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## Civil Society Organizations as a Catalyst for Political Change in the Republic of Bulgaria

The goal of this article is to examine the processes of formation and development of civil society organizations in Bulgaria that opposed the official policy of the Todor Zhivkov regime, the legitimization of their socio-political activities, and pluralism, which became a catalyst for transformational changes in Bulgarian society. The following objectives are addressed: a comprehensive analysis of the political situation in Bulgaria in the late 1980s was conducted, and the peculiarities of the emergence of dissident movements in the country, as well as the resistance of state authorities to their activities and the legitimization of the first CSOs, are examined. The article uses a neo-institutional methodological approach and a number of methods: comparative, analysis, descriptive, functional, etc. It is argued that all spheres of the country's internal life during this period were affected by creeping systemic crises that urgently required change. External factors such as perestroika and the new foreign policy of the Soviet Union, as well as the abandonment of the Brezhnev doctrine, also contributed to this. The combination of internal and external factors led to a surprising new quality of social change: a complex transformation of the political regime. The peculiarity of the political changes in Bulgaria was that they were catalyzed by civil society organizations and dissident structures that were formed not on ideological principles, but around ecological issues.

**Keywords:** Bulgaria, civil society organizations, dissident structures, control, legitimization, political transformation.

### Громадські організації як каталізатор політичних змін у Болгарії

Мета статті – дослідження процесів утворення і розвитку громадських організацій, опозиційних до офіційної політики режиму Т. Живкова, легітимації їх суспільно-політичної діяльності, плюралізму, які стали каталізатором змін у болгарському суспільстві. Вирішені наступні завдання: проведено комплексний аналіз політичної ситуації в Болгарії у кінці 80-х рр. ХХ ст.; досліджено особливості зародження дисидентського руху, протидію органів контролю його діяльності, легітимацію перших громадських організацій. У статті використано неінституціональний методологічний підхід та ряд методів: порівняльний, аналізу, описовий, функціональний тощо. Доведено, що країну того періоду охопили повзучі системні кризові явища, які настійливо вимагали змін. Цьому посприяли і зовнішні передумови – перебудова та відмова від доктрини Брежнева. Поєднання внутрішніх і зовнішніх чинників викликало результат нової якості – складну трансформацію політичного режиму.

Особливість політичних змін у Болгарії та, що їх каталізатором були громадські організації і дисидентські структури, сформовані не на ідеологічних принципах, а навколо екологічних проблем. Вони турбували болгар через природний страх за власне здоров'я, посилений екологічною катастрофою на Чорнобильській АЕС; потребу зберегти для майбутніх поколінь природу, яку поширив у тривожній доповіді Римський клуб; а причина політичного характеру – відносна безпека неполітичних вимог, для болгар – екологічних, у зв'язку з чим влада не могла застосувати традиційні репресії проти «політичних ворогів».

Наголошено, що при соціалізмі в країні діяла розвинена мережа «офіційних» організацій, які спиралися на громадську участь, ініціативу і були підпорядковані владі. Втім, саме вони створили можливості для активізації індивідуальних ініціатив, розвитку «запізнілого» дисидентства, добровільної громадської практики. Після зміни режиму в 1989 р. і переходу суспільства на

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демократичні засади, досвід діяльності громадських організацій капіталізували, почали використовувати для реконструкції громадської активності та взаємодії.

**Ключові слова:** Болгарія, громадські організації, дисиденти, контроль, легітимація, політична трансформація.

**Setting a scientific problem and its significance.** Interaction between the population and various civil society organizations (CSOs) and political parties is characteristic of any modern society. The first practices in this field appeared in Bulgaria during the times of the National Revival, especially in the mid-19th century. The most common form of their legitimization and social organization in Bulgaria at that time were clubs (later cultural centers, too), which always had a library with a reading room. Studying the formation of CSOs, Bulgarian researchers R. Havrilova and I. Yelenkov believe that in the second half of the 19th century, there were 130 such centers in small Bulgaria<sup>2</sup>. In addition, in the 1860s and 1870s, various associations existed, especially among students and women, where the patriarchal ideology was legitimately dominant. S. Gruyev wrote that “after the Revival of 1878, the people took a fantastic step towards a high cultural level, but their political customs often remained in the captivity of crudeness and intolerance”<sup>3</sup>.

