

Bulgaria's future needs an open past



I am the first to admit the existing problems: corruption is rampant, situation in homes for mentally handicapped people and orphans is unacceptable, prisons are overcrowded, racism and poverty are shocking and legislation needs adaptation and implementation etc. etc. But who can seriously believe that problems can be solved within one year, after a period of 16 years in which they grew bigger and

bigger? There were also important improvements. The Bulgarian press renewed and emancipated surprisingly and façades and roads were repaired. During the many visits I paid to Bulgaria since 2002, I witnessed the improvements. Instead of having one cow, farmers now had twelve, there was more agriculture in the empty Thracian fields and the number of tourists increased. Bulgaria looked better, but not good enough. In the poor ghetto's of the Roma nothing changed, in spite of the millions of funds sent from Brussels and elsewhere, there was a lack of transparency in how the money was spent, laws were not implemented, the rate of unemployment stayed high, the brain-drain was dramatic and the contractual killings increased.

DS only disguised itself

In 2003, not yet being a member of the European Parliament, I contacted several members about my experiences. Communism lacks its Nuremberg Trials. In the beginning of the nineties, only a few years after the "end" of communism, former leaders of the *Darzavna Sigurnost (DS)* came easily to power again. One could even state that the old elites never left. The top of the *Darzavna Sigurnost* consisted of approximately ten generals and hundreds of senior officers. Experienced and wealthy, knowing their foreign languages, they dealt with the privatisations of state properties, which was a lucrative job that made them still richer. Some founded banks or insurance companies, others became judges, lawyers or businessmen or founded political parties. Whatever they did, they always had their contacts in politics and court. And if not, they could buy it. For at least 15 years this mafia way of ruling could take place without any strong interference from inside nor outside the country. During the privatisations hundreds of thousands of people had lost their job, free healthcare and free education included. But there was no relief, there were no social plans and they lacked the skills to organize themselves. And even when they tried to organize themselves in NGOs and parties, there was infiltration, intimidation or high level bribing. Money, power, skills, all was concentrated in the former DS. Who worked for this former DS and which crimes they committed? Who for instance killed in 1978 the Bulgarian dissident writer Georgi Markov in London (the well-known umbrella-murder)? There are suspicions, but nobody knows for sure, as Bulgaria is the only country where the files of the secret service were never opened. In 2001 Rapporteur Geoffrey van Orden urged the Bulgarian authorities to provide further information relating to the murder. And a year before the country's biggest newspaper "Trud" cites Geoffrey van Orden telling Deutsche Welle that he will not vote in favour of the report on Bulgaria if the case on 1978 murder of Bulgarian writer Georgi Markov is not solved conclusively.

Who killed Georgi Markov?

In 2005 the investigation journalist and writer Hristo Hristov publishes a book about the murder on Georgi Markov, for which he is awarded the "Chernorizez Hrabar Award", as the best investigation journalist of the year. And Hristo Hristov goes on. In 2006 he wins a case in court: The Bulgarian court decided on 16-04-2006 regarding a complain submitted by Hristo Hristov that the director of the National Investigation Office, general Kircho Kirov, did act illegally by refusing access to the documents of the First Head Department of the former totalitarian secret service Darzavna Sigurnost. The decision of the judge did not change anything. Today, 16 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the archives of the murders in Sofia are kept away from public eyes in spite of court decisions. What changed is Hristov's safety. In May 2006, visiting Bulgaria with a Green Delegation, I was shocked to learn that he gets serious threats, only a couple of weeks after a bomb attack on another investigation journalist, Vasil Ivanov. In recent years more than 150 Bulgarians were murdered by means of contractual killings. Until now most victims were involved in Mafia, having opposite interests. If press tries to open the files and literally becomes a target, the West should strongly protest. Postponing will not increase the Bulgarian freedom of speech, but on the contrary endanger journalist's life and intensify the fear among common people.

Ataka's scapegoats

During last year elections the former DS, financially enabled journalist en Holocaust-denier Volen Siderov to start his party Ataka: anti EU, anti Jews, anti Roma, anti Turks. Thanks to three websites and an own newspaper, but mainly to SKAT TV, a satellite TV-station, Ataka entered the parliament with 21 people in June 2005. According to recent polls it would be Bulgaria's second party. And there is a newly born extreme right party. Siderov is talking in slogans and one-liners. He states that the poverty is due to the privatisations, which indeed were done in a criminal way, but by the very same people who finance Siderov! Siderov however will never accuse DS to whom he owes so much. He accuses the "pro-Mammon" Jews, the robbing gypsies and the foreign Turks and spreads hatred. One more year of hatred won't bring good changes either. The West as a partner of former DS-leaders during privatisations cannot deny that it is at least partly responsible for nowadays situation.

A promise by Minister Petkov

There is still a way out. The secret files must be opened! According to the existing Bulgarian law the archives of the DS should become a public library, open to everybody. During the official meeting of the Green Delegation from Brussels with the Minister of Interior, Rumen Petkov, on 11 May, I proposed to the Minister to send a constructive signal to the European Union by opening the files. I showed the Minister the court's judgement that refusing access to the files to Mr. Hristov was illegal, as the law which allows access was not implemented. Therefore I proposed having a conference on the files on July 20th and to celebrate this event while opening all of them. Minister Rumen Petkov said that I did not have to wait that long. Before the 20th of July 2006 the opening of all DS-files would be a fact. He would send me an invitation to come and convince myself. All other individuals and interested institutions would have access too. I am waiting for this invitation now and hope that meanwhile brave journalists will not have to suffer from threats to their life and that of their friends and family.