

# СОЦИАЛИСТИЧЕСКА БЪЛГАРИЯ В БРИТАНСКИТЕ ДИПЛОМАТИЧЕСКИ ДОКУМЕНТИ (1953-1979 г.)

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## SOCIALIST BULGARIA IN BRITISH DIPLOMATIC PAPERS, 1953-1979

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**Abstract** *Given the long-standing opinion that the Cold War was basically a political and ideological confrontation between the Soviet Union and the United States, it might be expected that Britain would have downgraded its interest in Bulgaria or the Balkans, in general. Yet, documentary evidence suggests the contrary: the Foreign Office constantly and closely observed and analyzed the political, economic, cultural, social and historical specificities of Bulgaria. London was particularly interested in its relations with the Soviet Union, the Kremlin's influence in the country and the endless Bulgarian problems with its neighbors.*

**Key words** *Modern History, Bulgaria, Great Britain, Cold War History, Eastern Europe*

‘...all human relationships ... are shaped by all five senses;  
how we understand others, even more how we feel about them,  
emotionally, and thus how we act toward them, have a good deal to do  
with how we apprehend them through every sense’

Andrew J. Rotter  
*Empires of the Senses*

### Introduction

This paper examines the penetration of political, social, cultural, historical and ethnic consciousness in the Foreign Office's reports, analysis and policy towards Bulgaria. First two sections deal with British observations, comments and conclusions as regards Bulgarian national specifics, internal development and relations with the Soviet Union. The last paragraph connects the case of British attitude to Bulgaria with the global Foreign Office strategy towards the Soviet bloc. In general, the paper is focussed on two principal research questions: how did British diplomacy evaluate the overall development of Bulgaria and how the Foreign Office reflected the knowledge regarding the country in the elaboration of its policy. To answer these questions, I examined the records of British diplomatic representatives in Sofia along with various analyses in London and final documents concerning the Foreign Office's policy towards Eastern Europe. Certain private papers and historical research enriched the sources of the present study.

In the first two parts of this paper I applied an approach typically used in research regarding mass culture. Two main reasons motivated me. First, we have literature on how British and western writers, travelers or journalists depicted the

Eastern parts of Europe and how their writings influenced the public perception of the region. (Wolff 1994; Todorova 1999; Goldsworthy 1998; Hammond 2007) Few scholars, however, undertook endeavors to see how British diplomacy viewed Bulgaria and Eastern Europe during the Cold War and, particularly, how this knowledge was used later. Second, long before we read, hear, see or feel in some other way the products of international diplomacy, strategic thinking and decision-making, identity and national images had a substantial presence in diplomatic documents. This process is known as mental mapping. It includes the establishment of regional units (Eastern Europe, Western Europe, the Balkans); characterisation of the regions according to their development (traditional, modern, backward); describing the physics, mentality and culture of the local population; underlying the significance of the region (Peteri 2010; Fält 2002: 7-11; Said 1979: 49-72). Present research aims at connecting together cultural, social and diplomatic issues. Therefore, the last part focuses on diplomatic history (Trachtenberg 2006). It examines evidence regarding the place of Bulgaria in British policy towards the communist world and how Bulgarian national specifics, politics and developments influenced the Foreign Office's approach.

### **The Country – National Image**

About the end of 1958 Anthony Lambert took his position as British minister in Sofia. Six weeks later he outlined his first impressions in a report to the Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd. Depressing – might be the word that characterizing his text in a best way. He was aware of the short time for any profound conclusion but 'certain aspects of life' struck him. Lambert emphasised that this country, which constituted an excellent example for the Soviet satellite, was connected with Russia 'by ties of blood, history and language'. The British representative underlined that 'formidable economic and political apparatus' maintained these links but beyond them there was neither real foreign policy nor normal contacts with the world. The report gloomily depicted the 'melancholic' life of Bulgarian intellectuals, the 'bleak' life of the workers and the fear in all social circles by the 'dead hand of Moscow' (UKNA FO: 371/142915, Lambert to Lloyd, 2 January 1959). Lambert's report resembles the imaginary journey of a Westerner in the eastern part of the continent that Philip Longworth described in an academic book several decades later (Longworth 1992: 3-4).<sup>1</sup>

