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FORUM

Bulgarian Historiography after 1989

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Speaking on a popular TV show in 1990, soon after the collapse of the previous regime, long-time dissident and doyen of Bulgarian historical science, former Dean of the Faculty of History at the University of Sofia, Nikolay Genchev, insisted on putting the 'Bulgarian national interest' 'above all'. Genchev said with regret that 'the Bulgarian national problem has recently appeared mainly as a Turkish problem'. Irritated, he added that it is talked about 'only for the Turks . . . [in spite of the fact that there were only] a million [Turkish] people living in this country'. He followed up with apocalyptic predictions that Yugoslavia wanted Pirin (or Bulgarian) Macedonia, Romania longed for Dobrodja (which is split between Bulgaria and Romania), the Turks claimed secession, and therefore only the 'hard chest of the Balkan' remained.[1]

In the summer of 2007, the Sofia Municipal Council made the decision to build a monument to the Serbian Prince Mihailo in the Bulgarian capital. Outraged, the historian Ivan Ilchev, at that time Dean of the Faculty of History at the University of Sofia and future rector of the same institution, shared his disapproval with a prominent Bulgarian newspaper:

> In any case, if the members of the city council really go through with opening such a monument of Prince Mihailo in Sofia, I will call on the students of the Faculty of History, the members of the clubs 'Suhrani Bulgarskoto', 'Memory', IMRO,[2] and the members of clubs for the history of Macedonia to attend the 'celebration' and to express their attitude towards such a scanty and conformist decision, taken behind the backs of the electorate of Sofia.[3]

Such pronouncements by high-ranking and administratively influential Bulgarian historians illustrate the preoccupations of the Bulgarian historical profession in the years of postcommunist transition. We see the dominant nationalism, the idea that Bulgaria is surrounded only by enemies, open hostility towards the Turks living in Bulgaria and towards Serbia, and the desire to rehabilitate the sacred theme of 'Macedonia' as essentially Bulgarian.

In what follows, I will limit myself to debates related to Bulgarian history, and in most of the cases I will emphasise only publications by professional historians. In general, I will not devote space to the publications of Bulgarian historians working abroad. Moreover, emphasis will be put on contemporary Bulgarian history.

It is important to stress that in the early 1990s, historians undoubtedly gained new freedoms. However, they also had to deal with low wages, reduced funding and a sharp reduction in the number of doctorates and scholarships. As a result, the vast majority of students in Bulgaria turned to careers

[1] See: https://www.vbox7.com/play:0bf1be52&pos=vr?fbclid=IwAR3sVHKovJrcscGtaX6L4OHZBcGq74ZxIv0z8Ms6_96XppIHmm8VVffSkVQ.

[2] In the interwar period the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation (IMRO) was a pro-Bulgarian political force. After 1989 it was restored and was one of the Bulgarian extreme nationalist organisations.

[3] See Ivan Ilchev, Zashto shte uvekovechavame u nas arhitekta na velikosrabskata politika – *Sega*, 24 Aug. 2007. http://old.segabg.com/article.php?sid=20070824000400012O1.

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related to economics and law. Historical education remained inert, old-fashioned, stagnant and closed to methodological innovations from other social sciences and humanities. The majority of the historical guild remained unfamiliar with the activities of historians abroad. On the other hand, competition for positions abroad at the Ministry of Education and Science became more open and the opportunities for young historians to travel abroad grew. As a result of these developments, and the spread of the internet at the turn of the century, young scholars received more access to international scholarship. Nevertheless, the initial marginalisation of historical science was followed by the emergence of quasi-historical nationalist TV programmes that framed how historical knowledge was disseminated in the new century, and transformed the approach and values of historians who participated in their production.

