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SOME INTERNATIONAL ASPECTS OF THE BULGARIAN
COUP D'ETAT JUNE 9, 1923

After loosing the war in alliance with the central powers, Bulgaria carried out far-reaching changes in her foreign policy. "In the face of the decision-making European powers, i.e. Britain and France, the Bulgarian politicians tried to prove that they had learned the lesson of the past, and had convincingly entered a new path", wrote a historian.¹ As regards neighbours, efforts were made to show the will to friendly cooperation. It was not always easy, all the more so as the question of the economic access to the Aegean Sea, stipulated in the peace treaty of Neuilly, had not been resolved. The Bulgarian government often demanded the fulfilment of its rights and this strained the relations with Greece.

The foreign policy programme which was to take off the country's political isolation, caused by the previous war conflicts, was carried out primarily by Alexander Stambolisky, an outstanding statesman. He frequently declared—and undertook concrete measures to that effect—that he intended to execute the provisions of the peace treaty, although the consensus of opinion in Bulgaria had it that they were unfair and unjust.

It would seem that such foreign policy of a defeated enemy would not only be approved by the victors but also actively supported by them. This policy seemed to guarantee that in future Bulgaria would no longer be the hotbed of trouble in the Balkans. Actually, Stambolisky met with profound distrust, especially

¹ I. Dimitrov, *Bulgaria w polityce europejskiej między wojnami (wstępne wnioski)* [*Bulgaria in European Politics Between the Two World Wars (Tentative Conclusions)*]. "Studia z dziejów ZSSR i Europy środkowej", vol. XIV, 1978, p. 40.

in the capitals of the western powers. His home policies were criticised for fear that they would lead straight to bolshevism (there was talk about the "orange bolshevism" of the Bulgarian peasant leaders, hinting not only at the colours of the Bulgarian People's Peasant Union, but also at the fact that, after all, their radicalism was less dangerous than the Russian "red" bolshevism); they were also blamed for a leaning towards rapprochement with revolutionary Russia and thus for breaching the uniform front of the capitalist countries. Stambolisky's tour of European capitals in December 1920 and January 1921, during which he visited Warsaw, did not help much. Although he managed to overcome France's opposition to the admission of Bulgaria to the League of Nations, the states belonging to the Little Entente protested against the decision on this matter.² Stambolisky was aware of the importance of overcoming his country's isolation, so during his tour of Europe he often made statements sharply condemning the Soviet Russia. He was particularly emphatic in Poland whose armies had not long before been fighting on the eastern front.³ But the reaction was one of incredulity. Wincenty Witos, the principal leader of the Polish peasant movement, was also ill-disposed towards him.⁴

It is quite possible that the distrust was enhanced by the attitude of the Bulgarian opposition which, as time went on, became increasingly hostile to the peasant party government. Diplomats who lost their jobs and had friends in the diplomatic milieus in other countries did not mince criticisms and helped create an

² Excerpt from the report of the Polish Legation in Sofia, of December 14, 1920, Archives of New Records—further as AAN, Ambasada RP w Paryżu [The Embassy of the Polish Republic in Paris], 8, k. 5; Information Paper of the General Staff of December 15, 1920. AAN MSZ [The Ministry of Foreign Affairs], 216, k. 9.

³ Cf. the report of Consul Adamkiewicz who accompanied Stambolisky on his visit to Poland, and the appended summaries of speeches. AAN, Ambasada RP w Waszyngtonie [The Embassy of the Polish Republic in Washington], 210, k. 2 - 7.

⁴ Cf. Z. Hemmerling, *Wincenty Witos i Aleksander Stambolijski—działacze państwowi i przywódcy partii chłopskich w Polsce i Bułgarii* [Wincenty Witos and Alexander Stambolisky—Statesmen and Leaders of Peasant Parties in Poland and Bulgaria], in: *Polska—Niemcy—Europa. Studia z dziejów myśli politycznej i stosunków międzynarodowych*, Poznań 1977, p. 466.

unfavourable opinion about Stambolisky.⁵ The armed operations by various detachments on the Greek, Yugoslav and Roumanian borders, about which some diplomats said—groundlessly—that they were backed by the Bulgarian authorities, constituted an additional factor increasing the hostility and fears of the neighbours.⁶ Actually, the authorities were very much opposed to such actions, aware as they were of the possible consequences and the vulnerability of the country which in virtue of the peace treaty had been obliged to scale down its army to an insignificant size. Moreover, the Bulgarian People's Peasant Union and the government dominated by peasant leaders took steps to fight the terrorist grouping called the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation (WMRO) whose activities particularly worried Yugoslavia.