The socialist rule displayed general dissimilarities between the East and West. They were reflected on miscellaneous images that populated diplomatic papers. In them Bulgaria naturally belonged to an undemocratic and a backward world in British views. A world closely linked to Russia, the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. In 1940 Julian Amery was in a special mission in the Balkans. During the Second World War he drew the borders of division on the same ethnic, religious, cultural and political basis that could be found later in various British documents. Bulgaria was close to Yugoslavia in terms of its 'history, language, race, religion,

<sup>1</sup> Longworth's traveler suffered a cultural shock – grey 'endless rows of apartment blocs', 'very few advertisement hoardings', 'smells are more pungent', 'people are worse-dressed', 'few private cars', 'many more people in military uniforms', etc.

social and political structure'. In this country 'the crown is the dominant factor' which ruled through the army and the police, while 'the government is even more a tool of the Crown that in Yugoslavia' (Churchill AMEJ: 1/1/20, A Political Survey of Yugoslavia, 20 August 1940. Appendix, Bulgaria). British examination of the Soviet bloc often placed significant attention to history, relations with Russia/the Soviet Union, economic capacity and liberalisation. The historical experience badly influenced Bulgarian prestige in Britain. Bulgarians had ethnic links with Slav countries and in spite of their military potential they had lost all wars in which participated (UKNA BC: 18/3, Notes on Bulgaria, 24 January 1946). As Sir Roger Carrick, a British diplomat in Bulgaria, put it in short – in their history Bulgarians 'had not made a successful strategic decision' (Carrick: 2).

Quoted observations could be expanded further with certain notes regarding the Communist political elite. It was obvious that after 1953 leading personalities remained in the sphere of Moscow. In British diplomatic papers the highest party echelons seemed as an emanation of Soviet control in Bulgaria. They were actually educated in the Soviet Union, such as Valko Chervenkov, or received support, like Todor Zhivkov, for their political survival. Moreover, their manners resembled the behaviour of their Soviet patrons. For instance, the Bulgarian Stalin – Chervenkov was described as 'ruthless and energetic man', a 'keen doctrinaire' who represented an example of a 'staunch Stalinist' (UKNA FO: 371/122291, Enclosure to Chancery letter No. 1081/31 of October 25, 1956, to Northern Department). His successor as Prime Minister, Anton Yugov, was seen by the British Minister Richard Speaight as 'colourless but zealous follower of the party line' (UKNA FO: 371/128604, Speaight to Lloyd, 17 January 1957), while Todor Zhivkov, the dominant figure since 1962, resembled Nikita Khrushchev in the view of the British Ambassador Edwin Bolland. He noted that the Bulgarian leader seemed 'blustering and demagogic' in his unprogrammed speeches and communication with ordinary people. At the same time Zhivkov showed unpardonable attitude to his subordinates and contempt to music and performers who he disliked (UKNA FCO: 28/2489, Bolland to Bullard, 5 June 1974).<sup>2</sup>

Along with the traditional image as pro-Russian and later as firmly pro-Soviet country the Foreign Office also characterised Bulgaria as colourless and slowly modernised satellite of the Kremlin. British minister in Sofia G. Furlonge made an interesting comparison between Bulgarian roads and the situation in the country as a whole in his despatch to S. Lloyd on 31 May 1956:

The commonest sight on Bulgarian roads is the ox-cart, which can well serve as a symbol of the country itself. There seems every reason to suppose that the vehicle will continue to plod along the same road and that no outcome of the present struggle for the driving-seat will appreciably modify either its direction or its pace; while the possibility of the animals getting a leg over the traces must continue to be regarded as remote (UKNA FO: 371/122294, Furlonge to Lloyd, 31 May 1956).

<sup>2</sup> Britons put the accent on Khrushchev physical appearance, culture, manners and relations with his colleagues. For the impression of Khrushchev's behavior in Britain (Priestland 2009: 326; Churchill BARKER: The Papers of Sir William Barker 5, Bulganin and Khrushchev, 28 April 1956).