Postcommunist Topics of the Transition

The existence of fascism in Bulgaria in the period between the two world wars has steadily gained in prominence since the 1980s. Between the Second World War's end and the watershed of 1989, the regime legitimised its rule by defining itself against what it described as a 'fascist' or 'monarcho-fascist' old regime. The post-war Communist Party point of view – that fascism had been the ruling system or predominant ideology in Bulgaria – was decisively rejected. Most new interpretations spoke of the personal regime of the monarch Tsar Boris III as authoritarian, but not 'fascist' or totalitarian.[4] Most historians stressed that while the interwar regime in Bulgaria was monarchical and authoritarian, fascist organisations were in the opposition and forced to comply, rather than being able to impose their own dictatorship upon the nation.[5]

Another important historiographical reassessment was related to the position of Bulgaria as a Nazi ally during the Second World War and the partisan resistance led by the Communist Party. In post-communist conditions, the lack of German occupation was a sticking point, because the Communist Party had used the term 'occupation' from 1941–4, in order to encourage a stronger resistance. Yet, because of its status as a non-occupied country, resistance in Bulgaria was indeed weaker than in Yugoslavia or Greece. By the same token, the struggle of the partisans began to be seen simply as directed against their own state authorities and their pro-German policy, albeit inspired by a foreign state in the form of the USSR.[6] But historians close to the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) and its successor, the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), still argued that the struggle in Bulgaria had been against international fascism and its allies.[7]

In the post-communist period, the topic of the 'salvation of the Bulgarian Jews' in March 1943, already in play since the late 1960s, was more heavily exploited, both externally and internally in order to normalise the image of the regime before 1944. However, if in communist times credit had been given to the proletariat, the BCP and personally to the dictator Todor Zhivkov, after 1989 the new heroes became Tsar Boris III, Bulgarian politicians, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and civil society. The topic of 'salvation' rapidly became a national ideology for embellishing Bulgaria's record of tolerance, while silence was maintained about the deportation of Jews from the occupied territories of Aegean Thrace, Vardar Macedonia and Pirot, which was organised and carried out by the Bulgarian authorities at the insistence of Nazi Germany.[8]

[4] Ivan Bozhilov i dr, *Istoria na Balgaria* (Sofia: izdatelstvo 'Hristo Botev', 1993), 656–79; Vladimir Migev, 'Politicheskata Sistema v Balgaria ot 9 juni 1923 do 9 septemvri 1944', *Istoricheski pregled* 9 (1990): 77–89; Krastjo Manchev, 'Monarhijata i diktaturata v Balgaria 1934–1944', in *681–1948. Iz istorijata na balgarskata narodnost i darzhava*, ed. Milen Kumanov (Sofia: Pelikan Alfa, 1993), 265–83.

[5] Nikolai Poppetrov, 'Avtoritarizam – fashizam (Kam modela na politièsko razvitie v Balgaria)', *Istoricheski pregled* 2 (1997): 25–48.

[6] Bozhilov i dr, *Istoria na Balgaria*, 699–700.

[7] Ilcho Dimitrov, 'Deveti septemvri v balgarskata istoria', in *Mezhdu Mjunhen i Potstdam*, ed. Ilcho Dimitrov (Sofia: Kliment Ohridski, 1998), 192.

[8] Georgi Daskalov, 'Demografski procesi v Iztochna Makedonia i Zapadna Trakia (1 Jan. 1942–25 Oct. 1944),' *Voennoistoricheski sbornik* 2 (1991): 36. Vitka Toshkova, ed., *Balgaria – svoenravnijat sojuznik na Tratia rajh* (Sofia: Voenno izdatelstvo, 1992).

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As much as the coup d'etat on 9 September 1944 was for many decades a founding myth of the communist regime in Bulgaria, in post-communist conditions there was no way for the date not to become the focal point of important symbolic struggles and radical historiographical reassessments. In the previously dominant interpretation, although emphasising the strength and decisive assistance of the Soviet army (it even entered the Bulgarian communist constitution from 1971), it was still claimed that there had been internal forces, armed guerrilla warfare, a military coup, which, combined with a popular uprising, led to the overthrow of the 'monarcho-fascist dictatorship'. It is no coincidence that the radical post-communist reassessment emphasised the seizure of power by a military coup, that only became possible once the Soviets invaded Bulgaria on 8 September 1944.[9] Even historians associated with the former ruling *nomenklatura* were not able to hide the overwhelming influence of external actors on the course of Bulgarian history at the war's end.[10]