However, despite the growing number of these cultural centers and associations, their members have failed to create a legitimate network of forms of civil interaction, to recreate the intensive “social capital” that would contribute to the formation of a strong and effective democracy. The military coup in Bulgaria in 1934 opened the period of dependence of CSOs on the state and their centralization.

Gradually, the political actors started recognizing the significance of socio-political reality as a whole and its individual manifestations and components. Therefore, the study of the legitimation of CSOs in Bulgaria and their role in the processes of transformation of power in the state is quite important and relevant.

**Analysis of previous research:** the key works that illuminate the origin and development of CSOs in Bulgaria before the political regime change and at the beginning of transformational processes are the publications of Bulgarian scientists I. Baeva, R. Gavrilova, I. Yelenkov, S. Gruyev, P. Yovchev, Z. Zhelev, O. Zagorov, V. Stoyanov, N. Todorov, and others. The material and methodological basis presented in these works provide for a clear and systematic analysis – the foundation for studying the effectiveness of various types of CSOs that have united a large number of citizens, demonstrated social potential, led to desired political changes.

The collective monograph edited by S. Delvaux, in which the authors examined CSOs during the transformation period, analyzed the social inertia of institutions of the old regime after 1989, and their influence on the forms of political interaction, also deserves attention. S. Delvaux’s hypothesis is that socialist society is heterogeneous, not monolithic, and that not all areas of civic activity were dominated by coercion. The transformational changes that the Bulgarians were experiencing had individual characteristics and differences. New CSOs were significantly different from the old ones, but the development of civic life after 1989 should not always be perceived as an indicator of social change<sup>4</sup>.

**The goal of the research** is to examine the formation and development of civil society organizations that opposed the official policy of the Todor Zhivkov regime, the legitimation of their socio-political activities, and pluralism, which became a catalyst for transformational changes in Bulgarian society. In order to achieve this goal, the following objectives have been identified: to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the political situation in Bulgaria in the late 1980s; to investigate the peculiarities of the emergence of the dissident movement in the country, the resistance of the controlling bodies to its activities, and the legitimation of the first civil society organizations.

**Presentation of the main material.** The formation of CSOs without government sanctions is a completely new and unusual phenomenon for the People's Republic of Bulgaria (PRB). In the last decades, the traditionally close economic and political ties of the People's Republic of Bulgaria with the USSR have become an obstacle even for the emergence of opposition sentiments, warning against

<sup>2</sup> Гаврилова, Р., Еленков, И. 1998. Към историята на гражданския сектор в България. *Фондация «Развитие на гражданското общество»*. Изследване на гражданския сектор. № 2 (Пролет): 16, 27.

<sup>3</sup> Груев, С. 1991. *Корона от тръни*. София: 53.

<sup>4</sup> Delvaux, S. 2005. *Les nouveaux militantismes dans l'Europe élargie*. Paris: Harmattan: 82-83.

expressions of dissatisfaction with the existing communist regime and therefore there was no experience of fighting against it.

In the second half of the 1980s, a crisis of power became clearly evident in the PRB. It was expressed primarily in the adoption of a series of ill-considered decisions in domestic and foreign policy and their negative consequences, particularly in the field of economic management. Here, the reform processes became continuous and, eventually, led to the creation of associations instead of ministries and firms, and fruitless debates about forms of socialist property that yielded no positive results. Huge amounts of money were invested in the construction of dubious industrial giants in terms of economic efficiency and environmental safety. The country lacked sufficient domestic funds, and external debt to the West sharply increased (reaching \$10 billion).

