhivkov. The young generation of literary critics was again under fire. Dzhagarov argued that they “aimed to restore all the disgusting trends of a bourgeois tradition in literary criticism, known for slanders and personal accusations.” The editor in chief of *Literaturen front*, Pavel Matev, tried to deal with this extreme criticism by saying “we should remain

³⁰⁹ F. 551, op.3, f. 18, p. 45.

vigilant but not suspicious.”³¹⁰

Nikolai Staikov of course supported Dzhagarov but he also expressed the position of those hardliners who were unsatisfied with Zhivkov’s flirting with the young writers: “The fact that we must support the attempts of the Central Committee to keep intellectuals on its side does not necessarily mean that some of those intellectuals should spit into our eyes.”³¹¹ The next comment made by Veselin Yosifov was typical of the atmosphere inside the Praesidium at that time: “Only an idiot would write down or share in personal conversation that he is against the Central Committee of the BCP.”³¹²

The discourse of these two meetings in 1965 shows some important directions of the conflict in this period. In the first place, the criticism against the literary critics provides evidence of the existence of a stronghold of opinions outside of the structures of the Writers’ Union. Also, the controversy contained within the writing by those young literary critics was mainly motivated by their attempts to redefine the past in order to analyse the present. What is also noticeable was the absence of anyone inside the writers’ organization who would openly defend the ideas of the literary critics.

What facilitated the last step in Dzhagarov’s road to power was the unexpected death of Dimitar Dimov. Despite being put in power only as a temporary solution, the author of *Tobacco* laid the ground for the success of the magazine *Septemvri* and also for the arrival of the younger generation in literary life. During the meeting of the Praesidium on April 12, 1966, the members had to discuss post-mortem a report written by Dimov in relation to the upcoming election of a chairman of the Writers’ Union. The organization took the decision to rework the report but first to read it out on behalf of Dimov.

³¹⁰ F. 551, op.3, f. 19, p. 34.

³¹¹ Ibid. p. 42.

³¹² Ibid, p. 53.

Within this context, on April 15, 1966, the Bulgarian Writers' Union held a special meeting at which to elect its new leadership. The outcome was predetermined and Dzhagarov became chairman of the BWU. The newly elected Council of the Writers' Union exemplified the tendency of the political leadership of the BCP to co-opt potential enemies inside the structures of power. Emil Manov was not only elected as member of the leading organ but he was also appointed as a coordinator of the apparatus of the organization. The role of national literature was recognized when the author of folkloristic and historical stories Nicolai Haitov was placed in charge of the international relations of the Bulgarian Writers' Union.

On May 23, 1966 the new Council of the Bulgarian Writers' Union was presented in front of the Praesidium. The main stage was of course taken by Georgi Dzhagarov. He stated that "here is the place for arguments, discussions and rifts – outside this room there must only unity."³¹³ Further in his speech, Dzhagarov expressed his admiration for Todor Zhivkov and his negative attitude towards *Septemvri*. Dzhagarov's appointment marked the end of a six-month period in which the magazine was temporarily a platform of unorthodox thinking.

The next important step of the new leadership was the election of new members of the Bulgarian Writers' Union. The discussion of the proposal took place on February 9, 1966, during a meeting of the Praesidium. The first name that caused serious tension was that of Vera Mutafchieva. Her historical novel *Sluchayat Dzhem (The case of Jem)* was warmly welcomed by the public and by literary critics. In addition Mutafchieva was a well-respected historian. She was amongst the first women to be accepted into an international group of researchers of the Ottoman Empire. However, her biography was still problematic. Her father who was amongst the most renowned historians in the prewar period became a

³¹³ F. 551, op. 3, f. 19.

victim of stigmatization after 1944. The chief of the section of the novelists inside the organization, Emilian Stanev, backed the proposal to accept Mutafchieva and was stunned by the fact that his section did not present Mutafchieva with a nomination for membership. It became clear that Mutafchieva was a victim of inner sabotage, conducted while Stanev had been outside of the country.

The next conflict appeared in relation to the proposition of the young poet Konstantin Pavlov. During the previous year he had published his second volume of poems and therefore his work was an answer to the critics who had complained recently that not enough literature was being published. The attack against Pavlov was conducted by Bogomil Rainov. He accused the young poet of misanthropy and said: “I am surprised by that stubbornness in the writings of Konstantin Pavlov. His works are still full of pessimism – totally inapplicable to our reality. Georgi Dzhagarov also argued against Pavlov. Firstly, the leader of the Writers’ Union insisted that the young poet had been “artificially planted as a talent.”³¹⁴ He questioned Pavlov’s loyalty to the cause of socialism and rejected him with the argument that the organization did not need people who would destabilize unity.

The candidature of Toncho Zhechev also faced a wave of criticism. The attack came from Georgi Karaslavov and Stoyan Karolev. Firstly the young literary critic was blamed for pointing out that Bulgarian literature is provincial. Zhechev’s next fault was his participation in a blitz interview in *Septemvri* where, in the opinion of Karolev, he had gone too far in his criticism. Zhechev’s rejection was related to his participation in the circle of literary critics around Koyumdjiev and Tzvetan Stoyanov.

³¹⁴ Ibid.

Czechoslovakia

In the period 1964-1967 the Czechoslovak Writers' Union was led by Jiří Šotola. Similarly to Dimov, he was moderate and able to balance between the interests of different groups inside the organization. Alfred French claims that the permitted range of opinions was wider but the principle of democratic centralism remained the same.³¹⁵ The opening speech of Šotola during the first meeting of the Praesidium of the Czechoslovak Writers, conducted on 25 February, 1964, was evidence of that tendency. He called for a responsible attitude towards the goals of the Writers' Union; he stressed the importance of writers' adaptation to the norms of the present day; he argued against dogmatism and in defense of the right to a personal opinion. In addition Šotola targeted the literary critics for their hysterical attempts of being provocative. In his last words he did not miss to express his satisfaction with the recent meeting of the writers the communist leader Antonín Novotný. In the last part of his speech he stressed the need to seize the generational conflict inside the Writers' sphere.³¹⁶

The next two years saw the attempts of the ideological department of the Communist Party to enhance control over the public sphere and the writers in particular. For instance, in 1965 the chair of this unit František Havlíček wrote an article in the magazine *Nová mysl* warning about the dangerous role of Vaclav Havel due to the latter's bourgeoisie origins.³¹⁷ This was part of the wave of criticism towards the magazine *Tvař*. The latter was seen as a threat by both reformed and unreformed Stalinists.³¹⁸

In February 1966, the Praesidium of the Czechoslovak Writers Union opened the preparations of the 4th Congress of the Writers' Union. Some of the decisions taken during this meeting sharply contrasted

³¹⁵ Alfred French, *Czech Writers and Politics*, p. 222.

³¹⁶ LA, PNP, 25.02.64.

³¹⁷ John Keane, *Václav Havel: Political tragedy in six acts*, (New York: Basic Books, 2000)

³¹⁸ Alfred French, *Czech Writers and Politics*, p. 228.

with the general atmosphere of ideological pressure over the writers. The chairman himself took control of this commission responsible for the ideological preparations for upcoming Congress. What demonstrated the difference in the approach in the work of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union was its approach towards young writers. The Praesidium voted for the creation of a special group that had to work in collaboration with the leading organ. Despite the ideological victimization of *Tvář* the list of the sub-commission included controversial young authors like Jaromír Hanzlík, Václav Hons, Jiří Gruša and the main enemy of Havlíček – Václav Havel.³¹⁹

The latter became a central figure in the discussion about the nominations for literary awards that were conducted during the same meeting. The work for which Havel gained his nomination was *The Garden Party* and it was excluded from the nominations which had been proposed by the Czechoslovak Union of Theatre and Radio Artists. The person who proposed the nomination was Ivan Klíma. He had to defend the style in which the play was written. Klíma underlined the importance of present day reality and claimed that since there were new problems facing today's age the authors who were exploring them need new instruments.³²⁰

Along with Havel the list of nominees included the works of two of the leading rebels during the 1956 Congress of Czechoslovak Writers - Jaroslav Seifert and František Hrubín and the controversial Bohumil Hrabal.