Neither should certain aspects of a rather personal nature be treated lightly, though they may seem of little importance. Stambolisky was brought up in a peasant family, in the peasant movement, and his manners as well as the way he conducted political talks differed widely from what the diplomatic circles of Paris and London were accustomed to. In his relations with people and in his behaviour he was closer to the politicians of revolutionary Russia than to the diplomats of the West-European countries. Many of them reacted with apprehension and dislike, he was probably treated as the personification of "Bulgarian barbarity" (the tone of superiority towards the Balkan nations is quite discernible in the British diplomatic correspondence), while the French envoy in Sofia, Georges Picot, became his personal foe.⁷ Among the enemies of the peasant party were people educat-

⁵ Cf. e.g. note of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, of March 29, 1921 (signed by Adamkiewicz) on the conversation with the former Bulgarian envoy, Madjarov.

⁶ Cf. the report of the Polish Legation in Sofia, of April 29, 1921. AAN; Ambasada RP w Paryżu, 8, k. 18 - 21.

⁷ "M. Picot's dislike of Stambolisky was due, among other things, to personal reasons, particularly because of the rough treatment he had experienced several times on the part of the former Prime Minister"—Report of the Polish Legation in Paris, of July 13, 1923. AAN Ambasada RP w Paryżu 8, k. 78. D. Kossev was right when he said that Stambolinsky's radical domestic policies, his behaviour towards the representatives of the traditional parties, etc. had dismayed the politicians of the western countries. D. Kossev, *Septemvrijskoto vāstane 1923*, Sofija 1978, p. 371. Cf. also annual report for 1923 by William Erskine, appended to that book (p. 681). The British envoy in Sofia, despite criticism, pointed to the virtues of Stambolisky as a statesman.

ed at West-European universities (Stambolisky was a graduate but he had read agricultural sciences not law) who felt quite at home in international diplomatic milieus.

It seems that the most distrustful were Roumanian politicians. They were afraid that the radical Bulgarian government might come to an understanding with the revolutionary Russia, which would entail the loss of some of the territorial gains made by Roumania out of the war. So Bucharest hinted that Stambolisky more or less secretly inclined towards communism.⁸ The information about communist influence at work on the Bulgarian government was also conveyed in the reports of Polish diplomats. Similar conclusions were drawn in European capitals from the fact that during the 1922 Genoa conference Stambolisky had talked with the Soviet delegates.⁹

In the studies conducted so far historians have remarked that Stambolisky's anti-communist policies, launched at the beginning of 1923, were prompted by internal considerations, by his wish to weaken the position of the most influential rival of the peasant movement at a time when, it seemed, the forces of the right had been disrupted.¹⁰ But it is just possible that the worsening of the relations between the Bulgarian Communist Party and the Bulgarian People's Peasant Union may have been due also to certain considerations of international politics. Stambolisky, who wanted to improve the relations with the northern neighbour, promised Bucharest to limit the communists' freedom of action,¹¹ so he eventually had to yield to repeated pressure,¹² or allow the

⁸ Report of the Polish Legation in Bucharest, of June 30, 1921. AAN Poselstwo RP w Atenach (Polish Legation in Athens) 43, k. 130. The Roumanian government was also uneasy about Stambolisky's reforms for they could have an impact on the mood of the population (D. Kossev, *Sep-temvrijskoto* . . . , pp. 379 - 380).

⁹ V. Božinov, *Bългария na konferenciite v Genova i Lozana (1922 - 1923)*, in: *Akademik Ch. A. Christov, Izsledvanija po slučaj 60 godini ot roždeneto mu*, Sofija 1976, pp. 317 - 318.

¹⁰ For instance, J. Mičev, *Fašistkijat prevrat na deveti juni 1923 godina i junskoto antifašistko vystane*, Sofija 1973, pp. 151 - 153.

