The following publication presents part of the author’s research carried out under the Advanced Academia Programme of the Centre for Advanced Study Sofia. This programme is supported by the America for Bulgaria Foundation, Stifterverband für die Deutsche Wissenschaft and the Fritz Thyssen Foundation.
The concepts of translation and totalitarianism are not related in any way. Translation presupposes openness between languages and cultures; it is only possible when certain visible and invisible borders can be overcome. And totalitarian societies are principally closed, their permeability limited in both directions – it is difficult to go into them, and even more difficult to go out. The iron curtain limits not only the circulation of the physical bodies of their inhabitants, but also that of ideas, texts, voices.

And yet, we know this curtain was not absolutely solid. In the Eastern European countries, and particularly in Bulgaria, many foreign authors were translated, including contemporary Western authors, especially in the 1970s–1980s. Of course, their works were carefully selected, they were subjected to both hidden and overt censorship, and their print runs were limited. And still they reached readers.

But what happened in the opposite direction? What were the politics of literary translation from Bulgarian into foreign languages? And could we speak of ‘totalitarian translation’ in this case?

This term is used by Daniele Monticelli in his exploration of literary translation in Estonia under Soviet rule in the period 1940–1955, the time of “total Stalinism”. As Monticelli states, “I will use the term ‘totalitarian translation’ for the kind of situation where, firstly, translations have a strongly hegemonic position in book production, and secondly, only one source language and culture is absolutely hegemonic among translations.” This source language and culture are, of course, the Soviet-Russian. According to Monticelli, they were so strongly imposed over the domestic context that it was subjected to erasure and overscription; thus, these terms of Susan Bassnett and Lawrence Venuti appear in a reverse and negative way.¹

¹ "Contrary to Bassnett’s view, erasure is here directed against the domestic not the foreign context; contrary to Venuti’s view, overscription does not lead to a differentiation within the domestic community; overscription means rather the radical substitution of the domestic (in this case Estonian) culture, of its internal differences and manifold external influences, with a highly homogeneous foreign cultural pattern.” (Monticelli)
My initial hypothesis is that Monticelli’s term ‘totalitarian translation’ could also be productively reversed. It could be used not only for the distortion of the domestic context of a small Eastern European country under Soviet rule, but also for this same country’s politics of literary translation into foreign languages, and not only for the Stalinist period. My case study is Bulgaria.

This research necessarily combines translation studies with social history of the recent past. In order to get closer to what is at stake here, let’s start with a curious fact that is both funny and sad.

**A CURIOUS STATISTIC**

If someone would like to know which Bulgarian author is most translated abroad, there is one way to get a quick answer. He/she can open UNESCO’s Index Translationum (international database of books in translation) and in the 14th year of the 21st century would be astonished to find out that the most translated Bulgarian author is... Todor Zhivkov. The ex-communist leader’s 143 listed publications in numerous languages (English, German, French, Spanish, Italian, Turkish, Greek, Portuguese, Arabic, Russian, Polish, Hungarian, Czech, Serbo-Croatian) outnumber by more than twice any of the professional writers coming next in the statistics. (Bogomil Raynov with 60 and Pavel Vezhinov with 59 translated books.)

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<th>&quot;TOP 10&quot; Author</th>
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<td>1. Živkov Todor</td>
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<td>2. Vežinov Pavel</td>
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<td>3. Rajnov Bogomil</td>
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<td>4. Radčkov Jordan</td>
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<td>5. Dimitrov Georgi</td>
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<td>6. Stanev Emiljan</td>
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<td>7. Gančev Ivan</td>
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<td>8. Levčev Ljubomir</td>
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<td>9. Karalijčev Angel</td>
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<td>10. Elin Pelin</td>
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Of course, statistics are always relative. First, the on-line database of the UNESCO Index dates from 1979. This means that in our case it includes two totally different periods – the last decade of communism and the Transition – whose book publication mechanisms and information channels are completely different. So simply to sum up...
the results of these two periods would be misleading. Apart from this, the Index is far from being precise and full: there are many omissions, especially after 1989.4