The nomination of Jaroslav Seifert for a national award for lifetime achievement raised the tension amongst the members of the Praesidium. Some of the reactions testified to the presence of dormant conflicts in Czechoslovak cultural life. In first place, the Slovak writer Dominik Tatarka argued against

³¹⁹ LA, PNP, 25.02.1964.

³²⁰ LA PNP, 25.02.1966.

the national character of the award. He was interrupted by Jiří Hájek who said that the award was not national in character since it was given by the Czechoslovak state to Czechoslovak citizens. It became obvious that the tension between Czech and the Slovak writers was strong. Secondly, a rather bureaucratic problem was connected to the fact that Seifert was to be awarded a prize by the Writers' Union only a couple of months after he had received the state award for literature. That was used as a pretext for mutual accusations between some members of the Praesidium. It unleashed the old rivalry between Jan Drda and Jan Kříž. The latter questioned the position of Drda as a defender of Seifert: "Weren't you supposed to defend Seifert ten years ago when you were in charge of the Commission for State Awards?"³²¹

The fact that Seifert was proposed for a prize signaled a complete rehabilitation of the rebels of the 1956 Congress of the Czechoslovak Writers. On the other hand, while promoting young authors, the power wielders inside the Praesidium unwillingly provided a public platform for young writers like Václav Havel. Also, the meeting underlined the ongoing mistrust experienced by the Slovak writers, which mirrored the problems between Novotný and the Slovak branch of the Communist Party. Therefore, the meeting shed light on two simultaneous processes. On the one hand there were the attempts of reconciliation with the past and the attempt to gather young writers around the CPCz. On the other hand, the Praesidium witnessed the dissatisfaction of the Slovak writers with the fact that in many instances the nominal term 'Czech' equaled the term 'Czechoslovak.'

In the days before the Fourth Congress of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union, Antonín Novotný was surrounded by enemies. He was in conflict with the Slovak Communist Party; the reformers such as Ota Šik were dissatisfied with the course of the reforms in the economic sector; and instead of improving his relations with the intellectuals as it was promised in 1964, the Czechoslovak communist leader ordered a

³²¹ Ibid.

severe campaign to be waged against *Literární Noviny*. Instead of balancing between the carrot and the stick, Novotný chose to use the stick.

The Fourth Congress of the Czechoslovak Writers

On May, 25, 1967 the meeting of the Praesidium discussed the resignation of Jiří Hájek from all the positions he had occupied since 1963. After sending his critical thoughts on the report that was to be read during the IV Congress of the Czechoslovak Writers, Hájek had been accused of denunciation by the leader of the CP Ideological Department, Havlíček. The reason for this accusation was the fact that Hájek expressed dissatisfaction with the proposed plan of the Fourth Congress of the Czechoslovak Writers. During the meeting of the Praesidium, however Havlíček was not defended by the rest of the members of the organization. The situation with Hájek was evidence that the opposition was no longer concentrated within the Praesidium of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union.

Firstly, the chair of the communist faction in the Czechoslovak Writers' Union declared that the organization was against ideological diversionists.³²² The traditional style of preparations was preserved in the case of official report of the Writers' Union. The first major rift appeared between the chairman of the Union Jiří Šotola and the chief of the Ideological Department in CPCz Jiří Hendrych. The latter had presented a critical overview of the media and claimed that in the last few months *Literární Noviny* had been acting against the directives of the Communist Party. In contrast, Šotola's report focused on criticism of censorship in journalism. The pressure from the power wielders in the ideological sphere which was being applied on the writers turned Šotola's measured arguments into the first conflicting point

³²² Alfred French, *Czech Writers and Politics* p. 252.

of the event.

The second day of the event witnessed the highest level of controversy. Milan Kundera was expected to deliver the official report of the Writers' Union. Despite outlining some main points he shifted the focus of his speech towards an analysis of the relation between the past and the present. His approach was not surprising, since one of the controversies that had erupted in 1956 was related to an article which Kundera devoted to the role of the tradition in literature. At this point, however, the writer went much further by analyzing the current situation in relation to the idea of historical progress. He underlined the struggle of Czechoslovakia to be part of Europe, as he claimed that "nothing was taken for granted neither on language nor our Europeanism."³²³ Then the writer enumerated the achievements of European culture as a counter point to the violence applied against individual thinking. He paraphrased Voltaire's declaration "I disapprove of what you are saying but I will defend to the death your right to say it." In that same Enlightenment based rhetoric, Kundera concluded that "everyone who through bigotry, vandalism, uncivilized behavior, or closed mindedness – undermines cultural progress is at the same time, undermining the very existence of this nation."³²⁴ Kundera provided as an example of that vandalism the attack in the parliament on the film "Daises".³²⁵ The conflict grew sharper as the next speaker was Jiří Hendrych. His narrative was not different from that of the power wielders that governed cultural life in Bulgaria. Namely, he underlined the leading role of the Communist Party and pointed at the foreign enemy – the Israelis. In response, the rank-and- file member Pavel Kohout reacted against such proclamations of anti-Zionism. He was known in the Praesidium of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union for his oppositional attitude but his harsh criticism came as a surprise for the hardliners inside the

³²³ The Prague Spring 1968. The National Security Archive Documents Reader, ed. Jaromír Navrátil (Budapest: CEU Press, 1998), pp. 8-9.

³²⁴ Ibid.

³²⁵ Alfred French, *Czech Writers and Politics*, p. 253.

organization. He argued against the suppression of free discussion and blamed the regime for encouraging ignorance and political apathy.³²⁶ The highlight of the morning session came when Alexander Kilment asked that an address written by Alexander Solzhenitsyn be read out. The letter was read out by Kohout and forced Hendrych to produce his famous line: Všechno ste prohráli (You have lost it all).³²⁷

With the start of the afternoon session the situation was already out of the control of the ideological power wielders. The first speaker who was supposed to give his address was the young playwright Václav Havel, for whom this was the first occasion of that kind. By playing with words and meanings he suggested that what had taken place in the morning session should be converted into a ritual which should be repeated every four years. Then he continued with his evaluation of Solzhenitsyn's letter "I gradually became confident that instead of uttering a thousand bold words of which a hundred are later gradually retracted, it is always better to utter only a hundred but to stand behind them to the bitter end."³²⁸

The communist writer Ludvík Vaculík gave a powerful speech. This was a logical continuation of his novel *The Axe (Sekyra)* published in 1966 in which the author had told the story of the relations between a young man and his father, marked by the historical context of the last twenty years. At the time of the speech Vaculík sharpened his message to the level of a straightforward political criticism. Firstly he focused on the internal problems of the writers and outlined the framework of the organizational life of writers under democratic centralism. He proposed a typology of the people involved in socio-political life. In Vaculík's opinion the first four groups were defined by lust for power; obedient nature; bad conscience; and an appetite for comfort; while there were two small groups consisting of people who had suffered humiliation and had attempted to renew self-respect. Finally, there were ill-informed moral

³²⁶ Ibid., p.254.

³²⁷ Ibid.

³²⁸ The Prague Spring 1968. The National Security Archive Documents Reader, p. 9.

absolutists.³²⁹ He continued his criticism as an individual who belonged to that last group. Vaculík claimed that in the last twenty years not a single human problem had yet been solved³³⁰ and the writer continued with his bleak re-evaluation „What is more I am afraid that we have not advanced on the world scene and that our republic has lost its good name. We have not contributed any original thoughts or good ideas to humanity. For instance, we have not come up with solutions about how to produce and how not to drown in goods.”³³¹ In this connection he acknowledged there was meaning in the lives of the people over the past twenty years, but he regarded this meaning to be a warning. His address in front of the Fourth Congress constituted an intermediate stage between his first novel *The Axe* and his 1968 political pamphlet *2000 Words*.