¹¹ Cf. the report of the Polish Legation in Sofia, of January 17, 1923. AAN Ambasada RP w Londynie (Polish Embassy in London) 173, k. 2.

¹² But the envoy Grabowski thus commented on the policy hostile to the communists: "It is difficult yet to give a categorical answer to the question whether these intentions are sincere and durable[. . .]. But certain pointers seem to suggest that the peasant government is, if not willingly, then under the pressure of the communist-bolshevist action threatening

relations with Roumania to deteriorate. He had also to reckon with the fact that as long as Bulgaria had the reputation of a potential ally of Soviet Russia or her covert sympathiser, she would not be able to overcome the dislike of the western powers.

More friendly were the relations with Yugoslavia. There Stambolisky's resolute opposition to the operations carried out by the WMRO and his wish to end all the mutual antagonisms were properly appreciated. The Yugoslav politicians were favourably inclined towards Bulgaria during the discussion about the economic access to the Aegean.¹³ The Bulgarian-Yugoslav rapprochement was the origin of the apprehension on the part of Greek and Roumanian politicians who feared a strengthening of the international status of their defeated neighbour.¹⁴ On March 17, 1923, in Niš, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia signed an agreement providing for a mode of procedure in solving possible disputes.¹⁵ Among others, the communists opposed it. The agreement with Yugoslavia sharpened the conflict between the peasant party and the WMRO which treated as a traitor every politician who had decided not to use force in the efforts to tear Macedonia away from Yugoslavia.

The rapprochement with Yugoslavia was Stambolisky's only important achievement in his efforts to get Bulgaria out of her isolation and to overcome the general distrust.¹⁶ As far as can be

it, really beginning to understand the need to oppose it[. . .]. The origins of this new orientation are linked to a series of facts in the sphere of internal and external policies [..].” AAN Ambasada RP w Londynie 173, k. 6.

¹³ Cf. Documents of British Foreign Policy 1919 - 1939. First Series, vol. XVIII. London 1972, document No. 167.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, document No. 446.

¹⁵ I. Mitev, *Fašistkijat* . . . , p. 62.

¹⁶ J. Mitev wrote that the rapprochement with Yugoslavia made easier for Stambolisky the establishment of good relations with France (J. Mitev, *Fašistkijat* . . . , pp. 60 - 61). On the other hand, France was interested in the strengthening of her influence in Bulgaria, as follows from the appreciation compiled by the General Staff of the Polish Army (AAN MSZ 216, k. 10). The envoy Picot declared France's friendly feelings towards Bulgaria (report of the Polish Legation (in Sofia, of April 29, 1921. AAN Poselstwo RP w Atenach 44, k. 21 - 22). But they were accompanied by a firm dislike of the peasant party government, and this can be concluded also from the information supplied by the Polish envoy in Sofia that in the

judged from reports by Polish diplomats, in the spring of 1923, the diplomatic circles were convinced that the conflict between the peasant leaders and the communists was primarily of a tactical nature, Bulgarian and Soviet contacts being maintained behind the scenes and Stambolisky remaining a threat to the social order in the Balkans.¹⁷

This international position of Bulgaria created an exceptionally favorable climate for the conspirators who in the spring of 1923 were preparing a *coup d'état*. For they opposed a government which most of the neighbours and the western powers considered a disturbing element in European politics. Admittedly, the conspirators were in a difficult situation. The organisations which were getting ready to seize power were often critical of Stambolisky's recognition of the peace treaty provisions, and collaborated with the WMRO, although at the same time they proclaimed a peaceful programme and promised to respect the international agreements.¹⁸ The representatives of the victorious countries in the Commission for Control and Damages admitted that Stambolisky was absolutely loyal to the treaty obligations and that "no other government in Bulgaria would be so willing to fulfil all, sometimes even private, wishes of the Commission and its members".¹⁹ The only concrete argument against him was his supposed rather than real intention to establish closer relations with the Soviet Russia.