Meanwhile, if a reassessment of 9 September was tied to debates about fascism in Bulgaria and the character of the wartime government, the communist repressions after this date had been an absolute taboo for more than four decades. Nevertheless, a kind of consensus was quickly reached that the so-called People's Court, founded in September 1944 to adjudicate war guilt, was a parody of legality. The prosecutors were selected on political grounds and the proceedings were choreographed by the communist leaders. The pronounced sentences were politically motivated, excessively severe, and many convicted people were in fact innocent. Of the 10,919 people brought to the court room, 2,618 were sentenced to death (1,046 of them were executed). Even historians close to the BCP offered negative assessments of these legal procedures.[11] Moreover, liberal Bulgarian historians, almost two and a half decades after the changes of 1989, established that in late September and early October 1944 the biggest single wave of politically motivated murders in modern Bulgarian history took place.[12]

The Communist Period, the Archival Revolution and the Search for New Research Fields

Once the archives were opened after 1989, historians could tackle the formerly forbidden topics of the communist period. It was of particular significance that scholars gained access to the documents of the ruling BCP, including its highest ranks. This helped to reveal the mechanisms used by the BCP to penetrate and control the schools, the universities and the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences;[13] the forced collectivisation of agricultural land;[14] the nomenclature;[15] the efforts of the political police (DS) to control the church;[16] the country's foreign debt;[17] ongoing economic reforms[18] and several other topics. Authors also attempted to explain how a totalitarian regime was constructed during the era of 'people's democracy'. In this period the Communist Party achieved total control from the autumn of 1947 until the summer of 1953, when a certain softening followed the death of Stalin. According to these historians, from the beginning of the 1960s onwards there was a gradual evolution back to a

[9] Bozhilov i dr, *Istoria na Balgaria*, 724–7.

[10] Dimitrov, 'Deveti septemvri v balgarskata istoria', 189–97.

[11] Ilcho Dimitrov, *Ivan Bagrjanov – caredvorec, politik, darzhavnik* (Sofia: BAN, 1995).

[12] According to Alexander Vezenkov, the number of victims, taken together with those executed after a verdict by the People's Court in the autumn of 1944, is certainly more than 4,000 but probably less than 7,000 people. At the same time, this number definitely exceeds that given by the communist resistance itself before 9 Sept. 1944. Alexander Vezenkov, *9 septemvri 1944* (Sofia: Ciela, 2014), 367.

[13] Vesela Chichovska, *Politikata sreshtu prosvetnata tradicia* (Sofia: Sv. Kliment Ohridski, 1995).

[14] Vladimir Migev, Kolektivizaciiata *1948–1958* (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo Stopanstvo, 1996).

[15] Alexander Vezenkov, *Vlastovite strukturi na Balgarskata komunisticheska partia 1944–1989* (Sofia: Institut za izuchavane na blizkoto monalo, 2008).

[16] Momchil Metodiev, *Mezhdu viarata i kompromisa: balgarskata pravoslavna carkva i komunisticheskata darzhava 1944–1989* (Sofia: Ciela, 2010).

[17] Daniel Vachkov and Martin Ivanov, *Istoria na vanshnia darzhaven dalg na Balgaria 1878–1990*. Ch. 3, Vanshnia dalg na Balgaria prez perioda na komunizma 1945–1990 (Sofia: BNB, 2009).

[18] Martin Ivanov, *Reformatorstvo bez reformi* (Sofia: Ciela, 2008).