The rebellion manifested unity in the protesting group of the Czechoslovak writers. Havel was a member of the younger generation but people like Kundera, Kohout and Vaculík were long-term members of the Communist Party and regular participants in the organizational life of CPCz for the last ten years.

On the next day, the power wielders attempted to regain control. The ostracized Hendrych spoke with self-confidence. He pointed out the presence of a particular group that deliberately destroyed the programmed schedule of the Fourth Congress. He sidelined those people around magazines *Květen* and *Tvář*. In addition, he added a dose of conspiracy by stating that the group that carried out the onslaught was masterminded from abroad. He blamed much of the problems on Pavel Tigrid – a Czech writer and journalist who had emigrated after 1948 and was the editor of a leading émigré intellectual journal.

³²⁹ Alfred French, *Czech Writers and Politics*, p. 257.

³³⁰ *The Prague Spring 1968. The National Security Archive Documents Reader*, p. 10.

³³¹ *Ibid.*

Then the power wielder issued a list of candidate members from which eleven people were crossed out because of what they said at the Congress. His speech was constantly interrupted by loud protests. He was forced to change the list of the nominations and postpone the final decision.

The final outcome of the Congress came as a result of a special plenum of the Central Committee of CPCz which took place in September, 1967. William Shawcross claims that with his decision to remain silent during this plenum, the Slovak leader made an important step in the process of ousting Novotný.³³² Unlike Dubček a number of hardliners backed Hendrych's proposal to punish those who "misused" the Fourth Congress of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union. The concealed character of the plenum meeting showed that the political regime in Czechoslovakia had become intrinsically unstable.

The change of the political context in Czechoslovakia in the end of 1967 can be witnessed by a statement made by the Czechoslovak writer Jan Procházka: "We have been in the past a centre of advanced culture, craftsmanship, and honesty; and it should be a natural ambition of today to excel our yesterday. Without a living contact with our own past we cannot think of a worthwhile future. But here too there is maybe an encouraging development. Nobody can now exclude from our national tradition T.G Masaryk, his friends or his colleagues, nobody now says that Beneš was an agent of the imperialists."³³³

Concluding remarks

In line with the political trajectory, the supremacy of Zhivkov's strategy over that of Novotný became clearly apparent during this period. In the first place the Bulgarian political leadership was able to

³³² William Shawcross, *Dubček and Czechoslovakia*, p. 108.

³³³ Alfred French, *Czech Writers and Politics*, p. 250.

preserve its inner party stability. By contrast Novotný deepened the divisions inside the Party Apparatus and did not manage to impose a proper ideological framework. The attempt to introduce the concept of an inclusive nation of all citizens turned out to be a failure. The weakness of the Czechoslovak political leadership became evident in its struggle to control the public sector and the writers in particular. Zhivkov's strategy of the carrot and the stick was upgraded with the appointment of his protégé as the new chairman of the Writers' Union. Not only did Dzhagarov implement Zhivkov's policy but he was also able to spread his influence outside of the writers' sphere.

As a result, the year 1967 became another example of Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia exhibiting two different faces of the communist system in the last twenty years. When in Bulgaria silence was considered the greatest manifestation of resistance, in Czechoslovakia the writers raised their voices. Although Dubček used a certain amount of nationalist rhetoric in his conflict with Novotný, he did manage to get the support of social reformers inside CPCz. Nevertheless the sharpest contrast with Bulgaria came during the Fourth Congress of the Czechoslovak Writers. On the one hand, the event demonstrated the generational unity of the reform-minded members of the organization. Kundera had clearly set a line of continuity between the values of the Enlightenment and the creation of the Czechoslovak state. Vaculík compared the faults of the present with the ideals that had brought about the creation of the socialist system. Despite of the enduring wave of sanctions the dice was cast. The success of Dubček came not as a result of the protests but due to the fact that the political regime had allowed those protests. Moreover, this was the second time in twelve years that Novotný allowed such an internal crisis to emerge.

During the next stage, Dubček's task would be to unify the party and the people behind the reformist project. He had to deal with the same problems as his predecessor – a lack of general political strategy and the presence of different fractions – the unhappy Slovak nationalists and the endangered

representatives of the party's old guard. In addition the dormant conflicts that begun to take shape produced the nucleus of a revolution that was to shake Czechoslovakia in 1968.

Chapter 5: The two faces of 1968

Introduction

To begin with this chapter aims to position the conflict in Eastern Europe within the general picture of confrontations in Europe. Then I will show the political development in Czechoslovakia in the first months after Dubček took power. Then the chapter will deal with the decisions made by the political leadership in Bulgaria in relation to the intervention of the Five Warsaw Pact members. I will discuss the participation of Bulgaria in the meetings devoted to the crisis in Czechoslovakia and I will outline Zhivkov's strategy. The chapter will concentrate around Zhivkov's assessments and his criticism of the political leadership in Czechoslovakia. The chronological order of the chapter covers the period from March until August 1968. It starts with the meeting in Dresden and finishes with the military invasion of the Five Warsaw Pact countries.

This chapter will also show the interconnection between politics and the writers during the unfolding of the crisis. In the first place, I will illustrate how a great number of writers attempted to shy away from direct confrontation. Also I will show the patterns which the power wielders in Bulgaria used to denouncing the events in Czechoslovakia. I conclude the examination of the propaganda war with the debacle of the *2000 words* manifesto. As a result the chapter will show how the long-term process of merging the world of the writers with the world of politics was used in Bulgaria in the conflict with

Czechoslovakia.

Conflicts and power in the global context

As a whole, 1968 was an eventful year. However, the conflicts took place predominantly in the first six months. In his analysis of 1968, Tony Judt points out that a number of coalition governments had led the political scene without a real opposition. Therefore Judt claims that this meant that the public sphere to act as an oppositional force. However when describing the events in May 1968 in France, Judt does not neglect to mention a middle class origin of the May Revolution. In truth it was the students' demonstrations that inspired the working class to go on strike. However, it was the lack of central authority only allowed the protests to continue for two weeks.

The situation in Eastern Europe was also unstable. At the beginning of 1968 the preparations for the performance of Adam Mickiewicz's play *Dziady* were cancelled by the Polish authorities because of alleged anti-Russian and pro-religious sentiments. On March 4, 1968 the power wielders removed Adam Michnik from his position at Warsaw University. Five days later Michnik and his colleagues Modzelewsky and Jacek Kuron were arrested. A massive wave of student protests spread around Poland. The answer of the Communist Regime was to accuse some members of these student groupings of Zionism. The accusations soon evolved into openly anti-Semitic messages. The situation worsened after the eruption of the six day Israeli-Arab war. As a result, in parallel to the development of the reformist movement in Czechoslovakia, the Polish leadership seemed to lose control.

Western Europe was also in the throes of mass protests. De Gaulle's political maneuvers did not

work. In 1968, many young people in France went to protest against the political order, which was personified by the prewar political leaders. In April, 1968, the murder of Martin Luther King was a serious blow to the attempts to find a peaceful solution to the American problems of social segregation. Also the media coverage of the war in Vietnam provoked a massive negative response. The summer of 1968 was the time of the American movement for peace. It appeared that the conflicts that had originated in the West were at their highest intensity. In that destabilizing context, the situation in Eastern Europe would have seemed static if it was not the dynamic provided by the reformist movement in Czechoslovakia.