And there is another important detail. Again according to the Index, the country most active in publishing translations from the Bulgarian is… Bulgaria. In this respect, the 'author' Todor Zhivkov is a representative case: almost all of his foreign-language translations (with only 13 exceptions) turn out to be 'homemade', and therefore, they also remain for 'home use'. Not that anybody in Bulgaria would read Zhivkov in another language. So these are a kind of mummy translations. Hence, the important question is not who is the most translated. Clearly, this picture is a consequence of the communist propaganda machine. Yet it is also clear that this consequence has lasted too long, almost a quarter of a century. We cannot ignore the creepy unheimlich feeling (the Freudian term fits perfectly here), as if we are still in the 1980s, as if the Transition had never happened, as if literature itself had never happened. This is another drastic example of erasure and overscription specific to certain cases of 'totalitarian translation' in foreign languages, though not for all Eastern European cases.

If we compare the Bulgarian Top 10 list to the most translated Polish, Czech and Hungarian authors, we will see, first, that there are no communist state leaders there at all (while there are two in the Bulgarian Top 10, with Georgi Dimitrov in 5th place), and second, that the numbers are much higher. The Polish Top 10 is headed by Stanislaw Lem with 632 books in translation, followed by Henryk Sienkiewicz with 454. The most translated Czech writer is Milan Kundera with 714 foreign titles, followed by Bohumil Hrabal with 382. The most translated Hungarians are Imre Kertesz with 241 translations and Sandor Marai with 228. In other words, these are all worthy combinations of contemporary and classic authors, with a considerable number of books abroad.5

**Obviously, literature in these countries manages to maintain significant autonomy and representativeness and to provoke significant international interest. Therefore, these literatures are rated exactly by their authors and works and cannot be easily topped – literally and symbolically – by the vanity and propaganda of an ex-totalitarian leader of a regime that has been gone for almost 25 years.**

Even Albanian literature wins a significant victory: the dictator Enver Hoxha (with 160 translations) remains firmly in second place after Ismail Kadare, with his 383 translations. Only the Romanian statistic looks similar to the Bulgarian, and it may even be more absurd. The Romanian Top 10 is irrefutably headed by Nicolae Ceausescu, with 414 translations (the second place is held by Mircea Eliade, with 166). The dictator's abundant export production was also published mainly in his home country by a Ro-

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4 No doubt the Index has many omissions and redundancies, yet it is the only database with such scope.


I’ve checked UNESCO Index while preparing the paper. The relatively slow accumulation of new translations has not changed the basic proportions regarding the socialist legacy in this field.
manian communist party publishing house. It seems that communist leaders weren't very keen to publish each other, since they had to print their works in their own countries even in the languages of the "sister nations".

Yet, the most ironic statistic seems to be the Russian one: Lenin (in first place with 3555 titles) turns out to be two times more translated than Dostoyevsky (in second place with 2331 translations). Ideological demons outstrip the author of "Demons".

**BRIEF HISTORY OF THE FIELD**

Bearing this statistical picture in mind, my research poses the following questions: how did translation and (literary) exchange processes function during socialism? What were the ruling mechanisms and institutions? What was translated; how was it published; where were the translations distributed, and to what extent? In other words, **how was the socialist "export canon" made, and was it actually exported?**

To this point, these problems have not been thoroughly researched. The period until 1962 has been studied in terms of bibliography in Veselin Traykov’s work, “Bulgarian Literature in Foreign Languages 1832–1962”, published in 1964. The period after 1989 is the focus of the recently published independent research, “Translation and Transition. Bulgarian Literature in Translation 1989–2010” (Next Page Foundation).6 There are also some separate surveys of the reception of Bulgarian literature in particular countries/languages written by foreign specialists in Bulgarian studies (as a branch of Slavonic studies).