Market and energy crises were added, caused by the USSR's decision to reduce supplies of cheap oil, and the GDR's refusal to renew trade agreements<sup>5</sup>. The lack of positive developments in politics and the economy, reorganizations, “new and innovative initiatives” and measures allowed Western scientists to describe the situation in the PRB as a “dynamic stagnation”. Thus, in addition to the crisis of power, the PRB, like other CEE countries, faced creeping systemic crises: in the economy, where it lost its competitiveness compared to the economies of Western and Southeast Asian countries; in the surrounding environment, which had been polluted for decades; in demographic imbalance (in the PRB, the growth of ethnic minorities was six times higher than Bulgarians)<sup>6</sup>.

The regime of Todor Zhivkov feared Turkish nationalism and sought to separate Turks from communities, established Muslim traditions and stereotypes, and imposed a way of life on them that was characteristic of the titular nation of the country – Bulgarians, and restricted the rights of minorities in the field of culture and education.

In general, the Balkan countries have a tendency to not recognize national minorities, except for certain ethnic and religious groups. The goal of state policies in the region was to integrate these population groups into the main nationality. A wide range of methods, including administrative (resettlement), were often not coordinated. In some countries, a part of the foreign population adapted linguistically, politically, and eventually ethnically, but where ethnic groups were numerous, the “integration” method did not work<sup>7</sup>. However, this policy did not work for compact masses of Bulgarians in Macedonia or Muslims in Bulgaria. In Bulgaria, there is no separate Muslim community<sup>8</sup>. Despite religious tradition and similarity of everyday life, it lacks a common language and ethnic self-awareness, as it consists of various ethnic groups such as Turks, Pomaks, Roma, and others.

In the 1970s, Pomaks (Bulgarian Muslims from the Rhodope Mountains) were forced to adopt Bulgarian names and identify themselves as Bulgarians. The People's Republic of Bulgaria banned Turkish language (as a dying language) and national clothing and replaced Turkish names and with Slavic ones. As officials prepared for the 1985 population census and renewed personal documents from 1980-1985, 250,000 Roma people were registered under Bulgarian names. New passports with Bulgarian names were also issued to Turks. The government began a forced assimilation campaign called the Revival Process (considered by the world to be a genocide) which was the culmination of discrimination against Turks – it interrupted their national and cultural development and encouraged Bulgarians to migrate to areas where Turks lived in compact communities<sup>9</sup>. Source analysis indicates that in the summer of 1985, plenums of the Bulgarian Communist Party's regional committees were held in areas where Turks lived, approving measures to intensify the assimilation of Turks, which became known as the “Revival of the Bulgarian Nation”.

There was another significant difference between the People's Republic of Bulgaria and the countries of the CEE. In the last 20 years of socialism in the countries of the Warsaw Treaty Organization

<sup>5</sup> Баева, И. 2001. *България и Източна Европа: монография*. София: Парадигма, 2001: 225.

<sup>6</sup> Stojanov, V. 1997. *Ausgrenzung und Integraation: Die bulgarischen Türken nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg. Österreichische. Osthefte*. H.2. 39: 198.

<sup>7</sup> Манчев, К. 1999. *Националният въпрос на Балканите*. София: АИ «Проф. Марин Дринов»: 307.

<sup>8</sup> Тодоров, Н. 1993. *Балканский узел противоречий. История и современность. Новая и новейшая история*. 3:75.

<sup>9</sup> Загоров, О. 1993. *Възродителният процес: Теза. Антитеза. Отрицания на отрицанието*. София: Пандора Лтд: 16-17.

(WTO), numerous dissident movements had been created<sup>10</sup>. In Bulgaria, dissatisfaction with the regime was rather a personal matter than a civic expression<sup>11</sup>. However, with the beginning of the Soviet perestroika, a small but growing number of people, mostly intellectuals who had long been moderately dissatisfied with the government's actions, began to criticize the government's policies. They demanded wider civil, religious and national rights, and created CSOs that did not have as much power as in other countries without the support of the masses.

