

# COURAGE

Cultural Opposition: Understanding the Cultural Heritage of Dissent in the Former Socialist Countries

## *Country Reports*



# BULGARIA

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## Abstract

This report explores the context of researching opposition under state socialism in Bulgaria, with a particular focus on cultural opposition. After a brief discussion of the development of research on state socialism and dissent in Bulgaria, it presents the major institutions involved in researching and documenting the socialist past. It highlights the importance of the legal and political framework. It argues that Bulgaria, in contrast to other post-socialist countries, lacks a strong government-initiated engagement with the socialist past. This is why there are not specialized public research institutes for that purpose. On the other hand, the lack of political intervention also means that there are no dominant interpretations imposed on scholars. The second part of the articles analyses public and private efforts to maintain the material legacy of cultural opposition. It describes the Bulgarian collections in the EU funded “COURAGE” Project, which deals with the history of cultural opposition in state socialism. These collections are an illustration of the wealth of artefacts on dissent that should be maintained and prepared for research. The authors conclude with recommendations, such as the necessity to provide more financial means to preserve this heritage.

**Key Words:** Bulgaria, state socialism, opposition, dissent, memory, historical research, collections, archives

## 1. Introduction

Just after the COURAGE project started, the Bulgarian National Assembly on 23 November 2016 passed the Bill for a “Law on the Removal of Communist Symbols” (*Zakon za premahvane na komunisticheskite simvoli*) in the first reading. One hundred and four deputies voted in favor, forty-six against, and three abstained. According to the bill, symbols that celebrated the communist system would be banned in the public space. Its sponsors claimed that in this way, the many victims of communist rule would be accorded tribute. The law would have made the removal from the public eye of monuments, sculptures, signs, paintings and photographs, produced during and in order to commend communism, mandatory. Such images and objects would be moved to the “Museum of Socialist Art” (a small such museum exists, as part of the National Gallery in Sofia).<sup>1</sup> The law would also prohibit the public display of signs that showed the communist period in the “wrong” light and of symbols endorsing the activities of the Bulgarian Communist Party. If it appeared impossible to remove a monument, an information plaque would be allocated to it for the time being. The text of the plaque would read: “The communist regime from September 9, 1944, to November 10, 1989, and the activities of the Bulgarian Communist Party, have been declared a crime by a law passed by the 38<sup>th</sup> National Assembly.”

This legislative initiative triggered a lively yet short-lived debate about how to deal with the socialist past. The conservative sponsors of the bill claimed that the communist regime had been criminal and responsible for massive violations of human rights. Left-wingers deplored the law as an attack on the freedom of speech, or as an attempt to falsify history. More reasoned voices pointed to the impracticability of the bill, whose vague language made it next to impossible to implement as it failed to define which symbols were communist and thus should be removed. Some observers ironically suggested that major buildings constructed during state socialism, such as the National Palace of Culture in Sofia or the socialist town of Dimitrograd, as well as whole factories and residential neighborhoods, would have to be eradicated as well, since they reminded people of the achievements of socialism.<sup>2</sup>

The bill never made it through a second reading and thus did not become law. Hence, the original law, which it was intended to amend, remained in place. In 2000, parliament had passed the “Law on the Declaration of the Communist Regime in Bulgaria as a Criminal.”<sup>3</sup> This law was sponsored by conservative deputies who had taken note of similar initiatives elsewhere in eastern Europe. The first article of the law states that the rule of the Bulgarian Communist Party had led the country “into a national catastrophe”. It accuses the communist regime of deliberate mass violations of human rights, of initiating the “economic decline of the country”, of destroying the “traditional values of European civilization”, of uninterrupted terror, of the “destruction of the moral values of the people”, of “environmental vandalism”, etc. The whole regime was thus declared to be criminal and the Bulgarian Communist Party was

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<sup>1</sup> <https://nationalgallery.bg/visiting/museum-of-socialist-art/>.

<sup>2</sup> <http://skandalno.net/закон-срещу-комунизма-приеа-герб-и-рб-172913>.

<sup>3</sup> Published in *Durzhaven vestnik*, no 37, May 5, 2000.

defined as a criminal organization. Article 4 declared that all citizens who had opposed the regime and its ideology were “just, morally right and deserve respect.”

While the law had no legal consequences and – except for episodes such as the attempted amendment in 2016 – remained a more or less dead document, it is illustrative for the difficulties Bulgarian policymakers face when addressing the socialist past. There is a notable disconnection between the increasingly nuanced scientific treatment of this period and the polarized, black-and-white approaches of most policymakers and newspapers. For them, the interpretation of communist rule more often than not is a tool of identity politics – in lieu of substantial programmatic disagreements, the attitude towards communism represents a litmus test for the right-left divide. Accusations that individuals were informants for the notorious State Security service have been repeatedly used as a political weapon (though voters have not seemed to care much). Policymakers have not only disagreed on the interpretation but also on the means of how to deal with the communist period.

This lack of consensus and political will has had institutional consequences and impeded an informed public debate about the nature of state socialism outside scholarly circles: neither has a special public institution to study the socialist past been created, nor is there a museum devoted to this topic. It took until 2007 – and pressure by the EU during the accession negotiations – for citizens and researchers to obtain access to former secret police files (see below). The government even failed to create a genuine memorial complex on the Danube island of Belene – the location of the most infamous labor camp under Bulgarian communism (next to that at the Loveč stone quarry). The country, thus, has hardly any official *lieux de memoir* for the period of state socialism and the victims of state suppression. Only the conservative government of Ivan Kostov made a real effort: a memorial complex was erected in the centre of Sofia in front of the socialist-era National Palace of Culture in 1999. It commemorates the victims of the communist regime (the so-called “Memorial Wall and Chapel in Memory of the Victims after 1944”).<sup>4</sup> Every year on September 9, the day on which the “Fatherland Front” took power in 1944, a commemoration and religious ceremony is held there. The same government, albeit with difficulty, had the Dimitrov Mausoleum in Sofia blown up in 1999.<sup>5</sup>

Hence, when discussing efforts to preserve and study the memories of opposition and dissent, we need to take into account the effects of political disinterest. Initiatives to build up collections, create memorials or establish specialized research facilities, usually cannot count on support by the state, neither on the local nor the national level (Bulgaria has no substantive regional policy-making level). They might find the backing of politicians with their own agenda but no systematic institutional interest in dealing with the socialist period beyond political debates. On the positive side, there is little evidence of a systematic instrumentalization of the past by anti-communist forces, as can be observed in countries such as Hungary and Poland where right-wing regimes are crudely re-writing history. The lack of systematic policies may also create openings in the absence of firmly established paradigms that constrain initiative. However, this also translates into a substantial lack of funding for historical research

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<sup>4</sup> “Bulgarien”, in Kaminsky et al, *Museen und Gedenkstätten*, 60.