Czechoslovakia in/outside of the Promised Land

The unsuccessful attempt made in December 1967 by Novotný, to use the support of the military commanders to remove Dubček from his position of a pretender for power signaled the last stage of the downfall of the Czechoslovak leader. This was evidenced by the plenum of January, 1968. This meeting was a continuation of the meeting December, 1967, but Novotný did not manage to stabilize his power. Next to Šik and Dubček, it was the Prague communist Smrkovský who initiated an attack against the leadership of CPCz. He questioned the 1948 Košice Program by suggesting that it should be creatively rethought. Finally, the balance shifted in favor of Dubček during the meeting of the meeting of the Central Committee which took place on January 5, 1968. Novotný was forced to step down from the position of First Secretary of the CPCz. He still managed to preserve his position as Head of State. Seen from the perspective of the hierarchy of communist power this position was for those who had lost the battle for power. In addition, in the next two months Dubček intensified the pressure on his rival. It was the strategy

of the new First Secretary to allow criticism towards Novotný without guiding it. During January and March 1968 Dubček secured his power. In his strategy, he was no different than his predecessors. He blamed the previous leadership for the mistakes and lack of progress in Czechoslovakia. He also created his own circle of loyal supporters. In Mary Heimann's opinion the difference in the strategy of the Slovak leader was his reliance on inner party support rather than expecting to be backed by Moscow.³³⁴ In addition, Dubček forced the process of political rehabilitation. At the same time, Brezhnev was convinced of the loyalty of the pro-Soviet Dubček. With the silent support of the Soviets, the First Secretary allowed a wave of criticism to be unleashed against his predecessor. The complete takeover of power in Czechoslovakia was accomplished on March, 28, 1968 when Novotný was forced to step down also from the post of Head of State.

The battle for power included a number of reforms and the removal of hardliners from important posts. In addition, the abolishment of censorship and preparations for reforms raised suspicion inside the Eastern Bloc. In the next months each activity of the Czechoslovak political leadership would be sharply criticized by the reactionary centers inside the Warsaw Pact countries, referred to in historiography as "The Five."

On April 5, 1968, the CPCz politburo published a program for reforms, known as the Action Program. The sections in the program were related to major problems faced by Czechoslovakia – economics, cultural freedom and national unity. The leading role of the Communist Party was preserved. However, there were a number of new roles of the CPCz: to be prime vehicle for arousing socialist initiative; to win the confidence of workers, and satisfying the various interests in society in such a way

³³⁴ Mary Heimann, *Czechoslovakia the state that failed*, p. 231.

as to promote the interests of society as a whole; to create new progressive interests.³³⁵

Along with its ideas, the Action Program was also an instrument for the stabilization of Dubček's power. This was witnessed by the atmosphere of accusations against Novotný, as his reign was blamed for all the shortcomings in the socio-political life of Czechoslovakia. Moreover, the accusations were followed by major changes in the CP personnel, signaled by the rise to power of reformers like Josef Smrkovský and František Kriegel.³³⁶ The well elaborated strategy defined by the idea of Socialism with a Human Face was able to provide a common direction for socio-political life. However, the policy of the Czechoslovak leaders increased suspicion amongst Czechoslovakia's allies - the changes had not been discussed with the Soviet political leadership. Mary Heimann provides clear picture of Dubček's position after the changes the political changes in Czechoslovakia: "On the one hand he needed somehow to contain any expression of opinion that might be interpreted as a threat to socialism, the interests of the Warsaw Pact and those of the Soviet Union, yet at the same time appear reformist enough to retain the allegiance of a majority within the Central Committee of the CPCz, revive the economy and avoid being discredited with the public as a breakers of promises."³³⁷

In addition, the Czechoslovak leadership was losing control of the situation in the public sphere. As it was pointed out by Kieran Williams, at the beginning of May, both Dubček and Smrkovský warned the Central Committee about dangers related to the possible interpretations of the reforms in public life. However, the domestic event that proved to the Soviets that the political situation in Czechoslovakia had got out of hand was the publication of the *2000 Words*.

³³⁵ Ibid., p.235.

³³⁶ Ibid., p. 236.

³³⁷ Ibid.

The manifesto was entitled *2000 Words to Workers, Scientists, Farmers and Everyone*. It aimed to create unity between the different classes in order to tackle the deficiencies of the political system. The manifesto consisted of a number of warnings and supported both a change in the pace of the reforms and an extension of their scope: “At this moment of hope, albeit hope still under threat, we appeal to you. Several months went by before many of us believed it was safe to speak up; many of us still do not think it is safe. But speak up we did, exposing ourselves to the extent that we have no choice but to complete our plan to humanize the regime. If we do not, the old forces will exact cruel revenge. We appeal above to those who have just been waiting to see what will happen. The time approaching will determine events for years to come.”³³⁸

The address written by the Czechoslovak writer Ludvík Vaculík was just a formulation of the problems faced by the whole political leadership in Czechoslovakia. Without a doubt Dubček attempted to rationalize his policy by addressing certain problems and by proposing solutions being fully aware that these solutions needed solid support inside the Party Apparatus. However, the sense of mistrust both inside and outside of Czechoslovakia confronted the Czechoslovak political leader with the task of searching unity between two extremely different camps – those of the reform communists inside the country like Vaculík and the foreign political leaders in the socialist camp. In this situation, Dubček was forced to face the prospect of an international conflict which would jeopardize his position and put an end to the reforms.

In July the situation gradually went out of the hands of the Czechoslovak leadership. In addition an opposition to Dubček was formed in his native Slovakia around the figure of Vasil Bilak. The military invasion came as a result of an increasing mistrust amongst five of the members of the Warsaw Pact.

³³⁸ The Prague Spring 1968. The National Security Archive Documents Reader, p.179.

Bulgarian policy and the development of the crisis

There were many authors working on the political reasoning behind the Soviet invasion in Czechoslovakia. An insight made by Ivan Volyges sums up the two driving factors that turned five socialist states against Czechoslovakia - the process of modernization outside of the command economy and the desire of Czechoslovakia to return to the economic and cultural milieu of the European community. In addition Volyges claims that the reformers in Czechoslovakia were aiming to create a socialist union outside of the socialist bloc.³³⁹ The policy of BCP during the Prague Spring was aimed against those ambitions of the Czechoslovak communist leadership. Moreover Todor Zhivkov headed the attack against Czechoslovakia from the first moment when the situation in Czechoslovakia came to the attention of the Soviet Union – on March, 23 1968 when the state members of the Warsaw Pact met in Dresden.

The meeting was provoked by fears related to the reform program set to be launched in April, 1968 by the Czechoslovak leadership. The division during the meeting was about the type of response to the situation in Czechoslovakia. The moderate wing was led by Brezhnev and Kadar. The former expressed his belief in the ability of the Czechoslovak political leadership to restore the control in the country, while the latter was eager to support the reforms in Czechoslovakia which he found to be similar to those conducted by him in Hungary after 1956. On the other hand, the hard-liner wing was formed by the leaders of GDR and Poland. Walter Ulbricht feared that the improvement of the relations between Czechoslovakia and West Germany would lead to a rebirth of the “*Ostpolitik*”, while his Polish

³³⁹ Ivan Volyges, *The Hungarian and Czechoslovak Revolutions: A Comparative study of Revolutions in Communist Countries*, p. 47.

counterpart Wladislav Gomulka had suffered a serious blow to his reformist image and the opposition in his country raised a new slogan: Poland is waiting for its Dubček.³⁴⁰

Since the topic of Czechoslovakia remained outside of the public, on March 29, 1968 Stanko Todorov and Todor Zhivkov spoke before the Central Committee of BCP about their participation in the meeting in Dresden. Todorov retold the meeting and underlined three major causes for concern - the political language used in Czechoslovakia after January 1968; the positive interpretations of the Masaryk era; the reforms conducted in State Security. In his conclusion, Todorov said: "The events in Czechoslovakia are an example of the struggle between the two world systems – the capitalist and the socialist. What they want is thinkable only in the new condition when there are no antagonistic classes, there are no class contradictions and there is no class struggle. So this is impossible now when in Europe, the German militarism is preparing for revenge and the war in Vietnam and in the Middle East is still going."³⁴¹ All in all, the speech of Todorov was at the core of the policy of BCP until the military intervention of the Warsaw Pact troops in Czechoslovakia.