The absence of an organized anti-government movement was explained by one of the political leaders of the BCP, A. Lukhanov, as follows: “The appearance of a dissident movement was hindered by effective measures, which were called prevention by the secret police. This was combined with a flexible policy towards the intelligentsia, to whom various privileges were granted – from free travel abroad to honorary titles, benefits, and high fees”<sup>12</sup>.

Dissatisfaction with the style and methods of authoritarianism was growing both within the BCP and even among its higher bodies. The dynamism of this process was further fueled by external factors namely, the events in neighboring countries that Bulgarians learned about from various media outlets. In the late 1980s, the government tightened control over the Turks again: restricted religious publications, banned the study of the Quran, closed places of worship, imposed public and economic sanctions, and limited Muslims' access to education. The spiritual infertility of the party ideology and outrage at the regime's harsh policies fueled the attraction to religion, especially in places where Turks lived compactly. In May 1989, Turks took to the streets in mass demonstrations against the regime, which the government suppressed by force and at the cost of human lives<sup>13</sup>. The rallies attracted thousands of citizens, which forced the government to address the “Turkish question”.

In May 1989, at the Paris Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe<sup>14</sup>, international agreements were signed on free movement of citizens across borders. PRB also signed these agreements and was obliged to implement them. T. Zhivkov decided to use this external imperative to address the “Turkish question”. Changes were made to the existing laws on citizenship and passports for Turks, democratizing the legal status of citizens. Without waiting for the designated deadline (September 1, 1989) to issue foreign passports to all citizens who wished to travel abroad, the government announced in May that it would issue such passports to Bulgarian Turks. Stimulating Bulgarian nationalism, which had always served it before, the government sought salvation for the regime, seeing nationalism as the only counter to the mass protests of Bulgarian Turks.

T. Zhivkov officially addressed the population through radio and television, calling for an end to the mass unrest. Denying the existence of a sizeable Turkish minority, he claimed that the majority of ethnic Turks were actually true Bulgarians who were forcibly converted to Islam and Turkish identity during Ottoman times, but they have the right to choose their homeland and can leave Bulgaria temporarily or permanently if they wish<sup>15</sup>. The government expected only a few immigrants, so Turkey would see that very few people were dissatisfied with life in Bulgaria<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> Хавел, В. 1994. *Силата на безсилите*. София: Избор: 112; Ash, T.G. 1991. *The Polish revolution: Solidarity*. L.: Granta books: 422; *From Stalinism to Pluralism: a documentary history of Eastern Europe since 1945* edited by Gale Stokes. 1991. Oxford University Press. № 4: 267; *Krajobraz po szoku '68*. 1989. Wyd. II. Warszawa: Wyd. Przedcewit: 124; Kuron, J. 1995. *Wiara i wina: do i od komunizmu*. Wrocław: Wyd.: Dolnośląskie: 377; Michnik, A. 1993. *Z dziejów honoru w Polsce: wypisy wicezienne*. Warszawa: Niezależna Oficyna Wydawnicza: 236; Sloboda, L. 1990. *Czechoslovakia's Road to Freedom. The American University Journal of International Affairs*: 238; Writings on the East 1990. *Selected Essays on Eastern Europe from the New York Review of Books*. Essays by A. Michnik, V. Havel, T. G. Ash, E. Bonner, G.A. Craig, F. Stern, and Ph. Roth. New York Review of Books: 131.

<sup>11</sup> Иванов, Д. 1992. *Заговорите срещу Тодор Живков*. София: 79; Иванов, Д. 1995. *Политическото противопоставяне в България 1956-1989 г.* София: Арес Прес, 1995: 52.

<sup>12</sup> Млечин, Л. 1991. Партбилет туда и обратно. *Новое время*. № 33: 20.

<sup>13</sup> Симеонов, П. 1996. *Голямата промяна 10.XI.1989 – 10.VI.1990: Опит за документ*. София: Отечество: 645-646.

<sup>14</sup> Младенов, П. 1989. *Нашият пътеводител са прогресивните и хуманни норми*. Реч на министър П. Младенов на Конференцията по човешкото измерение на СССЕ. София: Межд. отношения. Кн. 5: 5-7.