<sup>5</sup> Todorova, “The Mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov,” 377–411.

which is even more troublesome in view of the fact that Bulgaria is the poorest country in the EU and its government operates with limited budgetary possibilities.

## 2. Contexts

### 2.1 Researching Opposition under State Socialism

After the end of communist rule in November 1989, Bulgaria, like the other formerly socialist countries, experienced an explosion of interest in the “true” history of socialism. While much of this public thirst to learn about the communist past was satisfied by journalists and publicists with an emphasis on sensationalist revelations (and new mystifications), and by “old” communists justifying their deeds in memoirs, serious research on previously forbidden or taboo topics soon began as well. These researchers benefitted from the opening of archives, which included access to material of the Bulgarian Communist Party (whose archive had been moved to the State Archives) and the Ministerial Council up until 1989. To date, many important aspects of communist rule and the changes in Bulgarian society under it have found meticulously researched treatment.

An important initial focus of the critical reassessments of communist rule was its establishment and its early years. Was communism “only” an import imposed by the Soviet Army or also based on local traditions? How violent was the “Revolution of the 9<sup>th</sup> of September”? Well-known contemporary historian Nikolay Poppetrov, together with Pavlina Meshkova and Dinyo Sharlanov, produced for example a well-documented account of the infamous People’s Courts, which in the early years of Fatherland Front rule sentenced almost 3,000 people to death, among them many members of the pre-September 1944 political elite.<sup>6</sup> Martin Ivanov wrote an early account of armed resistance against communist rule which lasted until the 1950s, opening up a theme that in the next years would find repeated treatment.<sup>7</sup> Another important episode of early communist rule, which had triggered opposition and renewed state repression and that now found scholarly treatment, was collectivization. In the early 1990s, it was studied by Vladimir Migevev.<sup>8</sup> All these works were thoroughly researched using the newly gained access to archives. More recently, Aleksandar Vezekov produced a powerful account of the events at, and leading to, September 9, which in communist mythology was the day of revolution.<sup>9</sup>

In general, a lot of research interest was devoted to exploring political oppression and resistance. This was not only conditioned by the wish to establish a revisionist, or anti-communist, narrative but also by the traditional focus of Bulgarian historiography on political history and by the understandable urge to uncover events, which had been “forbidden” until

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<sup>6</sup> Poppetrov et al., *Bălgarskata gilotina*.

<sup>7</sup> Ivanov, “Goryanskoto dvizhenie,” 74–80.

<sup>8</sup> Migevev, “Kolektivizatsiyata,” 53–83. ; *ibid.*: Migevev, *Kolektivizatsiyata na bălgarskoto selo*.

<sup>9</sup> Vezekov, *9 septemvri*.

1989. While some of these works came to questionable conclusions, for example by exaggerating the numbers of victims or by using problematic terminology (“genocide”), they substantially increased the available evidentiary basis. In this regard, document editions contributed greatly, for example the important series “The Archives Speak” by the Central State Archive in Sofia. New evidence helped not only to uncover previously unknown phenomena but also to produce more nuanced narratives and to move to new approaches, stimulated also by the increasing international cooperation of Bulgarian historians.

While during the 1990s research on opposition focused especially on the early years of communist rule, the time frame but also the thematic scope was largely extended in the 2000s. Natalia Hristova, the pre-eminent Bulgarian expert on dissent, published her seminal book on the “Specificities of Bulgarian ‘Dissent’” in 2005.<sup>10</sup> Her book refutes the assumption that there was no “dissent” in Bulgaria – an idea also promoted by former members of the State Security service – while making clear that dissent in Bulgaria adopted very specific forms (which can be said about any country). Hristova stressed that not only the specific nature of communist rule had impacted on forms and expressions of opposition but that also pre-communist cultural and intellectual traditions played an important role. Her book offers a broad tableau of intellectuals, artists, journalists, and scholars who challenged, in very different ways, either the political premises of communist dictatorship or its claimed monopoly on the production of meaning. A particularly important innovation is her highlighting the many grey zones between affirmation and dissent. The party leadership drew the lines of the (un)acceptable differently and not all censors were able to see the critique expressed in-between the lines. An intellectual or artist could find some of his or her work praised and other banned – as shown by one of the collections described in COURAGE (Binka Zhelyazkova Collection).

Some personalities associated with opposition against communist rule attracted particular attention, most of all Bulgaria’s best-known dissident author, Georgi Markov, who was murdered by the Bulgarian secret police in his exile in London.<sup>11</sup> Another focal point of research investigated developments in the late 1980s, when critical individuals began to form informal but publicly visible organizations. The probably most numerous opposition group comprised parts of the Turkish minority that resisted forced assimilation in the late 1980s, also triggering support by critically minded Bulgarian intellectuals.<sup>12</sup> The first “public” dissident committee, the Club for the Support of Openness and Reconstruction (*Klub za podkrepa na glasnostta i preustroystvoto*), is frequently mentioned in literature on the end of communist rule; scholarship also stresses the role of Zhelyu Zhelev, one of the leading dissidents at that time and first non-communist president of Bulgaria after 1989.<sup>13</sup> The nascent ecological movement that started in Ruse in 1988 and then developed into the *Ekoglasnot* organization, and first steps towards independent trade unionism (*Podkrepa*), have been covered as well.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the notion of Bulgaria as the “most quiet barrack” of state socialism, which actually had been nourished by the communist regime itself, has been fully refuted.

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<sup>10</sup> Hristova, *Spetsifika na bälgarskoto “disidentstvo”*.

<sup>11</sup> Hristov, *Ubiyte “Skitnik”*.

<sup>12</sup> Angelov, *Borba bez orazhie*.

<sup>13</sup> Hristova, *Spetsifika na bälgarskoto disidentstvo*, 141–7.

<sup>14</sup> Dimitur, *Politicheskoto protivopostavyane*, 124–39.; Aleksandrieva et al., *Nezavisimo sdruzenie Ekoglasnost*.