In his speech Todor Zhivkov informed the members of the Central Committee of BCP about his personal meeting with Brezhnev and Kosygin in which he had asked them for an immediate response to the situation in Czechoslovakia and in his own words, he had told to the Soviet leaders: "even if we should take a risk we must be ready to act with our armies."³⁴² Zhivkov enforced his arguments in front of the Central Committee by stating: The West will probably misuse our policy. They will criticize us but we will enforce our role in the international communist movement. We will shift the balance. What is the guiding line of the Yugoslavian political leadership? What is the policy of the Romanian political

³⁴⁰ George Gomori, *Hungarian and Polish Attitudes on Czechoslovakia*, p. 115.

³⁴¹ F1B, op.58, f. 7, p. 12.

³⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 32.

leadership? It is counter-revolutionary and anti-Soviet in nature. Who allows the Romanian political leadership to put in danger in the working class in Romania and the interests of our political system?

By doing so, Todor Zhivkov became the first political leader in Eastern Europe to propose military solution to the situation in Czechoslovakia. Then he continued with personal attack against the political leadership in Czechoslovakia: “The situation is tough. What is the state of the Politburo? Those forces that were behind the Soviet Union and supported our policy were expelled from the Politburo. Dubček lacks the experience, the capacity and the intellect to lead the party”.³⁴³

A month later Zhivkov went to an official meeting with the Czechoslovak communist leader Alexander Dubček. The discussion conducted by the two leaders highlighted the division between Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia. Dubček’s spoke about his visions for the future of the socialist system. He claimed that the Czechoslovak leadership was trying to change the methodology of power and not to remove the existing political order. He added that he and his comrades in CPCz aimed to conduct those reforms that were not accomplished in the last decade of Novotny’s rule. In addition, the Czechoslovak leader claimed that the leading role of the party must remain unquestionable and summed up his policy as stating: “All of us here are communists, and our blood burns with internationalism.”³⁴⁴

On his part, Todor Zhivkov remained close to the arguments he had presented during the last meeting of the Central Committee of BCP. He explained to Dubček the nature of his vision about the socialist system and the role of the political power in times of changes. In the first place, the Bulgarian communist leader spoke about the allowed reforms and that he had ousted important figures in BCP such as Georgi Chankov and Anton Yugov because the two of them had crossed this allowed perimeter by

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴ F1B, op.60, f. 7, pp. 2-23.

endangering the immunity of the system – the Army and the State Security. Next to this, Zhivkov underlined the success of the 1956's reforms in Bulgaria as stating that he had solved the inner party conflicts by keeping them outside of the public eye. In conclusion, Zhivkov referred to the power making in the cultural sphere. He proudly said that the intellectuals were in full support of the leadership of BCP.³⁴⁵ Moreover Zhivkov explained to the Czechoslovak leader that the system of government in the cultural life in Bulgaria relied on state-public basis. In many respects he meant the model witnessed in the Writers' Union and the political control over the organization in the last 10 years. After his return to Sofia, Zhivkov claimed that his experience in Czechoslovakia had reconfirmed his fears about the development of the counter revolution in Czechoslovakia.

In the course of the next month, the Bulgarian political leadership closely monitored the situation in Czechoslovakia by using the resources of the military intelligence. In relation with the dissemination of specific information about the situation in Czechoslovakia, the politburo of BCP ordered: “Under the control of the department of Propaganda and Agitation of the CC of the BCP, measures to be taken for proper clarification to our community of the events in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, with the use of press, radio, television and other sources.”³⁴⁶

In the beginning of May, in front of the Czechoslovak leadership Brezhnev underlined the readiness of the Hungarian, the Polish and the Bulgarian leadership “to defend the cause of socialism at any cost”. The Soviet leader proved the position of Bulgaria amongst the hardliners in the Warsaw Pact. The next step in the development of the crisis was the meeting of the Five that took place in Warsaw on July 14, 1968. This was a chance for Todor Zhivkov to repeat his uncompromising position towards the

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

³⁴⁶ F.1B, op.35, f.127.

leadership of CPCz. He argued that CPCz is failing to take control over the public sector and the organs of power. Zhivkov also claimed that “Only by relying on the armed forces of the Warsaw Pact we can change the situation.”³⁴⁷ In his words the counter-revolutionaries had taken the control over the party and the “healthy forces” in CPCz needed evidence of support from the Warsaw Pact. In his opinion, an intervention would not be welcome but in hindsight such an act would be highly significant as: “A strike against the opportunism in the international communist movement.”³⁴⁸ The meeting concluded with the publication of the “Warsaw Letter” which reconfirmed the positions stated during the meeting and gave an ultimatum to the CPCz which was expected to take control of the situation.

The Warsaw meeting was portrayed in Bulgaria as the last chance for CPCz to regain control of the situation. The fight against counter revolution was the main topic in two major newspapers *Rabotnichesko Delo*³⁴⁹ and *Narodna Armia*³⁵⁰. In addition the political leadership of CPCz was blamed for diminishing the leading role of the party. These articles were part of a propaganda war against Czechoslovakia that would reach its final stage in the following month.

In the beginning of August 1968, the leaders of Yugoslavia and Romania openly grouped with the Czechoslovak leadership. The Yugoslavian leader Tito visited Prague and the leading newspaper in Yugoslavia, *Borba*, declared: “We express support, because we are guided by our own experience from the struggle for just principles of socialist and inter-socialist relations.”³⁵¹ During a demonstration in support of the Czechoslovak leadership that took place in Bucharest the Romanian leader Nicolae

³⁴⁷ F. 1B, op.58, f.3.

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

³⁴⁹ *Rabotnichesko Delo*, 18. 07. 1968.

³⁵⁰ *Narodna Armia*, 20. 07. 1968.

³⁵¹ Werner Sichel, “The economic effects on Yugoslavia of the invasion of Czechoslovakia” in *The Soviet Invasion of Czechoslovakia and its effects on Eastern Europe*. New York: Praeger, 1972, pp. 172-173.

Ceausescu spoke passionately about the new opportunity opened by the Czechoslovak leadership in front of the Socialist Bloc. In fact, these events underlined Zhivkov's fears that the influence of the Prague Spring will reach Bulgaria.

The meeting between Dubček and Brezhnev in Cierna nad Tisou between July, 29 and August, 1 1968 was the last attempt for peaceful solution of the situation in Czechoslovakia. Dubček responded to the threats by agreeing for another meeting. However the tensions remained and on August 18, 1968 the Soviet politburo hold a meeting in which it decided to launch a military campaign to provide support for the healthy forces in the Central Committee of CPCz.