<sup>15</sup> *Изявление на председателя на Държавния съвет Т. Живкова по Българското радио и Българската телевизия, 29 май 1989 г.* София: Междун. отношения, 1989. Кн. 5: 3-4.

<sup>16</sup> Язкова, А.А. 1990. *Балканам – мир и сотрудничество*. М.: Знание: 35.

Turkey responded to T. Zhivkov's call by expressing its readiness to accept refugees from the PRB, and the Bulgarian authorities accordingly intensified their terror against them. Thousands of Turks were forced to leave Bulgaria<sup>17</sup>, and the scale of the migration shocked the authorities of both countries. They crossed the border and settled in hastily organized camps. Turkey was not expecting such a massive migration, so it hastily closed the borders to the refugees, whose number had already reached 320,000<sup>18</sup>. Bulgaria lost nearly 170,000 workers in animal husbandry and the traditional export sector of tobacco. The approach used to resolve the national question in Bulgaria painfully affected nearly 900,000 people (10% of the population). Entire villages, towns, and districts in northeastern and southern Bulgaria became depopulated. The campaign worsened the already crisis-ridden economy of the People's Republic of Bulgaria<sup>19</sup>. The forced exodus of the Turks outraged the global community with the actions of the Bulgarian government<sup>20</sup>.

Another internal factor that accelerated social changes in the PRB was dissidence<sup>21</sup>, which emerged in 1988 under the influence of perestroika in the USSR. The topic of human rights has always been fundamental and unifying in all dissident movements. This was clearly demonstrated in Czechoslovakia, when the Helsinki Accords of 1975 allowed hundreds of intellectuals to sign the Charter 77 at the end of 1976, demanding that the government respects the human rights it had guaranteed<sup>22</sup>. Bulgaria also signed the Helsinki Final Act, but unlike the Czechs, the Bulgarians did not demand the authorities to comply with the provisions for over a decade. Even when the issue of gross violations of the rights of the Turkish minority arose, no one mentioned the Helsinki Accords, as the Turks' actions in the NRB were classified as nationalist, aimed at protecting Islam, and not as a form of dissident movement.

Unlike the CEE countries, Bulgarian dissent movement was delayed, but still made a certain contribution to the awakening of society and the destruction of the totalitarian political system. The catalyst for the formation of the dissident structure were not ideological but environmental problems.

The impetus for re-actualizing environmental issues in the PRB was the concern for the Danube city of Ruse. The poisoning of Ruse with harmful emissions of chlorine gas from the Romanian chemical plant in Giurgiu across the Danube was worrying the citizens of Ruse and complicating the relations between the two countries. Bulgaria demanded that Romania build treatment facilities at the plant, but like most bilateral issues, this one also remained unresolved<sup>23</sup>.

The citizens of Ruse organized protest rallies quite frequently<sup>24</sup>. The media actively joined the campaign to protect the city<sup>25</sup>. The letter was supported by scientists from the Institutes of Nuclear Research and Molecular Biology, the CSO "Cabinet of Young Writers", the Presidium of the Union of Scientists of the People's Republic of Bulgaria, and physicists from Sofia University.

The trade union meetings of the Institute of Philosophy on February 25, 1988, initiated by the young employee S. Gaitandzhiev, contributed to the transformation of public concern for Ruse into a new organization. Participants watched the documentary film "Breathe!" created by G. Avramov, V. Tsikov, and Y. Zhirov. The film revealed the state of the ecology in Ruse and the events surrounding the incident<sup>26</sup>. The discussion of the film resulted in the creation of a new environmental protection organization for Ruse. The initiative committee facilitated the elevation of local Ruse problems to the

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<sup>17</sup> Бурдяк, В.І. 2002. Конфліктогенні проблеми в розвитку міжнаціональних відносин болгарського суспільства. *Stereotypy narodowościowe na pograniczu* / Pod red. W. Bonusiaka. Rzeszów: Wyd. Un-tu Rzeszowskiego: 324-327.