The 1964 bibliography remains an indispensable reference. Along with this, it remains a telling document of its own time, when the state monopoly was imposed in the field of literary translation. The author’s foreword is written according to the compulsory teleological idea of progress and ever rising development. The years of the so-called People’s rule (after 1944) are rendered as the culmination of the entire researched period of 140 years. The primary emphasis is placed on the fact that translations into foreign languages increased significantly after the People’s revolution on September 9th 1944: “The comparison demonstrates that for 18 years after 9th September, about 4 times more translations have appeared than for the whole period of 120 years until 1944.” (Traykov, 10) This general conclusion is misleading, not least because it attempts to compare incomparable periods, including the pre-state Revival period (until 1878) of a still unshaped literary field and scarce translations, on the one hand, and, on the other, the period after 1944, totally regulated and fostered by the state. Apart from this, the statistics conceal the fact that **the rapid increase of translations from the Bulgarian after 1944 is provided by publica-

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6 [http://www.npage.org/article226.html](http://www.npage.org/article226.html) The results of this independent project include bibliography, case studies of translation from the Bulgarian in several countries/languages, and an overview text. As a co-author of this research, I came across many unknown facts and missing information concerning the previous two or three decades, which gave me the idea for the present research.
tions produced inside the country and never leaving its borders. This is another significant feature of ‘totalitarian translation’.

In spite of the new disposition of power, we should note that the most translated Bulgarian author before and after September 9, 1944 is one and the same – the classical Bulgarian writer Ivan Vazov. Veselin Traykov ascertains that, until the conclusion of the bibliography, 174 translated volumes of Vazov’s works were published. And the most translated book was Vazov’s classical novel, “Under the Yoke” (“Pod igoto”, first published in 1889–1890), which, by 1962, already had 66 editions in 31 languages. So, up to that time, socialist literature could not produce a more popular or more translated literary figure. Todor Zhivkov himself was still far from being a ‘best-translated star’. So, in contrast to the rapid distortion of the internal context, the Stalinist period in Bulgaria did not have the resources to change the existing picture of the external context of translations from the Bulgarian in foreign languages. This would happen later, in a more ‘liberal’ decades.

The recent research, “Translation and Transition”, outlines the new dynamics in the field of literary translation after the fall of the Berlin wall and the end of the state monopoly. The bibliography of translations in this period shows an abrupt shift of the former hierarchies and the appearance of new most translated authors whose reputations and careers are built after 1989.7

But the field of (literary) translation from the Bulgarian between the mid-1960s and the late 1980s remains fragmentary and chaotic. These are the times when the state propaganda machine works in full motion: cultural projects are developed with huge financial resources and aggressive ambitions for image making of the country and the regime abroad. At the same time, the cultural export remains clumsy, nationalistic, and out of date – something that remains typical for Bulgarian institutions. Yet the popular belief that exactly the state can and should do this remains unchanged after more than 20 years of transition to market economy.

The 1970s-1980s were exactly the time when the ‘author’ Todor Zhivkov was produced, and in such bibliographical quantities that placed him at the top of the Bulgarian canon in translation for all time. According to the National Library catalogue, his translated editions are over 600. The earliest one, as far as I could specify, is from 1956, in Turkish, published by the Bulgarian state publishing house, “Narodna prosveta”. But the larger part of these publications (about 500) accumulates after the 1960s.

So it turns out that the post-Stalinist decades were more totalitarian concerning translation in foreign languages.

7 http://www.npage.org/article226.html Georgi Gospodinov (1968) with 25 books in 16 languages and Alek Popov (1966) with 25 books in 12 languages. These were the results by the end of 2010; by 2014 Gospodinov’s languages of translation are already 23. But inside this dynamics, the totalitarian legacy prevails in the overall statistics.
**TYPOLOGY OF TRANSLATION CHANNELS**

We must specify at least three types of translation and publication channels in the communist period. As we saw, the greatest number of Bulgarian authors’ translations were published in Bulgaria by publishing houses founded especially for that purpose, such as the Agency for Book Publishing and Printing in Foreign Languages Sofia-Press, Sviat [World] Publishing House, Interpress, etc. The translated editions produced by these houses have representative, propaganda and souvenir functions. They reach Bulgarian embassies, they are given as presents on international meetings, etc. But in fact they remain empty bibliographic items without any consequence. They do not have market distribution in the countries (language territories) to which they are addressed, they do not reach readers there and there is no critical reception. Therefore, these publications never became part of the respective foreign cultural and literary context, which is the ultimate point of literary translation. They freeze into an expensive window display turned inwards instead of outwards. This simulacrum of translation demonstrates in a very clear way the enclosedness and self-isolation of the totalitarian regimes.