Even in the mid 1960s Sofia was a grim capital in the memories of Roger Carrick. He recollected the Bulgarian capital as 'a pretty miserable, pretty awful place. In comparison the near by Belgrade 'looked like Paris'. When local authorities showed desire to improve their international image and elevate Anglo-Bulgarian relations they did it not so much with specific actions but with emphasis on official ceremonies. One of them took place in 1964 when the British legation became embassy. To underline the importance of the case, the Bulgarians insisted on credential ceremony where the Ambassador William Harpham 'should wear diplomatic uniform – frills, furbelows, ostrich feathers and gold braid' in spite of severe winter cold. Here R. Carrick made another allusion of close Soviet-Bulgarian relations – 'in January ... the weather in Bulgaria is indistinguishable from that in Siberia' (Carrick 2004).<sup>3</sup>

The obedience to the Soviets, however, did not deprive Bulgarian authorities from national pride. Authorities confidently showed their achievement in front of western diplomats during the Tour for the Diplomatic Corps in 1974 – a tour designed to display economic, social and cultural modernisation of Bulgaria. Ambassador Edwin Bolland thought that the aim was not only to impress the diplomats but also to impress local population through attracting international attention on the progress of Bulgaria under the rule of the Communist Party (UKNA FCO: 28/2489, Bolland to Bullard, 5 June 1974). Bolland pointed out in a dispatch to the Secretary of State, dated 2 September 1975, the flourishing of the so called 'socialist patriotism'. This patriotism underlined Bulgarian national identity but indisputably subordinated it to communist development. Communist leaders considered themselves successors of a glorious past, which the party enriched. Therefore, they wanted international recognition of their contribution to the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, of Bulgaria's role in the Balkans, as well as to be treated as equal by the West (UKNA FCO: 28/2698, Her Majesty's Ambassador at Sofia to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, 2 September 1975).

### **The Regime – Bulgaria's Internal Affairs**

The post-Stalinist period in Bulgaria began as a scene from Dimitar Dimov's novel *Tyutyun* [Tobacco] – a strike of tobacco workers in Plovdiv. However, the role of the communists in the fiction and in the reality of May 1953 was completely deferent. While in the novel communists led the strike (Dimov 1979: 423-445), in Plovdiv they stood against the workers. Authorities restored the order by the interference of People's Militia and, as the Chancery of Legation informed the Foreign Office, workers who had shown vigorous dissatisfaction – disappeared (UKNA FO: 371/106223, Chancery to Northern Department, 11 June 1953). The quoted episode deserves attention because it embodied one of the main features of the regime in Foreign Office's views – there were not real prospects for effective

<sup>3</sup> Obviously, Harpham's sacrifice was justified because Bulgarians valued the official ceremonies and mutual exchange of visits on high political level. Even in 1959 Lambert had recommended the flattery of local pride, along with practical trade and cultural exchange, as an appropriate approach in relations with the Bulgarians (UKNA FO: 371/142915, Lambert to Lloyd, 2 January 1959).

resistance against the Communist Party. The regime firmly controlled the society and British diplomacy outlined Bulgaria as illiberal in its domestic politics but quiet in terms of few protests that shook the ruling party. In the 1950s the regime was conservative and determined to suffocate all attempts for freedom that might be growing under Polish or Hungarian example. The Bulgarian 1960s and 1970s seemed uneventful in British views – there were not dramatic developments and perspectives for radical changes.

This peaceful environment provoked a question – what was worthwhile in Bulgaria for the Foreign Office? British diplomacy tried to understand how communists think, how they developed their policy, how they behaved in the international scene and were there any possibilities for reforms. In short, the Foreign Office examined all visible aspects of communist policy. In spite of limited possibilities for political influence Edwin Bolland saw opportunities his mission in Sofia to be fruitful. He pointed out that ‘we can examine the Bulgarian communist “mind”, i.e. the leadership’s way of thinking and feeling’ (UKNA FCO: 28/2698, Her Majesty’s Ambassador at Sofia to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, 2 September 1975). In this way British experience in Bulgaria could enrich the Foreign Office’s knowledge regarding communism.