Thus, the cabinet of Alexander Tsankov, formed after the *coup* of June 9, 1923, had to expect serious complications, particularly in the relations with the neighbours. For whatever the

opinion of West-European diplomats Stambolisky's policy is hypocritical, "but there are no sufficient reasons for the overthrow of this government" (excerpt from the report of the Polish Legation in Sofia, of October 20, 1921. AAN, Ambasada RP w Paryżu, k. 169). This shows not that Stambolisky succeeded in establishing good relations with France but rather that France was inclined to tolerate a government by the peasant party when she saw no other solution.

¹⁷ For instance, the report of the Polish Legation to Roumania, of March 13, 1923. AAN Ambasada RP w Paryżu 8, k. 66 - 67.

¹⁸ Cf. e.g. the excerpt from the report of the Polish Legation in Sofia, of November 12, 1921. AAN, Ambasada RP w Paryżu 8, k. 42; R. P. Grišina, *Narodnijat sgovor i Konstitucjonijat blok prez 1922 g.*, in: *Akademik Ch. A. Christov, Izsledvanija* . . . , p. 300.

¹⁹ Excerpt from the report of the Polish Legation in Sofia, of October 20, 1921. AAN, Poselstwo RP w Atenach 43, k. 169.

opinions about the domestic policies and the supposed intentions of the peasant leaders, the fact remained that the cabinet formed by the conspirators had been supported by the extremely nationalistic and terrorist WMRO. The fears of a violent turnabout in Sofia's policies could be justified.

The first echos of the *coup* agreed with that. The formation of a new government was welcomed, first and foremost, by the German press which considered Tsankov a Germanophile and so his accession to power was thought to prove profitable to Germany.²⁰ Similar reactions were noted in Italy.²¹ But in Greece, Yugoslavia and Roumania opinions were decidedly unfavourable to the perpetrators of the coup.

Surprisingly, the new government received strong help from France. According to Tadeusz Grabowski, the Polish envoy in Sofia, Picot, the French envoy who previously used to emphasize France's interest in the Bulgarian-Yugoslav rapprochement promoted by Stambolisky,

"has played a considerable role in the strengthening of the position of the new government. Apparently, all the declarations were drawn up with his approval. He was instrumental in allaying the fears of Yugoslavia, and thanks to his influence the government is promoting a policy of greater reserve towards the Macedonians".²²

This information was confirmed in the report of the Polish embassy in Paris, which added:

"Picot is supposed to have been informed about the plans of the conspirators, which were established a year ago. Picot praised them, but their realisation had been postponed to make Stambo-

²⁰ Report of the Polish Legation in Berlin, of June 14, 1923. AAN Ambasada RP w Paryżu 8, k. 74 - 75. Cf. also D. K o s s e v, *Septemvris্কoto...*, pp. 399 - 400.

²¹ Cf. particularly I. Dimitrov, *Bálgaro-italjanski političeski otnošenija 1922 - 1943*, Sofija 1976, pp. 27 sqq.

²² Coded telegram of June 20, 1923. AAN Ambasada RP w Paryżu 8, k. 81. It should be added that Tsankov made a special effort to dispel the possible concern of France about the possibility of a new turn in foreign policy. Cf. D. K o s s e v, *Septemvris্কoto...*, p. 381. According to Roumanian information, Picot established contact with Tsankov immediately after the coup, earlier than any other diplomats. Erskine described the steps taken by him as barely decent (*ibidem*, pp. 392, 683).

lisky responsible for certain international agreements, particularly those concerning reparations".²³

It is difficult to appreciate the accuracy of the information conveyed by the Polish diplomats without consulting French diplomatic archives. But it seems fairly probable that Picot knew a great deal, although studies conducted by Bulgarian historians do not confirm some of the details (e.g. the reasons for postponing the *coup d'état*). Rumours about the plot had circulated in Sofia for a long time, they even reached Stambolisky, and there would be nothing strange in the French diplomat obtaining some detailed information from politicians belonging to the traditional right-wing parties, who took part in the preparations. When the coup proved successful, he tried to prevent its international consequences from becoming unfavourable to his country, all the more so as Stambolisky had been replaced by people with whom he shared ideas, social position and "good manners". It was also in his interest to somewhat exaggerate his role in the coup.