In other words, we should be aware that the direction of translation is not simply a matter of formal classification in totalitarian societies. The dichotomy of target language and source language specified by linguistics, semiotics, and translation studies for the sake of research and analysis, is closely related to the question of power in the totalitarian context, power over meanings and their dissemination. Texts translated from foreign languages, whatever these texts and languages are, are not very dangerous in a totalitarian country, because they can be easily controlled. Whether they have managed somehow to break through, or their circulation has been initially allowed, they can always be criticized, condemned, destroyed. Whereas the translations into foreign languages, especially into Western European languages, could easily get out of control. If these translations were published by foreign publishing houses, they would be distributed, read, interpreted in all possible ways. The solution is to print them ourselves here, so that they will exist and not exist; this is the tacit answer of the regime. It explicates the schizophrenic split between the urge for propaganda abroad and the fear of real communication.

The second circle of translations is within the boundaries of the Eastern Bloc through agreements between state institutions, planned mutual publications, etc. This is exactly the perimeter of the foreign careers of Bogomil Raynov and Pavel Vezhinov, the next two names in the Bulgarian Top 10 authors in translation. Both of them are popular among a wide reading audience and are tolerated by the regime. They have 59-60 foreign titles each, most of which were published in the USSR, the main recipient of translation from Bulgarian (after Bulgaria itself).
The fact that their books were subjected to planned translations does not mean they did not also find success among common readers. Pavel Vezhinov’s short novel “The Barrier” (“Barierata”, 1976) was a hit in the USSR. In 1961, his book “Far from the Shores” (“Dalech ot bregovete”, 1958) was published in a record print run of 500,000 copies in Moscow (a record for a translation from Bulgarian). Some of Bogomil Raynov’s novels appear in more than one edition, which is also an indicator of readers’ interest. Yet they remain popular only in the East. Despite their numerous ‘real’ publications abroad, both of these writers also have foreign translations printed in Bulgaria by Sofia-Press and Sviat publishing houses, including in Russian and other Eastern European languages.

Veselin Traykov, the bibliographer, was one of the first to point out the lavish lack of coordination between the different channels of translation. He mentions cases of duplication in which one and the same book was published by a Russian publishing house and by a Bulgarian publishing house for foreign languages in two different translations. At the same time, we should add, access abroad (within the boundaries of the Socialist block) was not allowed to every author/work.

The third and the most inaccessible zone of translation and publication is that beyond the Iron curtain. (This is why the internal publishing houses for foreign translations most often printed books in the prohibited Western European languages, books which remain as certain monuments of impossible communication.) Through the whole communist era, very few contemporary authors and works managed – or were allowed – to make a breakthrough in the West. Until about the 1960s, this was a taboo, something not tolerated by the regime and completely off its agenda. Later, the politics changed, but Bulgarian state mechanisms for cultural export remain inefficient despite the considerable resources invested in them. On the other hand, foreign interest has never been very strong. (What proves it is the fact that an excellent writer like Georgi Markov, an emigrant and dissident at that, could not attract proper literary recognition in Great Britain.)

In some Western European countries, partnerships with leftist publishing houses were established. These houses published Bulgarian literature with the financial support of the Bulgarian socialist state. In his survey of the reception of Bulgarian literature in Italy, Giuseppe Dell’Agata gives such an example: Bulzoni Editore, with its Bulgarian Library series. Subsidized by the Bulgarian state, Bulzoni was the main publisher of Bulgarian literature after 1976. According to Dell’Agata’s observations, these publications are a “product of the officious predominance of the Bulgarian commissioner and sponsor over the alternative ideas that could be suggested by Italian specialists in Slavonic and Bulgarian studies”; these publications had very poor distribution and, with very few exceptions, were badly translated. (Dell’Agatta, 38)

During the 1980s, there was an attempt at openness and greater exchange in the
context of Lyudmila Zhivkova’s cultural undertakings, the international writers’ meetings in Sofia, etc. At that time, the author most published beyond the Iron Curtain was perhaps Lyubomir Levchev, chairman of the Bulgarian Writers’ Union in the period 1979–1988. In the 1980s, his books of poetry came out in the USA, Sweden, Turkey, Great Britain and Germany.