While much of the mentioned literature focuses on more or less well known personalities, there was also a noteworthy trend to reconstruct the life-worlds of ordinary citizens in order to understand popular accommodations with, and everyday subversions of, communist rule. This research has been strongly inspired by oral history and ethnological methods, and included historians, ethnologists and sociologists. One center of oral history research on Bulgarian socialism emerged at the University of Sofia's Department of Cultural Studies (*Kulturologiya*). Daniela Koleva, for example, showed how official tropes shaped biographical narrating as well as how individuals asserted their own interests.<sup>15</sup> The second center was established at the South-West University of Blagoevgrad, where an interdisciplinary group of enthusiastic scholars and their students embarked on large-scale oral history recordings, which were often published and used for analysis (their activities are described in the collection "Everyday Life in SW Bulgaria during Socialism").<sup>16</sup> One of their main achievements was to record the mundane experiences of marginalized groups, especially the Muslim and Roma communities in southwestern Bulgaria. Research conducted by ethnologists, especially at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences' Institutes for Ethnology and for Folklore Studies contributed importantly to the extension of interest towards perspectives "from below" and to everyday life under communism. Another valuable source of information on everyday life in – but not limited to – state socialism is the private "Ivan Hadzhiyski" Institute for Sociology in Sofia. It was established in 1997 and collects diaries, memoirs, autobiographies, letters and other ego-documents.

The research on mundane practices of "ordinary" people highlighted the inappropriateness of binary visions of state socialism. Few people were in either total opposition or total conformity. It also showed that cultural opposition was not confined to intellectuals and artists, who more or less openly criticized the government and challenged its aesthetic or political norms. "Ordinary" people resisted official cultural norms as well without necessarily challenging the underlying political principles. Karin Taylor for example showed that one could be a good young communist but at the same time engage in alternative youth music culture.<sup>17</sup> Not only in the arts but in much of everyday life, life moved between zones of acceptance and conformity on the one hand, and of re-appropriation, manipulation and the refutation of official norms on the other. Research approaching its themes both 'from the top' and 'from below' has created, therefore, a nuanced picture of dynamic and ambivalent everyday cultural practices.

It has become clear that the state tried to use culture to build legitimacy but that at the same time, culture remained a contested field. Ivan Elenkov's comprehensive account of the "Cultural Front", in which he analyses the institutions and instruments used by the state to enforce its monopoly on meaning, clearly showed how important culture was for the communist government.<sup>18</sup> History writing during communism also came under investigation, because history was one of the main legitimizing devices used by the communist government. Communists understood very well that those who control the past also control the future. Already in 1995,

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<sup>15</sup> Koleva, Daniela: *Biografija i normalnost*.

<sup>16</sup> Vodenicharov, *Iskam chovekat.*; Vodenicharov, *Moeto dosie.*; Koleva, *Släntseto na zalez pak sreshtu men*.

<sup>17</sup> Taylor, *Let's Twist Again*.

<sup>18</sup> Elenkov, Ivan: *Kulturniyat front*. Sofia, 2012.



the grand dame of Bulgarian Historiography, Vera Mutafchieva, co-edited a collection of documents on the party's attempts to bring historians in line.<sup>19</sup> The past also played an important role in Ludmila Zhivkova's idiosyncratic cultural policies, which combined an opening towards the world with an increasingly patriotic but also esoteric message. Her policies and personality found repeated interest by scholars.<sup>20</sup> This episode also showed the double-edged nature of official cultural policies: they imposed certain interpretations but also created opportunities for critically minded intellectuals who were able to exploit the umbrella of patriotic rhetoric for their own messages. Official nationalism also produced critical narratives. Research has convincingly shown that in the field of culture, boundaries between opposition and affirmation were blurred and volatile.

This research, thus, is a powerful warning against interpretations that paint the period of state socialism only in black and white. Real life was more complicated than that, and official politics more variegated and flexible than it might seem at first glance. Nevertheless, the Bulgarian "*Historikerstreit*" about the "correct" version of socialist history has been characterized by attempts to come up with one single narrative, which often suffers from a certain teleology.<sup>21</sup> More generally, the field can be divided into two groups: on the one hand, those scholars who stress the oppressive nature of Bulgarian communism and the interventionist nature of the state. This current also tends to regard the communist period an economic failure. The well-known philosopher and founder of the Institute for the Study of the Recent Past, Ivaylo Znepolski, is probably the most influential representative of this current.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, there are narratives that stress the modernizing nature of communist rule and its socio-economic achievements (which are often measured against the rapid economic decline and social malaise of the 1990s), without ignoring the fact that it was a dictatorship. Iskra Baeva and Evgeniya Kalinova, in their seminal book on the Bulgarian transitions, have produced the most eloquent and best researched overview in this vein: they detail repression but also stress the socio-economic achievements of the period.<sup>23</sup> Corresponding with these Bulgarian accounts are works by foreign historians, which highlight complex state-society interactions as defining features of state-socialism.<sup>24</sup> Less nuanced are publicist and Internet forums to deal with the communist part, some of which display a high degree of nostalgia whereas others engage in crude anti-communism.

The nuances, shades and ambivalences as well as the stubbornness of individuals and their creative tactics in challenging a powerful state, such as those that emerge from the descriptions of collections in the Bulgarian section of the COURAGE database, can serve as a good example – and as empirical material – for a history of state socialism that highlights ambiguity

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<sup>19</sup> Mutafchieva, *Sădăt nad istoritsite*.

<sup>20</sup> Baeva, *Kulturnoto otvarjane*.

<sup>21</sup> Vezenkov, "Za nenormaliziraneto na komunizma," 245–273.

<sup>22</sup> Znepolski, Ivaylo. *Bălgarskiyat komunizăm*.

cf. also the multi-faceted collection Ivaylo Znepolski, ed.: *Istoriya na Narodna Republika Bălgariya. Rezhimat i obshtestvoto*. Sofia 2009.

<sup>23</sup> Baeva, *Bălgarskite prehodi*.

<sup>24</sup> An attempt at that direction is Ulf Brunnbauer's book on the societal policies of Bulgarian communism from 1944 to 1989, which was translated also into Bulgarian: Brunnbauer, Ulf. "Sotsialisticheski nachin na zhivot. Ideologiya, obshtestvo, semejstvo i politika v Bălgariya, 1944–1989". Ruse, 2011.

and complexity. The collections also put historical agents very much at the center of attention: they stress alternative outcomes of history and the power of humans to change things and challenge the status quo, instead of telling the story with a preconceived end-point in mind.