The attitude of Yugoslavia, for which the share of the WMRO in the coup was a serious warning for the future, could constitute the main problem facing the Tsankov government. Having taken over, the plotters wanted to dissociate themselves from the Macedonian terrorists and assured Yugoslavia that they wished to abide by the treaty of Niš, aware as they were of the importance of the reaction of the western neighbour.²⁴

According to information from the Polish legation in Belgrade, the politicians there had been aware for some time that a *coup d'état* was brewing in Bulgaria. But probably the preparations were not treated very seriously, for the June events came as a surprise.

"In the first days, the rather confused information about the new circumstances in Sofia caused the government to consider the need of defending the treaty of Neuilly and the advisability of supporting Stambolisky against the *coup* [...]. The rumours about the Bulgarian mobilisation seemed to warrant the assump-

²³ Report of the Polish Embassy in Paris, of July 13, 1923. AAN Ambada RP w Paryżu 8, k. 78.

²⁴ Telegram of June 20, 1923, *ibidem*, k. 81.

tion that the peace treaty was genuinely in need of defence. So the moment came when intervention was considered [...]”²⁵

But in practice Yugoslavia limited herself to diplomatic action, while the murder of Stambolisky by the conspirators, their relatively rapid mastering of the situation and the suppression of all resistance made any firm action impossible.²⁶

However, it does not seem that Yugoslavia would have intervened even if the conspirators did not dispose of the forces of the left so quickly. The attitude of France and the British intervention made difficult the taking of any steps against them, and the attitude of other states also prompted caution. Although the upheaval in Bulgaria strengthened cooperation between Greece and Yugoslavia, yet—as pointed out by the Polish envoy in Belgrade—“one must not forget that despite the friendly relations dictated by the circumstances, Greece, because of historical experience, has always been considered here an uncertain and unfaithful ally lacking, in addition, any considerable military value”.²⁷ The attitude of Greece turned out to be inconsistent. In the first days after the *coup*—on June 12—the government in Athens officially declared its intention to normalise its relations with Bulgaria. A few days later, probably fearing the nationalism of Tsankov’s government and influenced by Yugoslavia, the defences of the northern border were strengthened and the press launched a campaign against the perpetrators of the *coup*. This in turn caused an unfavourable reaction on the part of Great Britain, and it was under her pressure than on June 18, Greece officially recognised the Tsankov government.²⁸ This did not

²⁵ Report of the Polish Legation in Belgrade, of June 26, 1923, AAN Poselstwo RP w Atenach 46, k. 19. Yugoslavia undertook some military preparations, but stopped them following a serious warning by Britain. D. Kossev, *Septemvriskoto* . . . , p. 130.

²⁶ More about it in: Kumanov, *Jugoslavija i devetojunskejat prevrat prez 1923 godina*, “Vekove,” 1973, No. 5; D. Kossev, *Septemvriskoto* . . . , p. 402 sqq.

²⁷ Report of the Polish Legation in Belgrade, of June 21, 1923. AAN Poselstwo RP w Atenach 46, k. 30.

²⁸ M. Kumanov, *Bälgaro-gärcki otnošenija (juni 1923 - januari 1926 g.)*, in: *Bälgarija i evropejskite strani prez XIX - XX vek*, Sofija 1975, pp. 222 - 223.

mean that the fears of the Greek politicians had been dispelled, but irrespective of intentions and causes the gesture helped stabilise the government formed on June 9.

Yugoslavia's closest allies also maintained a discreet reserve. The Polish envoy in Belgrade reported :

"The Czechs made a rather spectacular declaration that, although they are not bound by a treaty, they will concur with all the political and diplomatic measures undertaken by Serbia ; yet, at the same time, Mr Šeba emphatically advised moderation and no far reaching commitment".²⁹

The same report contained sentences from which it might be inferred that the Polish diplomat had endeavoured to induce his Czechoslovak colleague to restrain Yugoslavia from any strong action in the defence of the overthrown government. The attitude of Czechoslovakia which was the strongest link in the Little Entente was certainly reckoned with in Belgrade.