In the early 1980s, even Todor Zhivkov managed to publish two books in Great Britain, with the Oxford publishing house Pergamon Press. They were part of a series of biographic interviews with Eastern European leaders carried out by Pergamon’s owner, Robert Maxwell. These are among the few Todor Zhivkov’s translations genuinely published abroad by foreign publishers. They were the result of a bigger flirtation between the regime and the media magnate Maxwell, which testifies to Zhivkov’s attempts at personal and state PR in the West.

**SOFIA-PRESS, OR THE INTERNAL TRANSLATION MACHINE**

The major producer of Bulgarian literature in foreign languages in Bulgaria was Sofia-Press Agency. Today, its considerable archive is kept at the Archives State Agency in Sofia. The following notes on the function and activities of Sofia-Press are based mainly on documents from this archive fund. (ЦДА, Фонд № 882)

Sofia-press was not only a publishing house, but also a powerful ideological and propaganda institute. Its task was to filter information to and from Bulgaria, to produce the foreign image of the “better society” and of the Bulgarian state and communist party through journalism, photography, cinema (mainly documentaries), art exhibitions, catalogues and, of course, literature. Literary translation was only part of the large-scale state PR and propaganda activities. The Agency’s predecessor was the more modest Publishing House for Literature in Foreign Languages (Издателство за литература на чужди езици) founded as early as 1958 as a consequence of a series of propaganda measures after the 1956 revolution in Hungary. In 1967–68, in the face of the escalating events in Prague, bigger investments were made and the publishing house was given a new Western-sounding name: Sofia-press Agency for Book Publishing and Printing in Foreign Languages. Sofia-press had the most modern printing equipment at that time. The Agency was authorized to provide propaganda and promotion materials for the political and cultural campaigns of the regime.

But the Agency had to pass through a period of defining its status and prerogatives among other already existing ideological institutions. Sofia-press had to defend its right to have access to more information about foreign countries and their press and radio programs, including those criticizing the Bulgarian regime. In this process, the Agency was assigned to listen to radio Free Europe, The Voice of America, the BBC, etc., to transcribe every broadcast concerning Bulgaria and present an ‘answer’ to it in the appropriate language and in the quickest possible way. The profile of Sofia-press was briefly defined in the following way: “thoroughly specialized in propaganda and counter-propaganda abroad and among foreigners. Its
production does not address the Bulgarian society.” (ЦДА, фонд № 882, оп. 1, арх. еА. № 40, с. 2)

Orders came to Sofia-press directly from the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party. For example, in the Record of meetings of the Politbureau of the Central Committee from March 26, 1968, in regard to “Measures for implementation of Politbureau decision on Macedonian question” is written: “Sofia-press Agency: to provide publication and distribution abroad of scientific materials about the life and struggles of the Bulgarian population in Macedonia; to publish in mass print-run a short popular history of Bulgaria in Russian, French, English and Spanish.” Of course, there is not a single word about how these books will be distributed among the ‘masses’ speaking the abovementioned languages.

Quite indicative is the profile of the first Sofia-press general manager, Spas Rusinov. According to his record, “immediately after 9 September 1944, he was chairman of the People’s Militia Inquiry Committee. By the end of 1944, he was assigned to work in the Communist party.” Later he worked for nearly eight years at the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party, including as head of the Propaganda and Agitation Department. (ЦДА, фонд № 882, оп. 1, арх. еА. № 376, с. 10)

The first tasks of the Agency were cultural and propaganda measures abroad concerning the ‘right’ interpretation of the Prague Spring. The main reference points for this campaign were gathered in a special booklet published by Sofia-Press under the title “Directions for Foreign Cultural and Propaganda Activity of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria in the Year 1968–1969”. (ЦДА, фонд № 882, оп. 1, арх. еА. № 19) So the establishment of both successive institutions – the Publishing House for Literature in Foreign Languages (1958) and then the Sofia-Press Agency (1967) – was an answer on the part of the regime to the two major political crises in the Eastern Bloc.