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more authoritarian model, although the total domination of the Communist Party was preserved.[19] Historians working in this area tended to be most interested in describing how the gradual evolution of the regime from a ferocious totalitarianism in the beginning to a form of consumer socialism, akin to Hungary's 'goulash socialism', led to a general corruption of society.[20]

After 1989, a second interpretative strand emerged in the historiography of the communist period. The great change of 9 September 1944 was relativized as historians traced out the continuities that existed across this caesura. These scholars described how a policy of modernisation which yielded results despite political violence linked the two eras.[21] Although recognising the lack of democracy and liberal freedoms, these authors emphasised the social benefits of state socialism. However, even left-wing historians could not hide inconvenient facts such as the permanent trade deficit; the irregular supply of essential commodities; housing, transport, trade and telephone problems in the big cities – phenomena that were increasingly forgotten in developed countries.[22]

While the gatekeepers of the historical guild remained wedded to earlier orthodoxies and relatively cut off from international scholarship, the opening up of the country after 1989 brought greater opportunities for young Bulgarians to obtain master's and doctoral degrees from foreign universities, and this factor, combined with new opportunities presented by the internet, intensified international exchange. The oversaturation of traditional and conventional topics related to the country's political past inevitably led to the emergence of new thematic fields in these decades. Notable works appeared in cultural and urban history, tackling topics such as advertising and the practice of reading, while religion reemerged as a topic, with a particular focus on the relationship between Christianity and Islam.

In the first decade of the new century, the diversification of the field continued apace to include studies dedicated to women and gender and social history that reached back into the 1870s.[23] The proximity of the communist period gave the opportunity to develop both autobiography and oral history, as far as there were still people who remembered the communist years.[24] These new and promising routes also attracted some young historians who focused on topics such as urban history,[25] the history of tourism,[26] entrepreneurial culture and mentality,[27] the discipline of everyday life and habitus,[28] the history of music as part of culture,[29] history of crime,[30] and others. In the last ten to fifteen years all these efforts changed the very notion of the historical craft among specialists and the wider public. Unfortunately, with a small number of exceptions,[31] the realm of strictly political history has proved largely resistant to methodological innovation.

[19] For example, see Vladimir Migev, 'Balgaria po vreme na komunisticheskia rezhim 1946–1989', in *Istoricheski pregled* 1–2 (2002): 137–57.

[20] Ivailo Znepolski, *Balgarskiat komunizam* (Sofia: IIBM, 2008), 175.

[21] Iliana Marcheva, 'Predizvikatelstvata na modernizaciata v Balgaria sled Vtorata svetovna vojna', *Novo vreme* 1 (1995): 47–60. Iskra Baeva and Evgenia Kalinova, *Balgarskite prehodi 1939–2005* (Sofia: Paradigma, 2006).

[22] Iliana Marcheva, *Politikata na stopanska modernizacia v Balgaria po vreme na Studenata vojna* (Sofia: Letera, 2016).

[23] Krasimira Daskalova, Tatjana Kmetova (eds) *Pol i prehod 1938–1958* (Sofia: CIPZ, 2011); Krasimira Daskalova, *Zheni, pol i modernizacia v Balgaria 1878–1944* (Sofia: Kliment Ohridski, 2012).

[24] For example, Aleksandra Petrova i dr., *Varhu hrastite ne padat malnii. Komunizmat – zhitejski sadbi* (Sofia: IIBM, 2007).

[25] Elitza Stanoeva, *Sofia: ideologia, gradoustrojstvo i zhivot prez socializma* (Sofia: Prosveta, 2016).

[26] Elitza Stanoeva, 'Exploring Holiday: Bulgarian Tourism in the Scandinavian Market in the 1960s and 1970s', in *Tourism and Travel during the Cold War*, ed. Sune Bechmann Pedersen (London: Routledge, 2020), 23–46.

[27] Ivajlo Najdenov, 'In the world of the Krăstich brothers, merchants from the town of Svishtov: entrepreneurial culture, business practices, ethics and mentality', *Istoricheski pregled*, 75, 1 (2019): 57–84.

[28] Elena Alexandrova, *Disciplina i vsekidnevie v politikata na VMORO (1893–1912)* (Sofia: Ivrai, 2020).