Even more deterring was Roumanian diplomacy. Although the take-over had been greeted with apprehension because of the nationalism of the new government, yet Bucharest was covertly satisfied with the overthrow of Stambolisky. The take-over by the right did away with the fears of a Bulgarian-Soviet agreement. Moreover, the Roumanian politicians were glad that this would make impossible a Bulgarian-Yugoslav alliance which could lead to the emergence of a strong Slav bloc in the Bal-

²⁹ Report of the Polish Legation in Belgrade, of June 26, 1923, AAN Poselstwo RP w Atenach 46, k. 20. Cf. also V. A. Vassilev, *Bългарo-čehoslovaškite otnošenija pri fašistkoto pravitelstvo na Al. Cankov (9 juni, 1923 - 4 januari 1926 g.)*, "Izvestija na Instituta za istorija", vol. XXII, 1972, pp. 100 - 101. But it is difficult to consider Czechoslovakia's attitude as favourable to Tsankov dictatorship. After all, Vasilev himself remarked that in summer 1923 a strong and active centre of Bulgarian emigrés was formed in Prague, and that it was backed by Czechoslovak politicians. I am inclined to think that Czechoslovakia was under pressure from France and was afraid that Yugoslavia might involve herself in the conflict against the wishes of Paris. Cf. also D. Kossév, *Septemvriskoto . . .*, pp. 414 - 417. About Bulgarian emigrés in Czechoslovakia see *V borba na bratska zemja (spomeni na Bălgari komunisti i antifasisti v Čehoslovakija)*, Sofija 1976.

³⁰ The Polish envoy in Belgrade wrote even : "Mr Emandi, the Roumanian envoy, has frankly told me about his satisfaction at the end of the Bulgarian-Serbian flirtation based on the idea of Slavonic solidarity". Report of June 26, 1923, AAN Poselstwo RP w Atenach 46, k. 20.

kans.³⁰ The attitude of Roumania was also influenced by the policy of France.³¹

Belgrade also reckoned with Italy's attitude in the matter. The Polish envoy, August Zaleski, reported from Rome :

"Nowhere, perhaps, have the events in Bulgaria met with such universal understanding, even approval, as in Italy. The official and political circles as well as the press have unanimously given a verdict of not guilty for the authors of the coup and condemned Stambolisky's government".³²

The Polish diplomat saw the reason for such an attitude in the fears that Stambolisky could have achieved Bulgarian-Yugoslav cooperation and establish closer relations between Bulgaria and the Little Entente, and the Soviet Russia, thus standing in the way of Italian expansion in the Balkans and checking Italy's economic penetration into Bulgaria herself. No wonder that the Italian press accused Stambolisky of betraying his people and selling it out to the Serbs.

The Yugoslav press openly accused the Italians of help in the success of the take-over by, among other things, extending financial aid and protecting the terrorists of the WMRO. The political circles also suspected the Italians of supplying the conspirators with information about some of Stambolisky's plans, thus accelerating the *coup*; they also blamed them for influencing King Boris in favour of the perpetrators of the coup.³³ The Italians denied all these charges.³⁴

Great Britain was also basically favourably inclined towards the *coup d'état*. In London, politicians watched with apprehension the Bulgarian-Yugoslav rapprochement seeing in it a factor strengthening the French influence in the Balkans. They welcomed the events which could check such a development, irrespec-

³¹ Report of the Polish Legation in Sofia, of July 20, 1923, AAN Ambasad RP w Paryżu 8, k. 87.

³² Report of the Polish Legation in Rome, of June 22, 1923, *ibidem*, k. 83.

³³ Report of the Polish Legation in Belgrade, of June 26, 1923, AAN Poselstwo RP w Atenach 46, k. 21.

³⁴ Report of the Polish Legation in Rome, of June 22, 1923, AAN Ambasad RP w Paryżu 8, k. 84. About the role of the WMRO in Italian politics see I. Dimitrov, *Fašistka Italija i WMRO*, in: *Bălgarija...*, pp. 245 - 246.

tive of other reasons, but they waited with the recognition of the new government until it became more stable.³⁵ Possibly, there was yet another factor. The *coup* of June 9 came at a time, when in Lausanne the work on the peace treaty with Turkey was nearing completion.³⁶ The treaty provided for Turkey getting part of the territory of Thrace which Bulgaria had lost by the treaty of Neuilly and through which Bulgaria was to have the so called economic access to the Aegean. This problem was still unresolved. The provisions gave rise to many Bulgarian fears and protests. It was easier to persuade the new and still unstable Tsankov government to accept the territorial clauses which in reality put in doubt the possibility of getting economic access to the sea.