Political changes in the country happened much slower in comparison to other Soviet satellites. Internal stability distinguished Bulgaria from the rest of Eastern Europe. Yugoslavia was the model for socialist state adopted by the Foreign Office because of its independence from Moscow. At the same time Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland inaugurated various reforms, while Romania restored its independent foreign policy and found a ‘Romanian road to socialism’ (Fischer-Galati 1994: 37). Simultaneously, the Kremlin installed and removed the Bulgarian leaders without significant change in Sofia’s policy. Valko Chervenkov was a good example how Moscow intervened in Bulgarian internal affairs according to its immediate foreign political needs. Chervenkov ruled Bulgaria without substantial problems from 1950 to 1953 and after Stalin’s death kept his position in the power. British minister in Sofia considered this stability as recognition of his subordinated policy to the Soviets. On the other hand, it could be an indication that there were not other politicians capable to replace him (UKNA FO: 371/111472, Carvell to Eden, 13 January 1954). Chervenkov, however, became inconvenient in the mid 1950’s when the improvement in the Soviet-Yugoslav relations began. Then the Kremlin continued to play crucial role for the selection of Bulgarian leaders – for instance, the change of Chervenkov with Zhivkov as a party leader in 1954 and with Yugov as Prime Minister in 1956. Later, in 1962, the removal of Anton Yugov and the establishment of Zhivkov’s complete power followed the same pattern of Soviet interference in Bulgaria (Crampton 2005: 191-193).

In 1956 the Foreign Office showed no inclination to percept the progress of T. Zhivkov in the party hierarchy as a deep change. The report of the legation showed that British opinion gravitated around the suitability of Bulgarian alterations in the light of improving Soviet-Yugoslav relations. In a report about the leading personalities in Bulgaria for 1956 the legation outlined the new Prime

Minister Anton Yugov as 'never much of Stalinist, and slightly more acceptable to the Yugoslavs'. At the same time, Todor Zhivkov, the first secretary of the party, was characterized as influential and energetic, a possible successor of Yugov (UKNA FO: 371/122291, Enclosure to Chancery letter No. 1081/31 of October 25, 1956, to Northern Department).

Domestic development offered no prospects for vital opposition or significant turmoil that might destabilised the regime. As many British reports indicated there were not significant people uprisings in comparison with the extreme examples of GDR, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland. British Minister in Sofia Furlonge observed that Bulgarian leaders were not zeal reformists. Even after the denunciation of Stalinism in 1956 the regime acted conservatively and suppressed all open demonstration of discontent that might threaten its stability (UKNA FO: 371/122294, Furlonge to Lloyd, 31 May 1956). Some other reports, however, indicated that there was silent opposition to the regime. British legation considered the peasant population as a source of opposition. In January 1955 Furlong reported to the Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden that authorities attempted to attract those agrarians who previously had supported Nikola Petkov, the leader of opposition Agrarian Union in 1945-1947. He described the campaign as 'vigorous', conducted through newspapers, public recantations and amnesty as well as denigration of agrarian leaders such as Petkov and Dr G. M. Dimitrov (UKNA FO: 371/116305, Furlonge to Eden, 15 January 1955). As Robert Conquest commented, public recantations and defections were strikes on the agrarian morale inflicted by communists. But he doubted their success: 'that morale, such as it is, must be prepared for the long haul and many setbacks, and has proved itself quite capable of surviving long periods of opposition before' (UKNA FO: 371/116305, G. R. A. Conquest Minute, 11 February 1955).<sup>4</sup>

In the 1960s Bulgaria rarely produced remarkable news but certain topic could be found in diplomatic correspondence between Sofia and London regularly – the party bureaucracy, corruption, problems with youth, discontent among the intelligentsia. The Foreign Office considered that Bulgaria was not like other satellites – it was the 'most backward and obscurantist' country in Eastern Europe and implemented only modest acts of democratisation (UKNA FO: 1110/1109, Mayson to Mackintosh, 28 February 1958; P. M. Foster Minute, 14 October 1958; UKNA FO: 371/165967, Mason to Lincoln, 8 February 1965; P. W. Summerscale Minute, 5 February 1962). In the Foreign Office P. W. Summerscale described Zhivkov and Yugov as 'reluctant de-Stalinisers' whose policy utterly depended on Moscow. In spite of his Stalinist background Zhivkov had a big advantage that pushed him in front of his colleagues – he was 'capable of adaptation' (UKNA FO: 371/165969, P. W. Summerscale Minute, 27 July 1962). Zhivkov stayed firmly in control of an 'orthodox' and 'rigid' regime, as Ambassador William Harpham commented in 1964 and 1965 but he was willing to expand Bulgarian contacts

<sup>4</sup> Conquest rightly stressed that Bulgarian agrarians had 'a rather complicated history' but in general after 1944 they were the main adversary of the Communist Party. In the post war period they were 'by far and away the most popular party in the country and clearly proved their right to be taken as the main democratic force in Bulgaria' (UKNA FO: 371/116305, G. R. A. Conquest Minute, 11 February 1955).

with the West (UKNA FO: 371/177505, Harpham to Butler, 24 March 1964; FO 371/182583, Harpham to Walker, 18 January 1965).