Sofia-Press cooperated with similar institutions in the rest of the socialist countries, such as APN – Moscow, Interpress – Warsaw, Panorama – Berlin, Pragopres – Praha, Budapress – Budapest, etc. Sofia-Press even established its own foreign branches: Kimon in Cyprus, Donau Press in Munich, and others. Its budget for 1969 was 3 500 000 leva (600 000 leva for direct propaganda) and was increased every year.

The Book Publishing Department had large lists of planned publications every year. For example, the literary titles alone for 1971 are 45 (of about 115). Some of them were to be published in 3-4 foreign languages, with print runs of about 3000 to 4000 copies. It is difficult to outline any principles of selection. Classical works

8 The record is available on the New Bulgarian University site as part of an historical archive of the communist past: http://www.nbu.bg/webs/historyproject/dokumenti_63-89/razdel6t2/f1bo-p35ac127.pdf (checked on 22.09.2012)
are listed alongside contemporary authors and children’s literature, representative works of a given period or style along with production of second and third-rate scribblers – anything can be found in these lists. Even the ideological filter does not seem so tight in the socialist belle époque of the 1970s.

Reading through the publishing plans and reports of five or six successive years leaves the impression that Bulgarian literature will soon simply be over. Only the number of languages keeps the progression going. In this sense, it is difficult to talk about a definite formation of a translation canon. What we find is more an endless – and fruitless – ‘work on the belt’, something like a translation factory, no matter what is being translated.

Rosica Tasheva, an author and translator with many years of service, says in an interview: “When I used to work in Sofia-press (…) we translated propaganda texts which, I think, went to Bulgarian embassies abroad. Whether anybody read them, I do not know. In any case, the idea was to glamorize the advantages of the realsocialismus…” (Tasheva 2011)

Another professional translator whose career started in these times said in an informal conversation that the Bulgarian embassy in Paris had a huge basement full of Bulgarian books in French. Sent by Sofia-press, they were piled up there completely unopened, unused and undistributed.

In the archive documents from the early 1970s, we can see how the Agency had begun to go beyond its own capacity, turning into a Kafkaesque institution. The Agency’s work depended largely on translation (not only literary), yet translation was the most poorly paid job. The average monthly salary was 85-100 leva. Many reports to higher authorities began to pose what they call translators’ question. It is a complex one – about the lack of translators, the low quality of the translations, the low payment, the big monthly quota of planned translations, the pressing deadlines...

In 1975, there were 71 permanent translators and editors in the Translation Department and 100 outside contributors. Of these, only 6 were communists (plus 3 political emigrant communists) and 13 were members of the Komsomol (the Bulgarian communist youth organization) – “which is a very low percentage”, as one report says.

These comments demonstrate that the ‘translators’ question’ was also a vulnerable ideological one. People who performed this job were very needed and valued, and at the same time always under potential suspicion and surveillance. As Daniele Monticelli claims, “translators, just like writers and artists, were ‘workers at the ideological front’, as party people used to say. On the one hand, they were irrelevant instruments of ‘totalitarian translation’, and on the other hand, exposed to all the risks that the ideological front presented under the Soviet rule”.

One of the reports claims: “… if we want to do everything accurately and on time, even a staff of 600 employees won’t suffice (we need 300 translators, 150 editors,
100 style editors, 60 type-writers, 60 proof-readers). Such a number of qualitative personnel could neither be found, nor trained in the next 5 years." (ЦДА, фонды № 882, оп. 1, арх.ед. № 82)

The Agency tried to solve this problem on its own by issuing the following order: “All people capable of literary translation are to be searched for all over the country, and entered into a card-index… so that they can be used by the Agency if needed.” (ЦДА, фонды № 882, оп. 1, арх.ед. № 82) This sounds almost like a call for military recruitment.

The Agency also badly needed native speakers of foreign languages who could do high quality translations in their mother tongue. That is why foreigners living in Bulgaria were also searched out and employed as ‘stylists’ (a word used for final polishing editors, or style editors). One somewhat more relaxed report says that native speakers in English, German, Spanish and Italian were found in Bulgaria and appointed to work in the Agency; only French native speakers could not be found or brought from abroad because their standard of living was much higher and no proper food, flats or payment could be provided for them. It turns out that certain languages implied luxury.