## 2.2 Institutions and Legal Foundations of the Preservation and Interpretation of the Past

In Bulgaria, there is no single specialized public institution devoted to the research of state-socialism, comparable to such institutions in Germany, Poland, Romania and the Czech Republic. This reflects the fact that despite political polarization over the use of the socialist past, society and government do not consider the socialist era as a “big” issue that warrants special treatment. The significant nostalgia for socialism, as measured in polls and evident from ethnographic surveys, takes any political urgency from official efforts to revisit the socialist past – most people probably just do not want to do it. In 2002, Daniela Koleva summarized the state’s attitude: “The Bulgarian state (unlike others, e.g. neighboring Romania) has been dealing with its recent past quite hesitantly. The trials against former communist leaders failed, lustration laws have been applied on a very limited scale (in university education and partially in the juridical system).”<sup>25</sup>

It is telling, therefore, that the single most prolific institution studying the history of state socialism is a non-governmental academic initiative, the Institute for the Study of the Recent Past (*Institut za izsledvane na blizkoto minalo*).<sup>26</sup> The institute was established by the philosopher Ivaylo Znepolski in 2005 and is funded mainly by donations and project grants. The Institute runs the most important book series in Bulgaria specialized on the exploration of the socialist past (in partnership with Ciela Publishers). It has published several seminal books on repression and opposition, and how cultural life developed between these poles. A good example is Plamen Doynov’s discussion of the paradigm of Socialist Realism in Bulgarian literature and how it was challenged by writers (2011) and his book about literary scandals during communist rule (2016);<sup>27</sup> another excellent publication on culture during state-socialism published by this institute is Ivan Elenkov’s book “Cultural Front” (2008), and his last book on socialist everyday life (2018).<sup>28</sup> Not least, the institute’s director has contributed to the understanding of Bulgarian communism with important publications.<sup>29</sup> Another important center for research on the socialist period is the privately run Center for Advanced Studies (CAS) in Sofia.<sup>30</sup> The CAS facilitates academic and public debates on state socialism. In its book series, it publishes important studies such as Rumen Avramov’s book on the disastrous economic effects of the so-called “Rebirth Process”, i.e. the forced assimilation of the Turkish and other Muslim minorities.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Koleva, “Belene”.

<sup>26</sup> <https://minaloto.bg>.

<sup>27</sup> Doynov, *Bălgarskijat sotsrealizăm.*; Doynov, *Literatura na sluchaite*.

<sup>28</sup> Elenkov, *Kulturniyat front.*; Elenkov, *Orbiti na sotsialisticheskoto vsekidnievie*.

<sup>29</sup> E.g. Znepolski, *Kak se promeniat neshtata*.

<sup>30</sup> <http://red.cas.bg/news.php>.

<sup>31</sup> Avramov, *Ikonomika*.

The lack of state-run institutes commissioned to explore the socialist period is evidence of the lack of political consensus on the best ways of how to deal with the past. On the positive side, this also means that scholars can engage with studying the socialist period without the straightjacket of an institution that was commissioned by the government to establish the “truth”. Neither is there in Bulgaria a state-run museum devoted to the socialist period: here, exhibiting socialism depends on individual initiatives (see for example the COURAGE registry entry on “Forms of Resistance in Fine Arts”). There is a plurality of voices and no state-sanctioned display of just one possible interpretation. One downside of this – probably due to neglect and not intention – liberal approach by the state is that local initiatives to commemorate repression and build memorials often face financial problems. Daniela Koleva comments that: “Commemoration of its victims remained largely limited to the sporadic activities of political and civic organizations, and monuments to them were left to the discretion of local authorities in response to civic initiatives.”<sup>32</sup> The developments on the location of the former labor camp on Belene Island are a good illustration of this. This camp is probably the best-known place of memory of massive repression and human rights violations under communist rule in Bulgaria. Yet, initiatives to create an appropriate memorial so far have been organized only by private groups (such as the Union of Repressed People and the Belene Island Foundation).<sup>33</sup> None of these initiatives have received substantial government support. Hence, there is no large-scale documentation center in Belene. Similarly, the modest memorial (plaques) in the equally notorious former labor camp in Lovech is a testimony of the state’s lack of interest to honor the victims of communist rule.<sup>34</sup>

While the Bulgarian state has so far failed to establish specialized research or commemorative centers dealing with state-socialism and opposition to it, it has taken measures to preserve documentary evidence (mostly in the framework of “regular” archival work). The Law on the National Archival Fond of 2007 created a new legal framework for the preservation of documents stemming from public authorities and the work of state archives, building on previous legislation. At the helm of the system of state archives, it established the “Archives State Agency” that carries out the state’s objectives in the field of archival documentation.<sup>35</sup> The Agency is responsible for a well-organized network of two central and 27 regional state archives, which existed already before the new law. The Central State Archive in Sofia also holds the archives of the Bulgarian Communist Party, which were declassified already in 1993.

State policies relating to archives do not especially target the socialist period, but the established framework has made it possible to safeguard “official” documentary heritage. It also gives archives enough space – though not funding – to set out their own programs. Access is handled relatively liberally. The archives hold invaluable information about the institutions of communist rule and their interaction with citizens, including information on opposition and dissent. The vast archives of the Bulgarian Communist Party, of the Fatherland Front and of the Ministerial Council, kept at the Central State Archive in Sofia, are indispensable for any

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<sup>32</sup> Koleva, “Belene”.

<sup>33</sup> See <http://beleneisland.org/>; <http://pametbg.com/index.php/bg/mesta-na-pamet/belene>.

<sup>34</sup> See Kaminsky, *Museen und Gedenkstätten*.

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.archives.government.bg/index.php>.

historical account of state socialism. The same can be said of the archives of local authorities and the local branches of state-wide organizations kept in the regional state archives, which are usually well organized. Naturally, given the pedigree of most documents preserved in a state archive, the authorities' perspective dominates. Yet, state archives also collect private legacies, among them of dissidents and critical artists, such as Blaga Dimitrova, Todor Tsonev, Zhelyu Zhelev, Radoy Ralin, etc. (See also the Petko Ogoyski and Hristo Ognyanov collections described in the COURAGE registry, all kept by the Central State Archive in Sofia).

The existence of functioning state archives is essential for the professional maintenance and registration of documents (although, because of underfunding, this is not always the case). They make these documents accessible to readers under transparent conditions, in accordance with the Law on Access to Information and with other normative rules. Thus, they fulfill vital services for the research community but also for the public (e.g. citizens tracing back ownership in order to reclaim nationalized properties). Not least, state archives enrich our knowledge about the past through their own publications. Especially noteworthy is the series "The Archives Speak", launched by the State Archive in 1998, which includes volumes of importance for the exploration of communist rule and opposition against it. The series, for example, helped to put into the public domain important documents on topics that were "prohibited" before 1989, such as armed resistance against communist power (vol. 64, *Goryanite*) and the forced assimilation campaign against Bulgaria's Turkish minority (vol. 55, *Văzroditelniat protses*).