In the late 1960s and early 1970s the country was living in one of the quietest period in its history. Bulgarian loyalty to the Soviet Union and socialism remained unshaken. The soviet influence had penetrated in all important political economic and ideological life in Bulgaria (UKNA FCO: 28/2489, Her Majesty's Ambassador at Sofia to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, 24 August 1973). Soviet-Bulgarian links were natural as the Ambassador Bolland described them – 'the eternal friendship' between both countries was based on 'geography, history, race, language, revolutionary traditions and ideology'. In short, 'all contribute to a close alliance'. The Ambassador grounded his opinion on the observation of words and deeds of Bulgarian leaders that showed, he believed, 'fairly clearly purposes and attitudes of mind'. Bolland saw Bulgaria as a country firmly ruled by 'a handful of man' whose thinking presented a mixture of communism and Bulgarian nationalism. Communism required subordination to the Soviet Union, devotion to ideology and governance according to the Soviet pattern. Bolland drew two conclusions from this state of Bulgarian affairs. First, close Soviet-Bulgarian relations rested on historical and cultural proximity as well as on current economic and political links. Second, any changes in Bulgaria depended on alterations in the Kremlin's policy – 'without a major upset at the Centre the wider forces here lack the power to modify the main lines' (UKNA FCO: 28/2698, Her Majesty's Ambassador at Sofia to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, 2 September 1975).

### **The Diplomacy – Bulgaria in the East European Policy of Great Britain**

The speech of H. A. F. Hohler, the Head of Northern Department, in the Imperial Defence College in May 1954 was an appropriate example about the multiple nature of the Foreign Office's analysis. He connected together history, culture and contemporary policy in order to define the British attitude towards Eastern Europe. Hohler stressed that the countries in the region were 'nominally independent' but 'in practice dominated by the Soviet Union' and their 'governments are dependent on the Red Army to maintain them in power'. Figuratively speaking, he outlined the British policy as 'keeping the pot simmering, but without letting it boil over', i.e. Britain should avoid war with the Soviets but could maintain through psychological warfare the hope that communist regimes were not eternal and had numerous weaknesses (UKNA FO: 472/6, Problems of the Satellites. Text of a Lecture given to the Imperial Defence College on May 18, 1954, by Mr. H. A. F. Hohler, Head of Northern Department, the Foreign Office).

Possibilities for 'pot simmering' varied greatly. Bulgaria was usually seen as small and poor but with important geographical position in the Balkans (Churchill AMEJ: 1/1/22, Memorandum on DH Policy in Bulgaria, 18 September 1940). Hohler described it as an Orthodox state that 'have always been on good terms with the Russians', but Bulgarians 'have a well-deserved reputation as tough fighters'. Czechoslovakia had the best reputation in the Foreign Office because it

was 'the most westerly of the satellites in all the senses of the word'. This country had 'well-balanced economy and highly specialised industries'. Moreover, people there suffered more heavily from communist rule in comparison to other East European states in terms of their 'strong tradition of administrative efficiency and cultured, bourgeois living'. Poland had high priority among the satellites because of its traditional rivalry with Russia and Polish industrial power (UKNA FO: 472/6, Problems of the Satellites. Text of a Lecture given to the Imperial Defence College on May 18, 1954, by Mr. H. A. F. Hohler, Head of Northern Department, the Foreign Office). Moreover, Poland had its place in the Soviet bloc but its social climate in the mid 1950s was different from the overall situation in Eastern Europe.<sup>5</sup>

After March 1953 Churchill's desire for negotiations with the Soviets emerged again. His intentions for global détente were accelerated by the Soviet moves for reduction of tension in Korea and Germany but British diplomacy felt uncertainty regarding the plans of the Soviets. A paper dated 9 April 1953 indicated the following: 'So little is known of the character and view of Malenkov and Beria that it would be wise to keep open mind in interpreting Soviet moves since Stalin's death' (Greenwood 2000: 128; UKNA FO: 418/94, Foreign Office, 9 April 1953). Foreign Office's conclusion was that the Soviet conciliatory moves represented just a new tactical approach, without any change in the Soviet foreign political objectives – namely, disruption of the NATO, in the short term, and the establishment of a world communist system under Soviet control, in the long term.<sup>6</sup>