<sup>18</sup> Стоянов, В. 1998. *Турското население в България между полюсите на етническа политика*: Bulgaro-Turcica 2. София: Издателство Лик: 213-214.

<sup>19</sup> Костов, Г. 1991. Смяната на социално-икономическа система. *Ново време*. 9 юли: 27.

<sup>20</sup> Stojanov, V. 1997. Ausgrenzung und Integration: Die bulgarischen Türken nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg. *Österreichische. Osthefte*. H.2. 39: 198.

<sup>21</sup> Асенов, Б. 1999. *Шесто за шесто и след това*. София: Самиздат: 130-131.

<sup>22</sup> *Charta 77 ocima současniku. Po dvaceti letech*. 1997. Praha – Brno – Doplnek: 54; *Naděje umírá poslední. Vlastní životopis Alexandra Dubčeka*. 1993. Ed. J. Hochman. Praha: Svoboda – Libertas: 265-266.

<sup>23</sup> Митева, Д. 1991. Въздухът на град Русе и белите дробове. *Свободен народ*: 141-142.

<sup>24</sup> Живонски, Н. 1988. Жертви на гласността. *Свободен народ*: 117-118.

<sup>25</sup> Иванов, Д. 1995. *Политическото противопоставяне в България 1956-1989 г.* София: Арес Прес: 119.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

national level<sup>27</sup>. On March 8, 1988, nearly 400 people gathered at the Cinema House in Sofia, forming the Public Committee for Environmental Protection of Ruse (PCEPR). Its members consisted mainly of scientists and representatives of the creative intelligentsia from the Institute of Philosophy, Institute of Sociology, the Unified Center of Physics of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAS), the Union of Artists, and the “Ekran” TV studio. A board of 33 people was elected.

The PCEPR meeting was covered in the newspaper “Sofia News” published in Russian, French, and English. The following day, during a performance at the Satirical Theater in Sofia, actor P. Slabakov broke his character on stage and read out a plea for help for the Danube city that was suffocating. The upper echelon of the party was outraged by such audacity. S. Mikhailov, who was removed from the Politburo of the BCP’s Central Committee for this incident, wrote that “nothing significant should happen in this country without informing the authorities and getting an approval”<sup>28</sup>.

Therefore, the open organized protest against the authorities and the creation of the first independent non-governmental CSO of a new democratic model is connected to the creation of the PCEPR. This was the first noteworthy dissident organization that had shown whether society is ready to accept new institutions. The organization challenged the government – it acted in the spirit of perestroika and at the same time contradicted the political system of socialism, as it was created without the approval and consent of the Bulgarian Communist Party. Hence, the emergence of the PCEPR caused a storm of indignation among the leaders of the BCP. The reaction of the authorities was instantaneous<sup>29</sup>.

The organizers of the PCEPR, who were members of the Bulgarian Communist Party, were individually and categorically informed that the creation of such organizations was incompatible with party membership and that they should abandon their activities. On April 7, a final decision was made to ban the registration of the PCEPR in the municipal court. Twenty-seven artists, writers, scientists, and journalists were expelled from the BCP, including S. Ruseva, N. Robievu, and S. Bakish (the wife of a member of the Politburo of the CC of the BCP and former Prime Minister S. Todorov, who resigned due to this reason)<sup>30</sup>. Some were arrested, others lost their positions, and many were banned from traveling around the country. The Institute of Philosophy of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences suffered a devastating blow, as its employees were considered the initiators of the PCEPR’s creation. Their articles were not being published, control over documentary films was increased<sup>31</sup>, and a new committee for the preservation of Ruse was established under the auspices of the secretary of the local party organization<sup>32</sup>.