[29] Maria Alexandrova, 'Popular urban music in Bulgaria in the 1920s', *Istoricheski pregled*, 76, 4 (2020): 34–71; Maria Alexndrova, 'Popular music in Bulgaria in the 1930s (part 1)', *Istoricheski pregled*, 77, 3 (2021): 86–135; 77, 4 (2021): 55–101.

[30] Stefan Ivanov, 'Intentional homicides in Bulgaria (1944–1989)', *Istoricheski pregled*, 78, 2 (2022): 58–91; Stefan Ivanov, 'Criminal agents in Bulgaria (1944–1989)', *Istoricheski pregled*, 78, 4 (2022): 79–108.

[31] For example, Stefan Detchev, *Politika, pol, kultura* (Stara Zagora: Kota, 2010).

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Indeed, most of these new approaches did not attack the national narrative and preexisting paradigm. One master-narrative of the 'History of Bulgaria' was upheld by mainstream historians and nationalist politicians. It described how a homogeneous Bulgarian ethnicity was created in the ninth and tenth centuries, survived the Ottoman domination and, during the period of 'Bulgarian Revival' in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it formed the basis of the modern and contemporary Bulgarian nation. This narrative has prevailed and been disseminated across the education system and media. It was no coincidence that, almost two decades ago, Ulf Brunnbauer expressed his concern that the orientation of innovative historians to marginal life experiences could leave important issues of historical science to be resolved by retrograde historians in a conventional way.[32]

Beyond the Nation, Beyond the Left and Right

Nevertheless, in the last ten years and more the national narrative, although considered sacred in the mainstream historical institutions, has been challenged by a number of historians, whose new approaches also moved beyond the post-communist left-right controversy.[33] Bearing in mind the prevailing attitudes in the historical guild, this was not an easy task. In 2008, Plamen Mitev, the Vice-Dean and future Dean of the Faculty of History at the University of Sofia, had an interview with the extreme nationalist and anti-Semitic newspaper *Ataka* (named after a far right political party already represented in parliament). Irritated by the liberal and cosmopolitan trends at the time and completely in tune with the parahistorical tendencies in the public sphere, he pointed out how the historian's task is to emphasise and promote the contribution and achievements of 'Bulgarian civilisation' among the public. For this task, it was particularly important for nationalist historians to spotlight the 'Bulgarian Revival' as the period when the Bulgarian literary language matured, and when the struggle for church independence and political separation from Ottoman rule gathered pace. Yet, such an instrumentalised history has provoked countervailing scholarship which has, among other things, pointed to the importance of the Ottoman reform context, cast doubt on the very existence of a canonical singular 'national history', and interrogated the influential thesis that Bulgaria's participation in the First World War was an effort aimed only at 'national unification'.[34]

The emergence of these new trends also made it easier to tell the truth about the policy of assimilation towards Bulgarian Muslims and Turks between the early 1960s and the late 1980s. This policy, cynically called 'the Revival process', which had been supported by some of the leading lights in the historical profession, involved forcibly changing the names of Muslim citizens, outlawing the wearing of Muslim clothing and repressing the use of Turkish. Nevertheless, there were some ongoing attempts to quell, apologise for, and even invent resistance and dissent among the Bulgarian intelligentsia and prominent scholars against the change of the names of the Turks in Bulgaria.[35] However, R. Avramov published a huge and well-backed monograph on the economic aspects of this policy. He did not hesitate to call what was happening 'a criminal act of the Bulgarian state against some of its own citizens'.[36] The responsibility of historical science and education for what had happened was analysed by me in two texts that traced the construction of the proto-ideology of the policy of assimilation of Muslims and Turks in Bulgaria,[37] and the participation of historians in its practical implementation.[38]

[32] Ulf Brunnbauer, ed., *(Re) Writing History: Historiography in Southeast Europe after Socialism* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2004), 29.