The East European policy of Foreign Office was a function of British policy towards the Soviet Union that excluded any major risk of war but emphasised the vital role of psychological warfare and bilateral negotiations (Paraskevov 2011: 210-212; Dudoi 2010: 96; Tebinka 2012: 808-809). Numerous diplomatic reports from East European capitals claimed that the Soviet Union firmly controlled the satellite states. Therefore, in 1953 the Foreign Office considered that 'as long as the Soviet Union's own strength remains unimpaired, we see no prospect of a successful uprising in any country. Nor do we see any prospect of another "Titoist"'. For the emergence of a new "Tito" it was essential East European countries to achieve some level of emancipation from Moscow along with development of military and economic potential. It also was important a new reformist leader to enjoy popular support for his policy. London concluded, however, that 'none of the satellites could meet these requirements'. For this reason British diplomacy saw no immediate prospects for liberation. The most important circumstance for liberation laid in the future developments of the Soviet Union – 'the satellites are held down by Soviet power; they cannot be liberated until Soviet power

<sup>5</sup> A British member of parliament who visited Poland in 1956 and had contacts with local senior civil servants noted that 'they conformed to the pattern of Central European intellectuals, but spoke very freely both to him and in front of each other. The atmosphere was not of the Iron Curtain; there seemed little fear of reprisals and there were few signs of police activity' (CPA CRD: 2/34/2, Conservative Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee, 23 January 1957).

<sup>6</sup> The Foreign Office wanted concrete evidence about the frankness of the new Soviet policy. British observers were basically interested in 'whether there is going to be a real change in the Soviet attitude to the Western world, or whether they merely indicate a temporary tactical retreat' (UKNA FO: 418/94, Foreign Office, 9 April 1953; Annex C – Recent Indication of Soviet Foreign Policy).

itself is decisively weakened' (UKNA FO: 371/106082, Policy towards the Soviet Satellites in Eastern Europe, Brief for the Secretary of State's conversations with Mr. Dulles and Mr. Stassen). A minute by Miss Brown from 5 June 1956 indicated the omnipresent Soviet supremacy: she wrote that the Soviet control could be exercised 'without the actual presence of the Red Army' but in fact through economic and administrative measures (Békés, Byrne and Rainer 2002: Document no. 10: British Foreign Office Minutes concerning Developments in Eastern Europe, June 5, 1956).

Bulgarian experience offered other valuable examples how Moscow exercised its power. Local leadership was, in R. Speaight's opinion, a 'Moscow-run clique' that 'faithfully reflected developments in the Soviet Union' (UKNA FO: 371/128604, Speaight to Lloyd, 17 January 1957). This meant that the Kremlin relied not only on rude power to attract the satellite states. Much more effective and long lasting were mutual economic links and personal loyalty of Bulgarian communist leaders to the Soviet Union.

Having in mind the analysis of the overwhelming communist domination upon East European societies, London defined the liberation as a long-term policy. On the other hand, the short-term policy dictated the maintenance of normal relations with East European countries. In fact, neither Britain nor the United States had intention to challenge firmly the Soviet Union supremacy in the region. Western aim was to liberate the satellites as a definition of Anglo-American policy towards Eastern Europe in 1959 showed. The Western states, however, wanted to 'foster an evolutionary development in this direction but the support for 'national communism ... should be discreet'. It was clearly stated that Anglo-American policy 'excludes the use of armed force ... and do not encourage the use of force, sabotage, rioting or guerrilla operations'. Prospects for any change in Bulgaria were appreciated as 'poor' but the Foreign Office should use the existing opportunities for the incensement of bilateral contacts. In 1959 British diplomacy underlined that its attitude towards the countries from the Moscow orbit was 'wholly subordinated to, and is indeed part of, our concern with the future of the USSR'. For the realisation of its aim, the Foreign Office sought to 'use Soviet weaknesses in Eastern Europe in such a way as to promote a Russian desire to call off the cold war: in effect, a desire to achieve such a relationship with the West will make it unnecessary for them to maintain their domination over Eastern Europe'. British aims towards the Soviet Union were outlined in three levels. First, the containment of the Soviet Union; second, prevention of the Soviet threat through evolution of the Kremlin's politics; third, to 'reach a peaceable *modus vivendi* with the Soviet Union' (UKNA FO: 371/142642, United Kingdom Policy towards the East European Satellites, 27 April 1959)