The emergence of the PCEPR sparked a new confrontation within the Politburo of the BCP – A. Lukanov defended de-Stalinization in the Soviet Union, while T. Zhivkov criticized changes in the Soviet Union that poisoned the reality in the People’s Republic of Bulgaria, explaining the Bulgarian specifics that did not allow for the transfer of the Soviet model of glasnost. It turned out that Bulgaria was not legislatively ready even for a limited democracy. Confronted with the PCEPR, experts of the Central Committee of the BCP found that the declared right to create self-governing organizations in mid-1987 was not regulated in any way. But T. Zhivkov stated that self-governing organizations could essentially be created “in communities, and not like this one, which seeks to spread on a national scale. Let them go to the communities and create them if it is so necessary”<sup>33</sup>. It was clear that those were tricks, but they could not stop the emergence of new informal organizations.

The collision of two positions – the behavior of dissidents and the reaction of the authorities – revealed a growth of political maturity of the society. A year before the onset of major changes, it made an attempt to openly speak out against totalitarianism, becoming a real sign of future pluralism in politics. An analysis of the sources on the creation of the PCEPR provides grounds for concluding both about the delayed Bulgarian dissidence, which was easily manipulated and broken, and about the straightforwardness of the leadership of the Bulgarian Communist Party, which had no intention of relinquishing full control over public life.

<sup>27</sup> Иванов, Д. 1995. *Op. cit.*: 49.

<sup>28</sup> Михайлов, С. 1993. *Живковизмът: През призмата на една лична драма*. София: М-8-М: 82.

<sup>29</sup> Бонев, А. 1990. Разпитът. *Дума*. 22 ноември.

<sup>30</sup> Бурдяк, В. 2003. Особливості зародження дисидентського руху в Болгарії. *Буковинський журнал*. 1: 135.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Живонски, Н. 1988. Жертви на гласността. *Свободен народ*: 117-118.

<sup>33</sup> Бонев, А. 1990. Марионетките на Живков срещу Комитета за спасение на Русе. *Дума*. 21 ноември.

We believe that the acceptance of socialist values by the Bulgarian society continued for a longer period in the PRB than in most CEE countries. The reason was different initial conditions and social expectations. Compared to the pre-war backwardness, the period of socialist construction looked dynamic and productive. The government was able to establish a relatively strong integration mechanism for a certain period of time, forming a kind of social contract, according to which society paid for the development of well-being by relinquishing political demands.

At the same time, this mechanism became increasingly difficult to maintain in a normal functional state, and it often malfunctioned. The growing awareness and openness of the world expanded opportunities for comparison, convincing people of the inefficiency of administrative and centralized management. Not only among ethnic minorities and the Bulgarian intelligentsia but also among other social strata, there was a growing sense of the need for change. Distrust became widespread, hostile, and reflected a personalized attitude towards the government.

The politicization of public consciousness and protest movements in the state were rapidly gaining strength. In the fall of 1988, three more alternative organizations emerged. Groups defending human rights and religious freedoms emerged in different parts of the country, such as the Independent Society for the Protection of Human Rights, the Committee for the Defense of Religious Rights, Freedoms, and Spiritual Values, and the Union of the Repressed People after 1945, etc.<sup>34</sup>. These civil society structures did not fit into the official ideology and policies and, to some extent, expressed opposition sentiments. Most of them did not pursue anti-socialist goals, but rather were anti-Zhivkov. Their leaders understood that the tasks they set could be solved only through the democratization of the political system. The authorities tried to bring non-conformists under control by including them in official formats (the committees of the Fatherland Front) or by banning them as anti-socialist.

The political organization Club for Support of Glasnost and Perestroika in Bulgaria, created in the autumn of 1988, posed a real political challenge to the authorities. The initiators of the club took precautions against political persecution by stating that the organization “operates fully on the basis of the Constitution of the PRB, adhering to existing legislation and decisions of the July Plenum of the CC of the BCP in 1987 and is fighting for their implementation”<sup>35</sup>. The reference to the July Plenum was not a trick, but rather the foundation of the club's image and intentions – it did not oppose socialism, but rather sought its reconstruction and reform; it operated openly, and demanded the political pluralism promised by the authorities in 1987<sup>36</sup>.