The attitude of Poland was of relatively little practical significance for Bulgaria's international situation and conformed to that of the majority of other countries. It was probably influenced by Witos's dislike of Stambolisky (in summer 1923 Witos was Prime Minister of Poland). The Polish envoy Grabowski, in a conversation with General Fitchev, said that "naturally the maintenance of a durable alliance with France on the one hand, and with Roumania on the other, was of basic importance". Concluding his report on this conversation he suggested the benefits for the Polish policies flowing from *the coup* :

"Namely, fairly clear prospects are opening before them for the strengthening, or at least protecting the Polish-Roumanian alliance in the south, and for the lengthening of the anti-Bolshevist bloc by kind of drawing Bulgaria into it, the latter having under the present government vigorously begun to eradicate Soviet propaganda [...]. There is also a good opportunity for Poland to play the part of intermediary between Roumania and Bulgaria, which with the present considerable chances of success would highly consolidate our prestige in both countries, and give us the opportunity of paralysing to some extent the dominating influence of Czechoslovakia in the Little Entente, and of

³⁵ Report of the Polish Legation in Rome, of June 22, 1923, AAN Ambasad RP w Paryżu 8, k. 84. For more about Britain's active support for the Tsankov government see D. K o s s e v, *Septemvrishtoto...*, p. 382 sqq. and 682 - 683 (Erskine Report).

³⁶ *Documents...*, First series, vol. XVIII, documents Nos 604 and 607.

overtaking her politically in Bulgaria [...]. This new phase in our Balkan policy creates for us a valuable bridge on the way to the Bosphorus and Turkey; a close relationship with the latter is in line not only with our national traditions but also with our political and economic interests".³⁷

The survey of the attitudes assumed by the particular European countries after the *coup d'état* in Bulgaria prompts a seemingly paradoxical conclusion that—despite various fears felt by some of them and conflicting interests—almost all were favourably inclined towards the government formed by the conspirators and that they greeted the overthrow of Stambolisky with varying degrees of satisfaction. All this happened despite the fact that Stambolisky's government had been very careful to fulfil not only in words but also in practice the provisions of the peace treaty, had been loyal to the victors, endeavoured to come to terms with its neighbours and opposed the WMRO. The most notable exception was Yugoslavia to which the take-over by Tsankov reopened the prospect of border disputes and the strengthening of Italian influence in the Balkans.

The motives behind those attitudes varied with particular governments. In some cases (especially in Italy) the politicians saw in the victory of the plotters an opportunity for drawing direct political benefits in the Balkans. But mostly the reasons for the friendly feelings towards the authors of the *coup* lay in the fear of the social radicalism of the peasant leaders. In spite of the declarations and assurances given by Stambolisky, in spite of the measures taken against the communists early in 1923, there was a widespread conviction that sooner or later radical Bulgaria would come close to revolutionary Russia.³⁸ In Poland and Roumania this aspect was linked with the prospect of immediate

³⁷ Report of the Polish Legation in Sofia, of July 22, 1923, AAN Ambada RP w Paryżu 8, k. 87 - 89.

³⁸ In the light of this I do not think that Kossev is right when he reproaches Stambolisky for a short-sighted policy (*Septemvrisikoto...*, p. 370) since it did not result in a Bulgarian-Soviet rapprochement. In the conditions prevailing at the time, it was difficult to count on effective Soviet help in the case of a conflict between Bulgaria and her neighbours who were worried over her pro-Russian policy; an anti-Bulgarian intervention by the western powers would have been more probable in such a case.

advantages which were possible if Bulgaria acceded to a policy hostile to the Soviet Russia. In the case of France it would seem that the attractiveness of Tsankov's anti-communist programme got the better of the fact that his victory had weakened France's position in the Balkans. Yet the forces which took over in Sofia on June 9, 1923, were dangerous to the neighbouring states in that they could one day put forward territorial claims and join the power which would attempt to cancel the peace treaties, despite all the declarations made immediately after the coup. This genuine danger seems to have escaped the attention of the majority of the politicians.

(Translated by Krystyna Dunin-Kęplisz)