[33] Stefan Detchev, ed., *V tarsenena balgarskoto. Mrezhi na nacionalna intimnost* (Sofia: Institut za izsledvane na izkustvata, 2010). See more analyses in Stefan Detchev, *Skritata istoria. Polemiki* (Sofia: Paradox, 2019), 36.

[34] Martin Valkov, 'Mezhdu nacionalno obedinenie i zavoevatelna vojna', *Anamneza* 1 (2018): 1–47.

[35] Mihail Gruev and Alexey Kalionski, *Vazroditelniat process: Mjusjulmanskite obshtnosti i komunisticheskija rezhim* (Sofia: Ciela, 2008).

[36] Roumen Avramov, *Ikonomika na Vazroditelniq process* (Sofia: Centar za akademichni izsledvania, 2016), 10.

[37] Stefan Detchev, 'Balgarskata istoriografia i protoideologijata na taka narechenia Vazroditelen process', in *Nasilstvenata asimilacia na turcite v Balgaria 1984–1989*, ed. Roumen Avramov (Sofia: CAS, 2019), 15–42.

[38] Detchev, *Skritata istoria*, 109–27.

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As far as going beyond the national framework, one cannot get away from the Bulgarian-Macedonian historical dispute that has already become the subject of recent European Union activities. At present, the vast majority of the population in the Republic of North Macedonia feel themselves to be ethnic Macedonians and believe in their centuries-long separation and uniqueness from the Bulgarians. On the contrary, throughout Bulgaria the vast majority of the population with roots in Macedonia considered themselves Bulgarians, as is the case with those living in Bulgarian Pirin Macedonia as well. These groups on both sides of the border illustrate the successful nation-building efforts of the authorities in Skopje and Sofia in recent decades.

However, the problem really stems from the existence of two stabilised national narratives, which conflict with the reality that is revealed by modern historical science. Nevertheless, a possible consensus could be formed if the findings of contemporary historiography, as well as those of the contemporary social sciences and humanities, were more widely recognised. Then Bulgarian and Macedonian historians could agree on the dynamic nature of identities, the modern nature of nations, the different medieval realities, the artificial process of standardisation of each language and so on. By and large, historians from both sides could agree also on the 'common history' related to the fluid indentities of Revival period elites and revolutionaries from Macedonia, who transitioned from a Bulgarian ethnic national identity into a separate, Macedonian one (which was formed later). Nevertheless, the Bulgarian side would also have to admit the gradual maturation of Macedonian identity during the interwar period, the complex and dynamic picture in Macedonia during the Second World War (1941–4), and the predominance of Macedonian identity during the war years.

In the last decade more definite judgements have been pronounced about the nature of the regime in Bulgaria in the second half of the 1930s and the beginning of the 1940s. Although the discourse about an authoritarian, non-partisan regime in which the king personally selected the governments persisted, its extreme nationalistic and discriminatory nature, the penetration of fascist individuals into the government, its anti-Semitic legislation and its responsibility for the deportation of the Jews from the 'new lands' were no longer omitted.[39] Challenging the thesis about the 'salvation' of the Bulgarian Jews during the Second World War, R. Avramov brought up the fact that the anti-Semitic legislation of 1940–41 led to the total suppression of Jews' civil rights, their eviction, and a brutal exploitation of their economic resources.[40] As a sequel, he and Nadia Danova published two huge volumes with authentic archival documents about the deportation of 11,343 Jews from the Aegean Thrace, Vardar Macedonia and Pirot by the Bulgarian occupation authorities. In both of their prefaces, the authors spoke overtly about Bulgarian responsibility and complicity in the deportations.[41] It was no coincidence that Ivan Ilchev, the rector of the University of Sofia, banned the publication of the collection, despite the large amount of parahistorical literature published by the university publishing house in these years. Thus, the collection was published by another publishing house.