In 1989, the opposition of the intelligentsia became widespread<sup>37</sup>. Therefore, two main directions were formed in Bulgarian dissent movement: non-partisan, which quickly evolved into anti-communism and opposed the system as a whole, and communist reformers, primarily anti-Zhivkov, who advocated for the democratization of socialism. They expressed their views through newly created CSOs.

Fearing events would spiral out of control, Todor Zhivkov resorted to old methods of governance. To subdue the dissatisfied, party officials launched a mass offensive against the opposition intelligentsia<sup>38</sup>. Over the course of a year, under public pressure, most law-abiding cultural unions returned the leadership dismissed by the administration. They criticized the government for the discrepancy between BCP's theory and practice, for national repression, and for violations of human rights in the People's Republic of Bulgaria.

On October 29, 1989, in South Park, members of Podkrepa, Ecoglasnost, the Independent Society for Human Rights Protection, and others gathered for the first time, collecting signatures again and reading the Program of Independent Trade Unions. On November 3, 1989, the first legal mass action organized by Ecoglasnost, with the participation of all opposition organizations, took place<sup>39</sup>.

The manifestation of civil disobedience in the People's Republic of Bulgaria occurred timely, in tandem with other CEE countries. However, the strength of this wave was lost in the dismantling of the socialist system. The image of Bulgaria in the international community and the authority of the

<sup>34</sup> Млечин, Л. 1991. И курица птица, и Болгария за граница. *Новое время*. 34: 19-20.

<sup>35</sup> Иванов, Д. 1995. *Политическото противопоставяне в България 1956-1989 г.* София: Арес Прес: 138.

<sup>36</sup> Желев, Ж. 1990. Пълна подкрепа, но... *Родолюбие*. 3: 22-23.

<sup>37</sup> Чакъров, К. 1990. *Втория етаж*. София: К & М: 181-182.

<sup>38</sup> Живков, Т. 1989. *Преустройството на нашето общество – призвание и отговорност на интеллигенцията*. София: Партиздат: 10-11.

<sup>39</sup> Крумов, Р. 1991. Какво става в «Екогласност». *Отечествен вестник*. 18 юни.

government within the country decreased following the ecological forum, despite the regime's hopes to raise the country's prestige through the event. By resorting to brute force, the PRB's government, for the second time in a year, compromised itself in front of the global community, drawing attention to the violations of human rights and freedoms and displaying the inability to resolve urgent and pressing social problems in a civilized manner.

**Conclusions.** A comprehensive analysis of the situation in Bulgaria in the late 1980s demonstrated the interconnectedness of internal factors of negative phenomena in all areas of societal life and how strongly they encouraged change. This was conveniently accompanied by external factors, such as the Soviet perestroika, the implementation of a new foreign policy by the USSR, and the abandonment of the Brezhnev Doctrine. The combination of internal and external factors for social change produced an unexpected and surprising result of a new quality in the People's Republic of Bulgaria, which spurred complex political transformations. As R. Darendorf stated in the preface to the Bulgarian edition of the book on the collapse of communism, "What died on the streets of Prague, Berlin, and Bucharest, in the endless rallies in Budapest, at your Round Table, and now in your parliament, was not just communism, but the belief in a closed world dominated by a monopoly of truth"<sup>40</sup>.

During the socialist regime in Bulgaria, there existed a well-developed network of organizations that relied on citizen participation and initiative, but for the most part, they remained "official" and closely tied to the government. However, they created opportunities for the development of individual initiatives, particularly for voluntary civic practice, and it was their experience that was utilized after 1989 for the reconstruction of civic activity and interaction.

The accumulated experience of CSO activity until 1989 was capitalized upon, with the belief that it would be useful in the new conditions. This year became one of the key ones in terms of political and social change, although they were not as radical, at least not in all areas of societal life, including the practice of civic interaction.

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<sup>40</sup> Дарендорф, Р. 1993. *Размисли върху революцията в Европа / Пр. от англ.* София: ЦИД: 6.



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