A major development in the accessibility of documents concerning communist repression and opposition was the opening of files from the Interior Ministry and especially its infamous State Security service, the former political police. In Bulgaria, that process took much longer than, for example, in neighboring Romania or in Germany, not least because there was no official lustration. Eventually, in late 2006, the parliament passed a law establishing a new archive with probably the most unwieldy name ever invented for such an institution: "Committee for Disclosing the Documents and Announcing the Affiliation of Bulgarian Citizens to the State Security and the Intelligence Services of the Bulgarian People's Army", the Bulgarian abbreviation of which is equally catchy, *KRDOPBGDSRSBNA*.<sup>36</sup> The Committee, colloquially called *Comdos* (Committee of Dossiers), started operations in April 2007. It serves two main purposes: to carry out lustration procedures in connection with people seeking an elected office or an important public function and to provide citizens with access to "their files".<sup>37</sup> Researchers can access documents on institutions as well. Surprising for a Bulgarian institution charged with such a sensitive task, the Committee has so far operated without any significant scandals, which speaks of the high level of professionalism and dedication of its staff.

Comdos has substantially increased knowledge about the workings of the State Security service and its attitudes towards dissidents.<sup>38</sup> It has initiated new research on communist rule. Secret police files not only allow us to reconstruct how the state identified opposition and

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<sup>36</sup> [https://www.comdos.bg/Нормативна\\_основа](https://www.comdos.bg/Нормативна_основа).

<sup>37</sup> See Troebst, "Vergangenheitsbewältigung auf Bulgarisch."

<sup>38</sup> Eg. Metodiev, "Darzhavna sigurnost."

how it traced suspected individuals (see the collection “State Security and the Bulgarian Intelligentsia” in the registry); they also contain abundant information on the everyday transgressions of “ordinary” people at the workplace, in public and in their private lives; and they help us to understand the epistemology of the communist state: what did it perceive as problematic, how did it construct truth, and how was information managed (and invented)? Comdos also launched its own book series publishing selected and annotated documents on specific themes (“From the Archives of the DS [State Security]”), which now runs into more than 40 volumes.<sup>39</sup> The series has become another essential tool for the study of the socialist period and especially its political history.

Other important reservoirs of information and artifacts from the socialist period are the archives of major cultural institutions. The National Library (*Narodna biblioteka*) in Sofia, for example, is supposed to receive a copy of each print publication in Bulgaria; during communism, it had a hidden fund of “forbidden” literature – illustrative of censorship practices. It has a collection of *samizdat* publications, described in the COURAGE registry. The Bulgarian National Film Archive (*Bălgarska natsionalna filmoteka*) holds a vast collection of movies and materials about their production and reception, documenting the vitality of Bulgarian cinema during the socialist period. Cinema became an important medium for the articulation of veiled – or not-so-veiled – critique of socialist conditions and of contradictions between ideology and reality. This is exemplified in COURAGE by the Binka Zhelyazkova collection. An important source of information on developments in the sphere of science during socialism is the archive of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.<sup>40</sup> It holds, for example, many personal legacies of Academy members and its scientists, which help to uncover the strategies of scholars as they navigated between “official” truths and scientific scrutiny.

These important state institutions are not exactly lavishly funded. Comdos’ budget, for example, was set at 3.48 million Leva, i.e. 1.7 million Euros, in 2018. Some of these institutions also lack storage capacity, so that the Central State Archive, for example, is forced to use storage outside its main building. However, these institutions are able to at least fulfill their primary functions to the public and even develop dissemination activities on their own. This cannot be said of most of the private collections, almost all of which struggle with severe financial problems and face more existential questions. They often lack the capacity to professionally maintain their contents, not to mention substantial dissemination activities. A sad but illustrative example is the uncertain fate of the highly interesting Tower Museum built by dissident writer Petko Ogoyski (see the COURAGE registry). Ogoyski donated the exhibition materials to the local Cultural Community Center “Napredak”, which operates under the umbrella of the Ministry of Culture. However, it lacks the means to maintain or even develop this important initiative (at the moment of writing, there are discussions at the town hall about how the collection may be better preserved and presented in a new building).

Bulgaria has not established a working system of providing financial support – neither on a grant nor institutional basis – to such initiatives. The state seems not to feel responsible for

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<sup>39</sup> [https://www.comdos.bg/Нашите издания/sbornitsi](https://www.comdos.bg/Нашите_издания/sbornitsi).

<sup>40</sup> <http://archiv.cl.bas.bg/>.

nourishing and supporting private initiatives, and actually struggles to provide enough financial support to its own cultural institutions. Given the budgetary constraints faced by the central and – even more so – local governments in Bulgaria, and the lack of genuine political engagement with the socialist past, this bleak situation does not come as a large surprise and offers little hope for future improvement.

Existing legislation even supports “public-private partnerships” with regard to the preservation of documents. The above-mentioned archive law includes the provision that the Archives State Agency and its structures will methodologically support private archives and control the “observation of the provisions of this law” (Art. 38). Private archives must, for example, register “documents concerning the history of Bulgaria” with the Agency (Art. 36). However, it seems that these provisions so far exist only on paper – despite the declared goodwill of the Agency, whose experts are ready to support private collection. Nevertheless, the state archives are busy enough maintaining their own core activities under conditions of scarce funding and have few effective resources to support private archives. Owners of the latter, on the other hand, seem usually not to take the existing law into consideration – and most likely do not know of it. The law also suffers from the extremely vague definition “documents concerning the history of Bulgaria”, which can cover practically anything gathered in private collections. Collectors can be forgiven for being reluctant to register such documents with the State Agency, as they fear to lose control over them. There is also hardly any systematic exchange of information and networking between state and private archives. At least the latter problem can be alleviated by COURAGE.

### 3. Analysis of the Collections in the COURAGE Registry

#### 3.1 Typology

The description of Bulgarian collections in COURAGE neither covers all collections of potential relevance nor does it aim to be representative in a statistical sense. The goal was to include particularly important and insightful collections on the one hand, and to represent the scope of oppositional phenomena and of initiatives to maintain memory on the other. We, therefore, aimed at showcasing the most important types. The Bulgarian collections (see appendix) present a number of important categories and types of collection concerning cultural opposition. First of all, they highlight the fact that both different state institutions and private actors (associations and individuals) have initiated and own collections. Seven of the described collections were organized by public institutions, while seven were created by private initiative and are owned privately (one moved from private to public). Public can mean different things: collections emerging from the legally stipulated mission of a state-run institution (such as an archive), or exhibitions organized by the curator of a public gallery on his/her own initiative, for example; further, ad-hoc collections described for the purpose of the COURAGE registry by putting together thematically coherent materials that are not stored separately. The described collections also differ substantially in size – from very small, literally housed in the attic of a private home, to the largest archives in Bulgaria. We also tried to achieve a geographic spread: Bulgaria is a very centralized country and Sofia hosts almost a fifth of the country’s

citizens and most of its national cultural institutions. Yet, there was cultural opposition also outside of the capital city – and collection initiatives as well. So, while eight collections are located in Sofia, five were included from other parts of the country. One collection (on the resistance of the Turkish minority against forced assimilation) is located abroad (in Bursa, Turkey). It is the so far sole illustration of another important feature of opposition against communist rule: it was not limited to activities in the country but had a strong transnational element, not least because people who were forced to leave continued their struggle against communism from abroad.