During the Cold War Britain regarded Eastern Europe as a vital part of the Soviet Union's sphere of interests and tried to avoid any actions which the Soviets might perceive as a rude Western interference in the Communist bloc's internal affairs. The shift in American policy towards the USSR during the mandate of the president John F. Kennedy led to the recognition of Soviet position in Eastern

Europe in exchange of the Kremlin's acceptance of status quo in Central Europe (Trachtenberg 2012: 154). The Foreign Office appreciated that the Communist Parties had firmly established their power in the region and a more vigorous policy would provoke a negative Soviet reaction. In this situation British diplomacy had an ambition 'to keep some windows open to the West' (UKNA FCO: 28/667, C. S. R. Giffard Minute, 14 January 1969). That meant to provide information about Britain and other West European countries, to establish and maintain contacts with intellectuals. The strategy also included the development of trade and cultural exchange and in some cases, if the internal conditions in the East European countries were appropriate, exchange of ministerial visits. The overall policy had to lead to more independent international policy of the satellites and liberalization in their domestic life.

Therefore, the Prague Spring in 1968 received a very high estimation by the Foreign Office while the policy of Bulgarian dictator Todor Zhivkov was regarded as an example for retrograde behavior because of Bulgarian narrow connections with the Soviet Union. Furthermore, Zhivkov's full control over the power did not allow the development of any liberal movement and real discussions for reforms. British diplomacy considered the possibility an opposition or powerful protest movement to emerge in Bulgaria as unlikely. Meanwhile Britain and the West did not support the Prague Spring with some more determined measures. The Soviet tanks on the streets of the Czechoslovakian capital provoked in London criticism but acceptance since the Soviet invasion and an eventual firmer western response would have destroyed the détente. After the suppression of the Prague Spring the British diplomacy adopted a policy of 'practical realism' in its relations with Eastern Europe – minimum political contacts and disapproval of East European's policy but continuation of trade and cultural exchange when Britain had interest. In the Foreign Office the image of Bulgaria was as a country that suppressed any tendency toward free discussions and political reforms. British diplomacy saw hopes for the future because some parts of the youth preserved their 'independence of mind' (UKNA CAB: 148/37/19, Relations with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 17 June 1968; UKNA FCO: 28/667, Crawley to Stewart, 9 January 1969; UKNA FCO: 28/573, Anglo-German Talks on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. London, 24-25 October 1968; UKNA FCO: 28/893, Students Unrest in Eastern Europe, October 1969).

For the Bulgarian government the practical result of its participation in the invasion in Czechoslovakia and the British disapproval of this act was the postponement of the first visit of British foreign secretary in the country. In spite of that negotiations for a new trade agreement continued and it was signed in 1970.<sup>7</sup> Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart canceled his visit to Hungary and Bulgaria 'whose troops had taken part in the invasion' but went to Bucharest that condemned the aggression. Actually, on 22 August the Foreign and Commonwealth

<sup>7</sup> Zlatko Zlatev examined some aspects of trade contacts between Bulgaria and Britain in the 1970s. (Zlatev 1987: 168-170).

Office left Romanians to decide if the moment seemed appropriate for Steward's visit. Nicolae Ceausescu 'quickly decided that he would wish the visit to go ahead as planned'. The British Ambassador John Chadwick used the case to comment that 'the Rumanians take pride in their policy of making up their own minds in international affairs' (UKNA FCO: 28/42, Chadwick to Steward, 17 October 1968; UKNA FCO: 28/40, Foreign and Commonwealth Office to Bucharest, 22 August 1968; Bucharest to Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 22 August 1968).