In line with the development of the crisis on August 19, 1968 the minister of Defense Dobri Dzhurov released an official order released an official order for Regiment 12 and Regiment 22 to participate in the military assistance to Czechoslovakia as part of the mission of the Warsaw Pact troops to liquidate the counter revolution in Czechoslovakia. This decision ended a six-month campaign of BCP against the political leadership of Alexander Dubček that had started in March, 1968 when Todor Zhivkov declared the Czechoslovak leader as incapable of leading the party. In addition the Bulgarian communist leader led his political struggle in the same way he had ousted his rival during the struggle for power in BCP. Personal accusations, threats and self were part of the arsenal of the Bulgarian leader. In addition Zhivkov's reading of the political reality aligned him with the victorious wing inside the Warsaw Pact's fraternal parties. Despite the geopolitical reasoning behind the Bulgarian intervention, the activity of Todor Zhivkov corresponded to his uncompromising attitude on the domestic stage. Not surprisingly the Czechoslovak situation dominated the policy of BCP in terms with the social life. Vladimir Migev points to the control over youth, as the Communist Party had noticed the instrumental role of the Czechoslovak

youth during the Prague Spring.³⁵² In this respect an event that took place in the beginning of August became the arena of the conflict between Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia – The IX Youth Festival. Sofia hosted the regular festival of the socialist youth. The routine character of the event was changed due to the worsening of the relations between the Five and Czechoslovakia. The organizers of the event turned their attention towards Czechoslovakia. A special unit was created to monitor the activity of the Czechoslovak participants and to be prepared to tackle any mentioning of the situation in Czechoslovakia. Many of the Czechoslovak delegates were stopped at the border and prevented of entering the country because of their appearance, namely long hair, beard and style of dressing. In addition, the rooms of the Czechoslovak participants had been wired by State Security. On its part, the Czechoslovak students grouped with their Yugoslavian, Romanian and French coevals. They distributed leaflets with slogans such as: “Long Live Dubček“, Dubček – Tito – Ceausescu. The reports of State Security show that many young Bulgarians paid visits to the base of the Czechoslovak participants and therefore they became influenced by the ideas proclaimed by the Czechoslovak youth. The support of the youth was needed by the communist power wielders so they can prove the level of loyalty in the so called public sector. Another social segment that needed to provide support for the policy of BCP was the intellectual elite. In terms with the writers this support came as part of one the most shameful acts in the history of the Bulgarian writers – the treatment of the Czechoslovak writer Petr Pujiman during the First Congress of the Bulgarian Writers.

The First Congress of the Bulgarian Writers

After 1948 the Bulgarian Writers’ Union had been conducting annual meetings which functioned as a

³⁵² Vladimir Migeu, *Prazhkata Prolet 1968 i Bulgaria* (Iztok-Zapad, Sofia, 2005), p. 121.

Congress. In April 1968, the Politburo initiated the convocation of a Congress of the Bulgarian Writers. Scholars like Natalia Hristova claim that the organization of the event was aimed to neutralize the impact of the Fourth Congress of the Czechoslovak Writers.³⁵³ This idea is evidenced by the political arguments used by the leadership of the BCP during the development of the crisis. Therefore, the First Congress of the Bulgarian Writers Union was to be an expression of the propagated unity between the power and the writers.

On April 4, 1968, a special meeting was held in which the writers had to accept the proposition of the Politburo to organize the Congress. However a great number of rank and file members were reluctant to participate in such a staged event. Moreover in the opinion of Migev, the resistance against organizing such an event could be seen as indirect support for the cause of the Czechoslovak writers.³⁵⁴ Voices were raised against the intervention in organizational life. Blaga Dimitrova severely attacked the new leadership of the organization. She complained that democratic practices were constantly infringed upon in the organization. Moreover, she argued that recently the Writers' Union was an organ of discrimination which harassed young writers. In addition, Dimitrova proclaimed the uselessness of the last Congress of Culture – an event highlighted by Zhivkov in front of Dubček. Her speech was met with thunderous applause³⁵⁵ which was reminiscent of the atmosphere of the Fourth Congress of the Czechoslovak writers. However, the outburst of Dimitrova and her colleagues was left without consequences as the majority of the writers voted in favor of the proposition of the Politburo.

The congress took place on 20-24 May, 1968. The staged character was evidenced by the fact that a central role was played by Georgi Dzhagarov. The first point of his address was to underline the role of

³⁵³ Natalia Hristova, *Spezifika na Bulgarskoto Disidentstvo*, p. 83.

³⁵⁴ Vladimir Migev, *Prajkata prolet*, p. 185.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

Todor Zhivkov in the life of the writers. Also, he highlighted the importance of April 1956 for the success of the literature of the last decade. Dzhangarov devoted the second part of his speech to criticism of particular tendencies in cultural life. Although he did not mention Czechoslovakia, it became clear that his warnings against the spread of ideological diversion were aimed against the Prague Spring.³⁵⁶ The structure of his arguments – praise of the political system in Bulgaria and criticism of independent attitudes was in line with the condemnation of the Czechoslovak political leadership by Todor Zhivkov.

What triggered the greatest controversy during the meeting was the speech made by the Czechoslovak delegate Petr Pujman. In his statement, the Czechoslovak writer talked in a calm voice about the tasks in front of the Czechoslovak writers. At the beginning of his address he addressed the Bulgarian writers as friends to whom he owed an explanation. He started with an overview of the mistakes made by the previous leadership of the CPCz. He addressed the naïve enthusiasm in Czechoslovakia after 1948 which lacked serious critical thought. Interestingly, during the simultaneous translation the Bulgarian interpreter omitted the word ‘naïve’ but Pujman insisted that the translator should repeat the adjective in front of the audience. Then he continued by revealing the extent of the public criticism to which the writers in Czechoslovakia had been exposed in the 1950s. In addition, Pujman introduced the audience to a long period in which the problems of the present day had remained outside of the focus of the Czechoslovak writers. Here he outlined the gap that had divided words from reality. Consequently he discussed the concept of truth and highlighted another form of division - between those who had the monopoly on truth and those who were only allowed to passively accept that staged truth. The next highlight of his speech was the topic of the elections. He talked about the elections in which the Communist party had always won 99 percent of the votes. Then he talked about the dilemma of the writers – should they close their

³⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 193.

eyes and ears to this or should they start speaking. In his opinion, the writers in Czechoslovakia had made the choice to speak. His final words heralded unavoidable conflict: “If we succeed in our attempt that will be of an immense significance for the whole world and for the workers’ class of the whole world, because the last arguments against socialism, the arguments of lack of freedom, will collapse.”³⁵⁷

The reaction of the audience was doubt. Some of the participants like Damyan Damyanov applauded, while most of the delegates stood still. But an immediate reaction did not follow. Instead, Pujman’s speech was omitted from the official media. The obstruction of the Czechoslovak writer became part of a serious onslaught against Czechoslovakia. Radio Belgrade reported the attitude of the chairman of the Bulgarian Writers’ Union. “Georgi Dzhagarov did not shake hands with Pujman when Pujman at the end of his speech delivered a gift of the Czechoslovak writers to the Bulgarian chairman. The chairman also did not thank him for the speech.”³⁵⁸ In addition, Radio Belgrade quoted Puiman’s remark that there was no counter-revolution and there was no danger to socialism, but only an intention to develop socialist democracy in freedom under people’s control.

A special bulletin of Radio Free Europe included a report on “The First Congress of the Bulgarian Writers Union’ Union.” The Congress ended on May 22, following three days of discussions which were remarkable for their set pattern and their fervent declarations of loyalty to the Party and to the principles of communism.” In addition, the Radio provided some extracts from the presentations of Lyudmil Stoyanov and Georgi Dzhagarov. The former was quoted as saying “the ideological crisis which has recently struck certain socialist countries cannot happen here” and also “it is our duty to emphasize our disagreement with the opinions of individual writers in some fraternal countries which are directed

³⁵⁷ <http://1968bg.com/>.

³⁵⁸ F805, Radio Free Europe.

against the Soviet Union.” The highlight of Dzhagarov’s speech, quoted by RFE, was his criticism of those forces that “assumed the privilege to ‘modernize’ and ‘democratize’ Marxism, thus depriving it of its class content and making a pitiable kind of bourgeois liberalism.” In addition, the radio quoted Jagarov’s warning that “the process of democratization can turn into an antidemocratic offensive and a capitulation to the enemy, unless it is led, organized and directed by the Communist Party.”³⁵⁹

The July Plenum

On July 5, 1968, the politburo of the BCP held a plenum. In the opinion of Vladimir Migev, this was an attempt on behalf of the Bulgarian communists to produce a response to the Prague Spring. On the one hand the members of the Politburo focused on general problems. Some like Angel Solakov claimed that the desire for promotion had killed the idealism amongst some members of the BCP. Also, there were some voices which talked about the need of some sort of decentralization of party life so that the local party organizations can gain more autonomy. On the other hand, the participants argued against the loss of the control inside the Party Apparatus that had allowed some “dangerous elements” to be accepted as members of the Communist Party. A number of critics of Czechoslovakia raised two main arguments – the concept of different roads to socialism is wrong; and the idea of democratic socialism is reminiscent of the old social democratic principles.