The described collections represent the broad range of possible items handed down from the past: archival documents, *samizdat* and official publications, movies and audio materials, physical artifacts, transcripts and more. They include materials that survived as a legacy from the socialist period, and others (interviews) created through the initiative of scholars or activists. Maybe most importantly, they highlight the different arenas where cultural opposition was expressed (be it in literature, painting or filmmaking, or through religious, minority or environmental activism); the different genres and media used to express critical attitudes; and the variety of people and interests involved both in the practice of opposition and its documentation. Taken together, the described collections are a powerful manifestation of the variations, ambivalences and differences of human experiences under state socialism.

### 3.2 Themes, Actors, Users

The collections from Bulgaria in the COURAGE registry do not aim to impose “the truth” about the socialist period and dissent. The aim is to present the manifold forms of cultural opposition, to increase the possibilities for comparison and to link collections with research efforts and make them known to a wider public. While the selection of Bulgarian collections does not allow for a genuinely sociological survey (e.g. of ownership patterns), it does indicate the huge variations that exist in collecting practices.

A remarkable communality of the collections described in the registry is the fact that most of them came into existence thanks to the tireless efforts of individuals. As mentioned above, in Bulgaria there exists no state institution charged with the task of researching state socialism and, in particular, of documenting dissent and opposition. The only institution that comes close to such an official mission is the so-called Committee of the Dossiers, but this does not specifically explore cultural opposition. More characteristic are individual efforts, be they by a specialist in the national archives, a curator at a city gallery, a former dissident putting together his own museum, or the daughters of a stubborn, independently minded teacher of literature in a provincial town. What unites these initiators is not only their general belief in the importance of freedom, but also their wish to preserve traces of the past that hint to the existence of alternative futures and show the power of individuals in challenging undemocratic governments. Their energy in a way seems to be driven by the lack of “official” policies in this field and to act as a substitute for state neglect; on the other hand, the sustainability of their efforts is certainly endangered due to the lack of state support, especially for private initiatives.

The selection of collections for Bulgaria followed two main criteria: firstly, to present the diversity of institutions and collectors; secondly, to present different arenas, genres and forms of cultural opposition. Overall, the achievements in collecting, storing and promoting material pertaining to the socialist period in Bulgaria can be seen as substantial. The leading role belongs to state “institutions of memory”: the Archives State Agency (ASA), the National Library “St. Cyril and Methodius” (NLCM), and the Bulgarian National Film Archive (BNFA). Pursuant to the Law on the Compulsory Deposit of Printed and Other Works and the Law on the National Archival Collections, these institutions store large material resources relating to the development of culture during the socialist period. They also undertake research activities and, within their limited financial resources, purchase new materials. The registry includes several collections from these organizations devoted to notable critics of communist rule and the realities of state socialism, such as the collections on Hristo Ognyanov and Zhelyu Zhelev at the State Archive in Sofia<sup>41</sup> and the ad hoc collection on Binka Zhelyazkova at the BNFA. These collections reveal expressions of counter-adaptive or corrective positions in several cultural fields: journalism, philosophy, and cinema. They highlight the importance of exile (Ognyanov) and the potential political pathways of dissidents (Zhelev).

So-called ad hoc collections were created in the process of describing collections. They refer to short-term events (which did not result in a physical collection or refer to documents stored in an archive, but not in a single coherent collection. An example for the former is the exhibition “Forms of Resistance” held at the Sofia City Art Gallery in 2016 – the paintings shown as examples of deviation from Socialist Realism are now back with their owners. An example for the latter is the “collection” of banned newspapers and *samizdat* journals kept at the National Library. While it does not exist as a separate collection, the COURAGE entry “Only the forbidden newspapers will be remembered!” (a quote from an interview with a repressed editor) brings them to life. Thus, our collections put artifacts into new contexts and create relationships that open new perspectives on the history of cultural opposition.

Some of the collections give a good overview of how the Bulgarian Communist Party tried to maintain absolute control in the sphere of culture. This was not only the task of the secret police but included the establishment of economic dominance and institutional structures. The collections reveal how the Bulgarian government followed the Soviet model of organizing culture, which aimed to establish state ownership over all cultural institutions. The centralized state founded institutions with a clearly hierarchical structure in order to act as gate-keepers. Professional associations, such as the Bulgarian Union of Writers, the Union of Bulgarian Artists, etc. were placed under direct party control and were charged with distributing material privileges to their members but also to act as overseers. Meanwhile the state tried to liquidate private initiative in the cultural sphere.<sup>42</sup> The collections contain examples of penalties imposed on recalcitrant writers and artists by the state, such as expulsion from the BCP and from

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<sup>41</sup> As with collections in the State Archive, not all relevant are yet accessible, because they are still being processed. The personal funds of intellectual dissidents such as Radoy Ralin and Todor Tsonev are not yet open for use.

<sup>42</sup> Elenkov, *Kulturniyat front*.



professional unions (which amounted to prohibition on carrying out an artistic profession). Protagonists of our collections were subject to bans on displaying their work; they experienced dismissals and other forms of censorship.

The State Security service was one of the regime's main instruments of maintaining control over intellectuals who were always suspected of being potential critics of the government. The collection of the Commission for the Disclosure of Documents and Announcing the Affiliation of Bulgarian Citizens with the State Security and Intelligence Services of the Bulgarian People's Army (the so-called Commission on Dossiers) gives insight into the recruitment of members of the intelligentsia. In some cases, cooperation with the State Security service was voluntary, based on "patriotic grounds". But there are also examples of people being solicited on the basis of threats to discredit them or their family. The small private collection "Seeds of Fear", for example, shows how authorities exerted pressure on the immediate family of people classified as politically "unreliable" or as "enemies of the people".