Going beyond the post-communist left-right controversy of interpretations and the canonical judgements of the time 'before and after the Ninth', we also saw the emergence of the thesis of continuity between the communist regime and the authoritarian rule that prevailed for a decade before 1944. R. Avramov pointed out how the coup's leaders could benefit from an already very nationalised and communal economic mentality,[42] while Al. Vezenkov also found continuity in the conscious adaptation of a number of management practices from before, the restrictions on acquiring residence in Sofia from July 1942, and discrimination against university candidates for political reasons since the autumn of 1943.[43]

[39] Vezenkov, *9 septemvri 1944*, 120.

[40] Roumen Avramov, *'Spasenie' i padenie. Mikroikonomika na darzhavnija antisemitizam v Balgaria 1940–1944* (Sofia: Kliment Ohridski, 2012).

[41] Nadia Danova and Roumen Avramov, *Deportiraneto na evreite ot Vardarska Macedonia, Belomorska Trakia i Pirot* (Sofia: Obedineni izdateli, 2013).

[42] Roumen Avramov, *Stopanskijat XX vek na Balgaria* (Sofia: CLS, 2001); Roumen Avramov, *Komunalnijat kapitalizam*. t. 1–3 (Sofia: CLS, 2007).

[43] Alexander Vezenkov, 'Za nenormaliziraneto na komunizma', in *Balgarskiat komunizam. Debati i interpretacii*, eds. Diana Mishkova and Mihail Gruev (Sofia: Riva, 2013), 262–3.

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As a continuation of this approach, the same balance was sought in the assessments given for the communist period, which went beyond the clichés of 'prosperity under socialism' and 'how advanced we were before the Ninth'. This historical research that questioned the caesura pre- and post-1944 is of crucial importance. It contains the potential to reshape future new approaches and perspectives towards modern and contemporary Bulgarian history as a whole.[44] As a result, it could Europeanise the still 'provincial' and isolated historical academic mainstream, and inspire a generation of young professional historians.

Conclusion

Surveying developments in Bulgarian historiography in the early twenty-first century, a number of experts were quite sceptical that any decisive change had really occurred. Yet by the start of this decade it is incontrovertible that new topics, issues and fields have emerged. These include microhistory and everyday experiences regarding gender and sexuality studies. But, perhaps most crucially, the main paradigm of the national narrative has already been overhauled, at least within certain circles of Bulgarian historians. Their works show a clear understanding of nation and national identity as modern phenomena, as well as demonstrating an enlightened understanding of race, gender and sexuality. Last but not least, such works highlight the importance of cultural transfer, which calls into question the very ideological conceptions of 'national traditions' and 'national culture' propagated by leading lights within the Bulgarian historical profession.

The great questions of Bulgarian history are no longer a subject reserved only for a few dominant historical institutions. On the contrary, it has been demonstrated in these pages that most historiographical advances have taken place outside of them. Status quo historians still continue to control tightly a number of institutional levers – including funding for science; the Ministry of Education and Science and history curricula; and the history programmes on the main television stations and programmes. It is not a coincidence that in many of the above mentioned cases, the innovators are those who have not received a bachelor's or master's degree in Bulgarian historical institutions, including Evg. Radushev, R. Avramov, Ch. Marinov and El. Stanoeva. Though there are also Bulgarian-educated historians such as R. Daskalov, D. Mishkova, Al. Vezenkov, St. Detchev and M. Valkov who are a part of this shift, they have significant international scholarly experience. Although such historians have a marginal status in the Bulgarian context, viewed from an outside perspective they seem to represent the professional mainstream in Bulgaria. At the same time, unfortunately, historical education in Bulgarian universities is still quite inert and closed to methodological innovations from other disciplines.

[44] Znepolski, *Balgarskiat komunizam*, 236, 248, 255, 271. In this case the authors referred to Ivailo Znepolski, ed., *Istoria na NRB* (Sofia: IIBM, 2009); *NRB ot nachaloto do kraja* (Sofia: Siela, 2011) and the 'alternative canon', Kalinova Baeva, *Balgarskite prehodi*… R. Avramov also spoke about the menace for new indoctrination. Roumen Avramov, 'Dvajset godini sled tova', in Gruev Mishkova, *Balgarskiat komunizam*, 236–7.

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