The most outspoken critic was Georgi Dzhagarov. He conformed to the officially self-reflexive character of the event by arguing against intrigues used by some party members in their attempts to place their children in elite secondary schools. However, most of Dzhagarov’s speech was devoted to a

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

criticism of some sectors of literary life. Again, the first targets were the literary critics: “I have to share with you, comrades, that almost all the literary critics have demonstrated a complete negligence of the political content in their writing. They do know structuralism, alienation and a large number of the world literature’s modern trends but they cannot share a single word about the principles of Marxist-Leninist aesthetics and have constantly denounced literature’s ideological foundation.”³⁶⁰

In the last part of his speech, Dzhagarov shared some impressions of the time when he had visited Czechoslovakia. Dzhagarov told the meeting that a Czechoslovak writer had reassured him that Czechoslovakia had completed the stage of revolutionary communism and was entering the stage of democratic socialism. Dzhagarov used this as an example of the situation in Czechoslovakia to release a warning: “I think that every member of the Central Committee understands the nature of revolutionary socialism as one is also aware of what is the meaning of democratic socialism. It is unthinkable to deny the contribution of the Communist Party.”

Concluding remarks

The conflict between Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia encapsulated the whole twenty years of Communist development. In this conflict the Bulgarian political leadership and Todor Zhivkov in particular used those political maneuvers that they normally used on the domestic scene. During the crisis Zhivkov masterfully combined his nationalistic argumentation with the demonstration of loyalty towards the Soviet Union.

³⁶⁰ F1B, op. 32, f. 58, p. 7.

Most importantly Zhivkov demonstrated his ability to read the political situation. He used the conflict between the “Five” and Czechoslovakia in two ways – firstly he reassured the Soviet Union of his loyalty, secondly he paraded his own regime and his own political achievements in front of the other socialist leaders. In addition, the situation allowed him to smash all hope that more freedom could be introduced in Bulgaria. This is why the writer Georgi Markov fled the country soon after the Soviet invasion. In contrast, Dubček was not only a victim of the Soviet invasion but like his predecessor Novotný he did not manage to control political and public life. His policy was constantly ruined by the representatives of the Slovak Communist Party. Also, as it became obvious from the reports of the Bulgarian Politburo, reforms in Czechoslovak internal security led to the establishment of another group which opposed the Czechoslovak leader. Lastly Dubček was not in control of the intellectuals and the *2000 Words* Manifesto was an example of this. In addition, despite the constant pressure during the meetings between him and the leaders of the Five, Dubček was guided by his loyalty to the Soviet Union so that he grossly underestimated the danger he was facing.

The First Congress of the Bulgarian Writers harmed the international reputation of Bulgarian writers. Information of the ostracism towards Petr Pujman was disseminated by Radio Belgrade and Radio Free Europe. This meant that the stagnation of the cultural life in Bulgaria became witnessed worldwide. In addition, to the political image of the Bulgarian regime as the most loyal to the Soviet Union, the Bulgarian writers were shown as a group of people under the total control of their leader.

The result of the Invasion and the consequent removal of Dubček seemed as the only possible outcome, after the Czechoslovak leader did not manage to conduct his reforms in the allowed perimeter. For the political leadership this meant that the model emphasized by Zhivkov in front of Dubček was victorious. On the other hand, the Bulgarian Writers’ Union under the leadership of Georgi Dzhagarov

had lost those occasional acts of controversy that appeared during the time of his predecessors Georgi Karaslavov and Dimitar Dimov.

Conclusion

The participation of Bulgaria in the military intervention against the reform movement in Czechoslovakia was the last stage of a policy, conducted by Todor Zhivkov for more than a decade. In many ways the system of foreign relations pursued by him corresponded to his strategy in the domestic context. However, Zhivkov managed to survive two political leaders of Czechoslovakia. This was due to his reactions in a number of conflicts that took place between 1956 and 1968. The gamut of controversies surrounding the political and the cultural life in Bulgaria culminated in the first six months of 1968.

Political Conflicts

In the 1950s, Zhivkov and Novotný were promoted by the Soviet political leadership in order to implement politics of de-Stalinization organized by the Soviet leadership around Khrushchev. Unlike Zhivkov, Novotný's road to power was relatively short in time as he managed to oust Antonín Zápotocký without causing a severe turmoil inside the party ranks of CPCz. At the same time, Zhivkov was involved in a long battle for power against some influential figures inside the BCP. As a result, it took him six years until in 1962 he ousted his last rival – Anton Yugov. As a result, his progress through the Party hierarchy was tightly linked to the process of de-Stalinization. The plenum of the BCP which took place in April 1956 and during which the leadership ousted Vulko Chervenkov was proclaimed as the final stage of de-Stalinization in Bulgaria. From this moment on, every political act in Bulgaria was to be measured on the basis of the April Plenum. Zhivkov and his decision-making became impossible to question. He managed to define the spheres of restraint and masterfully turned himself into a symbol of the post-Stalinist leadership. In contrast, Novotný never managed to find solution to the major problem

facing Czechoslovakia – the unity of the nation. The Constitution of 1960 enhanced the mistrust amongst the Slovaks. Novotný could not create a platform on which he would get the support of the members of the Communist Party. The weaknesses of Novotný, which became obvious in the mid-1960s, contrasted with the ever growing omnipresence of Zhivkov in Bulgaria at the same period. The Bulgarian communist leader installed his protégés in every sphere, while Novotný unsuccessfully tried to remove his new rival – the member of the Slovak communist party – Alexander Dubček. The lack of strategic leadership became obvious in 1967 when in addition to the Slovak problem, the Czechoslovak leader became the target of a generation of reformists like Ota Šik whose ideas for reforms were blocked by the Czechoslovak political leadership. Having miscalculated the support for his rivals, Novotný fell from power in the course of two months.

At the beginning of 1968 Zhivkov was to face a new leader in Czechoslovakia who came in power with the agenda of accomplishing the process of de-Stalinization which had been stopped in its tracks by his predecessor. Soon it became obvious that Dubček's policies differed substantially from the set of norms and conditions, typical of de-Stalinization. In response to this Zhivkov assumed another role. This time he began to defend the permissible perimeter of reforms. Especially, after the launching of the CPCz Action Program in April 1968, the political leadership in Bulgaria came to be convinced that Dubček's policy was inappropriate. The slander used by Zhivkov towards Dubček and his constant demands for radical action against the reformers in Czechoslovakia represented his style of confrontation used in his domestic battle for power in the 1950s. In addition, the difference between the two leaders was that Zhivkov had a realistic approach which was proved to be much more suitable than Dubček's trust in the Soviet support. Not surprisingly Zhivkov remained in power until 1989 while Dubček's reign did not last more than a year. The political credo of Zhivkov based on the balance between conformism and conflict

had prevailed over two political leaders who underestimated the importance of the political equilibrium. In the following period of Normalization the political life in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia restored the similarity that existed between the two regimes back in the late 1940s and the early 1950s.