It was getting more and more difficult to combine the deficit of staff with the initially formulated harsh ideological criteria for the translators: they should be “faithful and devoted to the people’s government; if possible, they should be Communist party members or active members of the Komsomol (…); they should not have graduated from foreign colleges (…); they should not be foreign citizens except for the cases when foreign specialist have been drawn from abroad (…); …an employee from the Personnel Department should make a thorough examination – gathering information about the candidate’s political and business qualities, his moral image, nature, etc. Inquiries about the candidate should be made at the institutions where he used to work, at the places where he was born and lives and through persons he has indicated.”

In its attempts to solve the ‘translators’ question’, Sofia-Press inadvertently articulated some important social dilemmas caused by socialist labor regulations. The Agency even tried to partially change these regulations in its own favor and in a more market-oriented way. For example, the Agency pleaded that translation work was creative, not mechanical (as it was already accepted in the Soviet Union), and that hence the translators’ monthly production quota should not be compared to that of factory workers; suggested that a ‘Translators’ Union should be founded in order to unify and qualify translators and defend their rights (such a union was established in 1974), etc. The Agency even proposed taking on new translators only by competition, not by the usual practice of state allocation after university (a surprising criticism of the state job policies). But the question of distribution and reception was hardly ever posed. At least part of the employees were aware that their work was destined for basements, Bulgarian or foreign, yet they went on with their work under pressure day after day.
But, as we might imagine, the financial question was far harder. Sofia-Press functioned on advantageous financial terms. For example, the Agency was freed from income tax and tax on production funds. It was officially stated that “the main goal of the Agency’s activity is not profit but the pursuit of broader and more effective propaganda abroad” (ЦДА, фонд № 882, оп. 1, арх.ед. № 80). Yet Sofia-Press was not only unable to turn a profit, but constantly and improvidently wasted money. In 1971, a rather severe report appeared from the attorney and the head of the financial department of the Agency about the total lack of ‘contract discipline’, about making uncoordinated and unprofitable contracts with foreign publishers and firms. This extensive report is one of the very few documents that dare to mention openly the absence of distribution of the Sofia-press production and delicately suggests that “there ought to be certain percentage of coordination between the preparation of a publication and the distribution contracts.” (ЦДА, фонд № 882, оп. 1, арх.ед. № 68, с. 12)

The Agency’s poor financial condition was officially admitted in a Bulgarian National Bank (BNB) report from 1971, when the Bank refused a loan of 200 000 leva to the Agency for shooting a French feature film in Bulgaria. (Cinema, of course, is a much more expensive art than literature and translation.) In the following year, however, Sofia-press was granted a loan of 354 000 leva (Avramov, 688–693). The financial crises did not lead to an institutional collapse. For example, in 1975, the Ministry of Finance gave 1 200 000 leva subsidy for the Agency’s propaganda activity. (ЦДА, фонд № 882, оп. 1, арх.ед. № 79а, с.20)

The state support never ended – until the end of the socialist state itself.

**FURTHER DIRECTIONS**

The activity of Sofia-Press Agency is only part of the picture of literary translation from the Bulgarian during the late socialism. Another important institution in this field is the Copyright Agency (Agentsia za avtorsko pravo) established first as a department of the Ministry of Education and Culture in 1961. The Copyright Agency was entitled to manage, so to say, the real translations published abroad by foreign publishers, not by the internal translation machine. The most complete bibliography of Bulgarian literary works translated and published abroad can be found precisely in the Copyright Agency’s archive. Its activity confronts us with the paradoxes of state-owned author’s copyright, another peculiarity of totalitarian translation. This institution served as a gate – more often a wall – for publication abroad. Its policies resulted in a kind of socialist ‘export literary canon’ which will be a matter of further research and analysis in this project.

On the other hand, the official institutions and their activities are not the only side of what happens in the field of translation in foreign languages during socialism. Because the main mediators, after all, are the translators with their personal stories, their life-long efforts to maintain proficiency in a small language and literature
not much in demand. It is their personal literary taste and preferences beyond the institutional and ideological priorities that sometimes made unexpected breakthroughs in the system. They were not at the top of the statistics, but they were able to generate authentic literary events and intercultural communication. Some of these individual cases will be a matter of further research and presentation as well.

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