In early 1970s the Foreign and Commonwealth Office did not consider that the Soviet Union might change its international policy. In a paper, dated 20 March 1972, British diplomacy examined the Kremlin's aims. The conclusion was that the Soviet priority in Eastern Europe was the maintenance of its hegemony and the international recognition of the *status quo*. As regards the West, the Soviets wanted disintegration of NATO and weakening of Western Europe (Bennett and Hamilton 1998: Paper by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 20 March 1972). Even after the Helsinki Final Act in 1975 London did not depart from the view that the Soviet Union was a hostile power. John Wilson, the British Ambassador in Hungary, wrote to the Foreign Secretary James Callaghan that the Soviet aim was the promotion of revolution around the world (UKNA FCO: 28/2674, Wilson to Callaghan, 9 December 1975), while the Ambassador in Moscow, Sir Terence Garvey, argued that security meant for the Soviet Union recognition of 'the new territorial and political order in Eastern Europe' established after 1944 (Hamilton 2006: 17).

In 1974 the Head of East European and Soviet Department Sir Julian Bullard advocated the careful consideration of local specifics in Eastern Europe because the socialist regimes responded much more positively to London's initiatives than the Soviets (UKNA FCO: 28/2441, Bullard to Dobbs, 18 July 1974). Differentiation among the satellites and the Soviets, however, placed little hope for rapid changes in Bulgarian attitude to Moscow. Bullard's reports argued that the regime was stable and eager to demonstrate its progress and glorious historical legacy in front of the West. Indeed, the conditions in the region varied and changed during the years but Bulgaria remained the only 'willing victim' of the USSR. The new Head of East European and Soviet Department Sir Bryan Cartledge considered how Britain could use the tendencies in Bulgaria. In October 1976 he underlined that Britain could do little to modify Sofia's dependence except to encourage 'the Bulgarians to project a distinctive national identity'. He hoped that national identity might lead in future to Bulgarian desire to protect their national interests (UKNA FCO: 34/327, Cartledge to Sutherland, 14 October 1976).

### **Conclusion**

This paper does not suggest that Bulgaria always seemed so gloomy and doomed in British perception. It basically argues that the Foreign Office's attitude to Bulgaria was rooted partly in Bulgarian image as traditionally pro-Russian country, partly in its subordination to the Soviets that influenced all aspects of Bulgarian politics and partly in British strategy towards the Soviet Union. Further studies could delve deeper into these issues.

If one opens the diary of Labour Party politician Denis Pritt from his visit to Bulgaria in 1948 and the correspondence of Herbert Parker, president of the Fabian society, in the 1960s regarding a visit to Bulgaria, will see how different the country seemed in the views of leftist figures and, at the same time, how fragile was its positive image (LSE PRITT: 1/14, *Diary of a Visit to Bulgaria*, September 1948; LSE PARKER: 6/1).<sup>8</sup>

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize the power of metaphors that enforces the power of the intentions in international affairs – *Of Pots and Windows* seems a suitable provisional title of research on the Foreign Office's policy towards Bulgaria and Eastern Europe, having in mind London's desire to maintain tension through 'pot simmering' in early 1950s and latter, when there were no possibilities for boiling the water, to leave open some windows for East Europeans towards enlightened and developed West. Obviously, Bulgaria was different and remote country in British views – it depended on the Soviet political, military and economical help for its internal development and maintenance of communist power. However, the Foreign Office choose an interesting approach in dealing with Bulgaria – figuratively speaking, British diplomacy left the room, in fact was evicted by the Soviets in the late 1940s, but without shutting the door (in sharp contrast to Americans who breached the relations with Bulgarians from 1950 to 1959). This approach enabled Britain to undertake further less or more successful maneuvers.

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- Churchill BARKER: Churchill Archives Centre, The Papers of Sir William Barker
- CPA CRD: Conservative Party Archive, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Conservative Research Department

<sup>8</sup> Among Herbert Parker's papers is his correspondence with other members of the Fabian Society and the Bulgarian Embassy in London in the 1960s. They negotiated the visit to take place in October 1968 but the invasion of the Warsaw Treaty's armies in Czechoslovakia led to its cancellation. Parker referred to the Embassy with a very short and very cold letter. He clearly stated that the reason for the cancellation was 'the Bulgarian support for the occupation of Czechoslovakia'. The Embassy, of course, did 'not see any real reason for the postponement' but eventually put the end of the correspondence with a short remark – 'the matter for us is closed' (LSE PARKER: 6/1, Parker to Zhelyaskov, 16 September 1968; Zhelyaskov to Parker, 27 September 1968).

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UKNA FCO: United Kingdom National Archives, Foreign and Commonwealth Office

UKNA FO: United Kingdom National Archives, Foreign Office

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