The Writers and the Conflicts

On their part, the writers in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia also demonstrated a number of differences in their attitude towards the political reality. Even in the first stage of the communist takeover between 1944 and 1948, the writers in Bulgaria were largely assimilated by the regime. Those who remained in opposition like the poet Trifon Kunev were involved in the political aspect of the struggle. In contrast to this, the different groups of Czechoslovak writers – from rural poets to religious authors were involved in a debate about the character of the new system. The repression after 1948 engulfed the writers in both countries. During the case of *Tobacco* the intervention of Vulko Chervenkov demonstrated the strategy of open intervention by politicians in literature. In contrast, during the Stalinist period the political leaders in Czechoslovakia handed the control over cultural life to the ideological department of the Communist Party and gave the Czechoslovak Writers' Union much more autonomy. The decision brought dubious results. Not surprisingly, in the period when the writers in Bulgaria were overwhelmed by Zhivkov's anti-cultist rhetoric, the rank and file members of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union were active participants in the first major onslaught against the regime. The attitude of the writers in Czechoslovakia during the Second Congress is related both to the past and to the future of the socialist system. They spoke about the need to restore the traditional role of the writer as it existed before the War. In addition, the focus on the role of truth was also part of a traditional area of thinking for the Czechoslovak intellectuals.

The next stage in which the differences between the writers in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia came into sharper focus was the Fourth Congress of the Czechoslovak Writers. A controversy was generated by a group of writers who corresponded to the profile of the April 1956 Generation in Bulgaria. In this sense the provocation of their more orthodox colleagues was obvious. The scope of their speeches was wider than those demonstrated in 1956. They discussed the historical position of Czechoslovakia as part of the European cultural sphere but were also influenced by the assessment of the political conditions. The idea of a decay reverberated in the speech of Vaculík. The third major example which underlined the division between the writers in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia was evidenced by the visit of Petr Puijman to the First Congress of Bulgarian Writers in May 1968. The Bulgarian event was staged to represent the unity between of the party and the Writers. The Congress was to underline the power of Georgi Dzhagarov – a writer who was known in the 1950s as an unorthodox writer and who a decade later had converted himself into a loyal servant of the regime. In this context the speech of Petr Pujman – a devoted communist and the son of an orthodox communist writer like Marie Pujmanová - came as a revelation to the unorthodox Bulgarian writers. However, the negation of the Czechoslovak writer was an evidence of the stagnation in the cultural life in Bulgarian. Moreover, the whole situation surrounding the events of 1956, 1967 and 1968 shed a light on the inability of the writers in Bulgaria to articulate a powerful politic. In addition, the relations between political leadership and writers can be analyzed outside of the narrow framework of the communist period. For example, the conformism of the prewar writers was firstly used in the early 1950s by Vulko Chervenkov to reduce the amount of coercion and violence and then a decade later was converted by Todor Zhivkov into an instrument that can guarantee total control of the regime over social life in the post-Stalinist period. In contrast, the number of controversies and the variety of opinions that existed in the Czechoslovak cultural life during the period of the First Republic reappeared numerous times in the socialist period, as for example during the battle of ideas that took place in the

period 1944-1948 and also during the Second and the Fourth Congress of the Czechoslovak Writers. Secondly, in Bulgaria the unity between power and people in the prewar period was formed on the basis of nationalist feelings. In difference, the political system in Czechoslovakia in the 1920s was based on Masaryk's democratic ideals. Not surprisingly in 1968, Zhivkov represented himself as nationalist whose anger was pointed against Yugoslavia and Romania, while the Dubček dwelled over the possibility of introducing democratic elements in the socialist model of power. All in all, in the time of the conflict Zhivkov remained close to the tradition of following well elaborated political goals while his Czechoslovak counterpart was unable to ask for solutions that may answer not only to his visions but also to the demands of the political context of the Socialist bloc in the late 1960s. In the end it was the attempt of bridging the past and present for a modern version of the socialist system that separated the Czechoslovak leaders from the leading strategy of protection of the political system that dominated Bulgaria.al message.

On the one hand, the choice of the two literary works – *Tobacco* and *Men*, aims to provide my work with the possibility of depiction of the political context in the 1940s and in the 1960s. On the other, these novels represent an opportunity to support the evidences about the decision making of Zhivkov and the social role of the post-war generation of writers in the 1960s. In terms with the depiction of the political reality the two literary works did deal with common problems. The conflict with and within the capitalist class assumed a central position in the novel *Tobacco*, while in Markov's novel *Men*, the focus was on the inability of the individual to fit into present-day reality. In the case of Dimov, he attempted to provide an understanding of the mentality of the upper classes and the guerilla movement in Bulgaria and to show them as vivid characters, thereby defying the orthodoxy demanded by the communists. Therefore, he revealed the conflict between the past and the present in the 1930s and 1940s as a conflict between

dynamic and vibrant past as against a communist present marked by stillness and orthodoxy. On his part, Markov demonstrated the stagnant atmosphere of the early 1960s in Bulgaria which contrasted to the colorful and positive depiction of the developed socialism, typical for many artistic works of that time.

Dimov's novel *Tobacco* provided an understanding about the reasoning behind Todor Zhivkov's decision making. By depicting the obedience of the political leadership of the guerilla movement towards the Soviet communist leadership during WW2, Dimov demonstrates the atmosphere surrounding the political upbringing of the future communist elite. As a young communist militant Zhivkov did learn this lesson and when in 1956 he took the control over the Bulgarian Communist Party, he converted the unquestionable loyalty towards the Soviet Union into an instrument for strengthening his own political power. In addition, the fear of making decisions without Soviet approval, noticeable in Dimov's depiction of the meetings of the underground movement, could trace the roots of Todor Zhivkov's suspicion against powerful and independent communist leaders like Dubček, Tito and Ceausescu.

In the novel *Men*, Markov's protagonists were similar to those talented writers who, similarly to Georgi Dzhagarov, instead of challenging the political system subjugated themselves to the power wielders. Also the atmosphere and the relations between the characters in *Men* were similar to the bleak atmosphere inside the Bulgarian Writers' Union. In addition, some declarations made by the Czechoslovak reformers were reminiscent to the personal illusions of the three main characters in Markov's novel: individual opportunities (Mladen), reforms in the model of recruitment of cadres (Ivan) and individual freedom (Sasho). Not surprisingly the crushing of those ideals was the reason for Markov's own departure in 1969. I claim that Markov's novel demonstrated the readiness amongst many young people to abandon their beliefs and came to serve the collective ideal. Instead of attempting to change the functioning of the socialist system, the majority of them preferred to take advantage from the possibility of social mobility

provided by the communist state. Therefore, Markov's novel supplemented the large number of primary sources that I have used to illustrate the subjugation of many talented Bulgarian writers and their unwillingness to confront the power wielders.

All in all, both Dimov and Markov underlined the predestination of their characters and the uselessness of a direct confrontation with the political reality. This pattern was witnessed in both generations – amongst the anti-Stalinists who were freed after 1956 and who did not engage with politics and in the generation of Georgi Markov whose coevals remained somewhere in the sphere of the licensed criticism and were subjugated by the political regime.

On the basis of the number of evidences provided by my analysis I conclude that the political system orchestrated by Todor Zhivkov and silently supported by the conformism of the Bulgarian writers responded to the needs of the Soviet control. In difference the attempts of the Czechoslovak writers to combine political ideals from the past in order to create the so called socialism with human face was doomed because it did not fit to the political reality in Eastern Europe. In addition, in Bulgaria the relations with the intellectuals were well calculated in order to keep the conflicts under the surface. Zhivkov took his pragmatic approach to the extreme and during the Prague Spring proved himself as the most cynical political leader in Eastern Europe. The writers in Bulgaria were unable to break the pattern and challenge the system while the writers in Czechoslovakia were concerned both for their role in the nation and for their position as European intellectuals. In contrast to that, the writers in Bulgaria proclaimed their national character but did not analyze the nation's problems and remained outside of the revolt of the intellectuals that took place in the 1960s. As a result a whole generation of Bulgarian writers never managed to restore its public credibility. In difference, many of the ideas that were behind the Prague Spring were revived with the appearance of Charter 77.

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