Still, the collections give powerful evidence that despite surveillance and persecution, many people dared challenge state power through cultural means. The range of possible oppositional activities was broad. As stated by Teodora Panayotova, the initiator of one of the collections, opposition could be: "expressed through a series of inconspicuous acts, gestures and words, such as the unconventional reading of a work; an 'inappropriate' statement at a teacher's meeting; a reference to a forbidden fact or author in front of students; reading forbidden or semi-forbidden books with students; education in fearlessness and disobedience; the singing of Russian White Army songs; giving lessons for free, i.e. refusal to participate in the natural exchange of services for goods". Teodora Panayotova, together with her sister Boryana, created the family archive "Life Beyond the Pattern of Communism". Private collections also reveal diverse "seeds of courage and freedom", such as the efforts of individuals to defend their principles and faith. These took place in the framework of esoteric movements, such as the mystical "White Brotherhood" movement, or in the sphere of rock music.

These experiences should not be belittled as "just" personal stories.<sup>43</sup> Rather, they help us to arrive at a more complex and nuanced picture of socialist Bulgaria. Assessing communism requires self-critical consideration. Edvin Sugarev stated that we need to "destroy the Berlin Wall in ourselves". Despite the manifold examples of conformism and accommodation with the communist regime, this period can hardly be summed up as one marked by "indifference, cowardice and absurdity."<sup>44</sup>

One aim of the selection of Bulgarian collections in the registry is to highlight the plight of ethnic minorities and the activities of those who fought for their rights under communism. A private collection, so far unknown in Bulgaria and kept in in the Turkish city of Bursa, contains interesting material on one the most researched but also debated topics in Bulgarian historiography: the regime's attempt to assimilate the Turkish minority by force. The collection of more than 100 autobiographical video interviews documents the fate of Turks who fled the

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<sup>43</sup> Sugarev, "Berlinskata stena e oshte v nas."

<sup>44</sup> Ibidem.

country mainly in 1989. Some of the terms used by the collection's author, such as "namecide" and "ethnic genocide", may provoke heated responses. But it is important that the registry also documents the self-presentation of participants in cultural opposition – an interesting field of study in its own right. The registry is a source which, like any other historical source, must be subject to critical analysis.

In general, one of the aims of the Bulgarian collections is to shed light on lesser known moments of everyday life and forms of everyday opposition through lifestyles as documented, for example, in the collections "Everyday Life in Southwestern Bulgaria" and the "Roma Archive". Both were created by one of the first centers for oral history in Bulgaria, the NGO Balkan Society for Autobiography and Social Communication at the University of Blagoevgrad. These collections present the point of view of "ordinary people" from different religious and ethnic communities. The personal stories reveal little-known moments of everyday life, such as experiences of collectivization and resistance against it, or state encroachment on cultural traditions in villages and hidden forms of resistance. Especially valuable is the presentation of the daily life of the Roma minority, whose experiences are largely excluded from official historical narratives.

All Bulgarian collections reveal the constant pressure exerted by the state on free-thinking artists and intellectuals but also their practices of self-assertion and opposition. They reject the myth of the total obedience and conformism of Bulgarian intellectuals, which was purposefully created by the communist authorities. The collections also reveal new aspects of the emergence of mass protests and informal dissident organizations in the late 1980s. The collection "Ecological Protests against Chlorine Pollution" at the Regional Museum of History in Ruse shows how the activities of museum curators can lead to the enrichment of collections with new materials revealing new perspectives on well-researched phenomena.

It is also important to underline that all the represented institutions promote their collections by various means: they organize exhibitions, conferences, public presentations and seminars; they participate widely in media events and search for ways to attract young audiences and the general public. Private collectors are also increasingly showing trust in state institutions (archives, libraries, museums). Petko Ogoyski, who created his own "Tower Museum" with original artifacts from his incarceration in the Belene labor camp, is a case in point: he donated the bulk of his original documents to the Central State Archives in 2012. Many collection founders and collectors feel a sense of mission; they are developing numerous activities to promote the compiled knowledge, also by using new technologies. It is indicative that some of the collections – both private and public – reach a wide audience and in doing so stimulate critical thinking and public activism today when we "have crashed into one place, with (our) dreams broken", as two famous Bulgarian music journalists recently commented.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> "BG rokat na 80te paleshe revolyutsii. Intervyu na Iskra Krapacheva s Rumen Yanev i Emil Bratanov," *Standart*, June 7, 2015.

## 4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The collections described in the COURAGE registry (and those not yet described or not even known) are an impressive manifestation of the creativity and sheer will of individuals and groups to document and explore the socialist past, despite difficult framework conditions. The main challenge is obviously the lack of funds – not only a result of generally small public budgets but also of a lack of state interest in this specific area. Even with a little more support, much could be achieved. Hence, the list of recommendations must start with the most fundamental issue: money.

But there are also other areas of possible improvement, not all of which directly depend on increased funding (although this would certainly help, too). Our research has shown, for example, that there is little systematic networking between the collections and the responsible institutions, although people running these initiatives very often know each other (historians in Bulgaria are a community still widely based on personal connections). Better networking would not only help to circulate useful information and support processes of learning from each other but could also serve lobbying purposes. Not least, it might help to create firm collaboration that could be used for project applications, especially with respect to international (European) funding. Active networking would also increase visibility and, thus, help to identify previously unknown collections. Owners of materials worth preserving might be encouraged to either pass them on to a pertinent institution or even to build their own collection, if they see that there are experts to whom they can turn for advice. A recognizable community of individuals and groups, documenting the heritage of cultural socialism and organizing joint efforts, could stimulate new initiatives.

Given the limited financial means of many collections, dissemination is usually a problem. Some of them, such as the Central State Archives, Comdos and the Institute for the Study of the Recent Past, can afford to publish their own book series. The latter institute may be highlighted as an example of best practice for combining academic research and publishing with events that target academic and non-academic audiences, and initiate public debates. It is also a successful fundraiser. What seems to be lacking, though, is systematic communication between relevant collections and the research community. A possible model for this can be seen in the activities of the Blagoevgrad-based “Balkan Society for Autobiography Research and Social Communication” which created its own collection mainly out of oral history interviews (described as “Everyday Life in Southwest Bulgaria in Socialism” in COURAGE). It has developed novel research and dissemination activities on the basis of these interviews. The Society has continually found funds, many of them project-based, for conducting oral history research and preserving its results, and for carrying out research based on these materials. It is a good example, therefore, of the productive aspect of combining collection and research.

Based on these general remarks, we would like to present a short list of recommendations that we consider of primary importance:

1. In view of the importance of collective memory, and of the rootedness of collective identities in notions about the past, European programs should continue to provide support for collaborative projects in that area, in which partners from different countries work together. Since the humanities in “new member” and associated states face particularly difficult conditions, the European Union has a strong responsibility to nurture reflective programs in these countries.
2. Primary responsibility for funding historic research in Bulgaria, however, rests with the Bulgarian state. Public and private initiatives to document cultural opposition during socialism should receive more funding. The responsible authorities could, for example, earmark project funding to that purpose, while established cultural institutions should devote more attention to this topic.
3. Another area in which state institutions could be of help concerns providing advice and support to the organizers of collections with regard to European grants. Application requirements for European funding are usually so complicated that especially smaller and private organizations (though not only), face almost prohibitive barriers for submitting applications.
4. Collaboration is also a responsibility of those working in the humanities in Bulgaria: organizations and individuals active in exploring cultural opposition under socialism should more systematically interact and network. This would help information and experience to be shared more widely, and result in the provision of advice to government bodies in relation to how the state could best support such activities.
5. Collectors and institutions should do more to reach out to the research community, including students at university, in order to underline the importance of their materials for research. This would help increase the number of stakeholders and, through the presentation of research results, the visibility of such initiatives.
6. Attempts at cooperation between the State Archives and private collectors should be expanded and supported in order to provide the latter with the necessary expertise to safely preserve documents. Expert archivists could also advise on the systematic description of data, which should follow established standards.
7. One important area in which knowledge can be extended is the identification of existing materials that have not yet been described. The COURAGE ad hoc collections, for example, have achieved this. Archives and institutions should be encouraged to generate cross-collection descriptions of content on the theme of opposition under socialism, which would help to locate relevant materials.
8. Finally, little of the available legacy of opposition has found its way into museums, as the socialist period usually receives only scant treatment. The permanent exhibition of the Bulgarian National History Museum in Sofia, located in the former residence of

Todor Zhivkov, breaks off in 1946.<sup>46</sup> It should be a priority for museums covering general history to systematically include the socialist era, and to showcase its contradictions and ambivalences. The described collections contain enough material to generate a nuanced picture, extending the focus from “important figures” to “ordinary people”. The section on dissent in the European House of History in Brussels serves as a good example of how this history can be presented, using original materials from Eastern Europe in the socialist era. COURAGE will support such initiatives.

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<sup>46</sup> <https://historymuseum.org/en/exhibitions/permanent/>.

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## Appendix

### *Selected Further Reading*

*Research literature on the nature of the communist regime in Bulgaria, on culture and opposition, and on the memory of socialism.*

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## List of Collections

1. Binka Zhelyazkova Film Collection (Sofia) – <http://courage.btk.mta.hu/courage/individual/n33627>
2. Hristo Damyanov Ognyanov (Sofia) – <http://courage.btk.mta.hu/courage/individual/n4920>
3. Life Beyond the Pattern of Communism (Sofia, Chepelare) – <http://courage.btk.mta.hu/courage/individual/n11002>
4. Roma Archive Digital Collection (Blagoevgrad) – <http://courage.btk.mta.hu/courage/individual/n25058>
5. Seeds of Fear (Sofia) – <http://courage.btk.mta.hu/courage/individual/n30092>
6. Zhelyu Zhelev Collection (Sofia) – <http://courage.btk.mta.hu/courage/individual/n43477>
7. State Security and the Bulgarian Intelligentsia (Sofia) – <http://courage.btk.mta.hu/courage/individual/n8947>
8. Tower Museum of Petko Ogoyski (Sofia) – <http://courage.btk.mta.hu/courage/individual/n8041>
9. Ecological Protests against Chlorine Pollution in Ruse (Ruse) – <http://courage.btk.mta.hu/courage/individual/n6845>
10. Resistance of the Turkish Minority (Bursa, Turkey) – <http://courage.btk.mta.hu/courage/individual/n242>
11. Forms of Resistance in Fine Arts (Sofia) – <http://courage.btk.mta.hu/courage/individual/n31185>
12. Everyday Life in SW Bulgaria during Socialism (Blagoevgrad) – <http://courage.btk.mta.hu/courage/individual/n17193>
13. Only the Forbidden Newspapers Will be Remembered (Sofia) – <http://courage.btk.mta.hu/courage/individual/n17910>
14. The Word of Master Petar Danov (Varna) – <http://courage.btk.mta.hu/courage/individual/n17481>

### *List of operating institutions and owners*

- Archives State Agency, Republic of Bulgaria
- Bulgarian State Security
- Government of the Republic of Bulgaria
- Microfond Sofia Foundation
- Bulgarian National Film Archive
- CRDOPBGDSRSBNA (Commission for Disclosure of Documents and Announcing Affiliation of Bulgarian Citizens with the State Security and the Intelligence Services of the Bulgarian National Armed Forces, *Comdos*)
- Balkan Society for Autobiography and Social Communication
- Open Society Institute – Sofia
- Cultural community center "Napredak"
- Sofia Municipality
- Rousse Regional Museum of History
- St. Cyril and St. Methodius National Library
- Intelligence Services of the Bulgarian People's Army
- Sofia City Art Gallery
- Abagar Bulgarian Catholic Literary Archive
- "Neofit Rilski" Southwest University, Blagoevgrad

### *List of people researched*

- Aleksandar Dyakov
- Anastasia Nikolaeva Pashova
- Antonia Kovacheva
- Artum Dinç
- Atanas Vasilev Patsev
- Binka Dimitrova Zhelyazkova
- Boryana Panayotova
- Boyko Kiryakov
- Christo Vladimirov Javachef (Christo)
- Dimitar Vasilev Stoyanov
- Elena Yanakieva
- Embiya Çavuş
- Galin Malakchiev
- Georgi Eldarov
- Georgi Yordanov Bozhilov
- Hristo Damyanov Ognyanov

- Hristo Kostadinov Ganev
- Hristo Vatev
- Iskren Velikov
- Ivan Georgiev–The Rembrandt
- Ivan Manolov Petkov–Turkata
- Krasimir Iliev
- Kristina Miroslavova Popova
- Lika Yanko
- Marika Vladimirova Stoyanova
- Mariyana Piskova
- Milena Angelova
- Nikola Tanev
- Nikolay Nenov
- Nurie Muratova
- Petar Asenov Vodenicharov
- Petar Konstantinov Danov
- Petko G. Mihaylov Ogoyski
- Sevdalina Petrova Panayotova
- Teodora Panayotova
- Vantzeti Dimitrov Vassilev
- Vasil Georgiev Akyov
- Ventseslav Terziyski
- Vildane Dinç (Alieva)
- Vladimir Lyubomirov Levchev
- Yordan Radichkov
- Yulia Karadachka-Simeonova
- Zhelyu Zhelev
- Ziyatin Nuriev

Map: Location of the Bulgarian COURAGE Collections

