

## CHAPTER XVII

### BULGARIA. 1934-1944

#### A. GENERAL

1. Bulgarian politics between the two wars was characterised by an all powerful monarchy (especially after April 1935) and the difficulties and problems caused by IMRO (International Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation). After the coup d'Etat of the ZVENO group on 19 November, 1934, all other political parties and IMRO were dissolved. The ZVENO group was an organisation which grew up in 1928 and which had a semi-fascist character. Later King Boris liquidated the leaders of the ZVENO group and became the indisputable dictator of the country. After this he was able to give free course to his personal leanings towards Germany and Italy, and his policy was to achieve again the Greater Bulgaria which was created by the treaty of San Stefano. (This treaty was imposed by Russia on Turkey after the war of 1887-88, which created a much larger Bulgarian state, which extended from the Black Sea to the Danube and to the Aegean Sea. However, because of opposition especially from Germany, the territory of this new state was considerably reduced by the Congress of Berlin). This Greater Bulgaria also became the dream of all the nationalist Bulgarist parties and was reflected in their foreign policy. It was for this reason that Bulgaria joined the central powers during the first World War and the reason why, during the second World War, she annexed the Greek and Yugoslav territories.
2. In order to Bulgarise these annexed territories, deportations and persecutions were practised on a grand scale, in order that the dream of a homogenous Greater Bulgaria could be attained. The strength of this feeling was illustrated by the way in which the Bulgarians put down a revolt in October of 1941 in Thrace, in which the Bulgarian police either shot or deported nearly all the population of one of the villages. This policy finally led Bulgaria to declare war on the Allies on December 13, 1941. However, prior to that date German infiltration had begun and by the early part of 1941 the Germans had occupied all the key points in Bulgaria. On April 6, the German army under Marshal List, which had been massed in Western Bulgaria, crossed the Yugoslav frontier to invade Eastern Yugoslavia. At the same time other German armies crossed the Greek frontier and occupied Salonika.
3. After the death of King Boris on 28 August, 1943, his minor son Prince Simeon was proclaimed king and a regency commission was formed by Prince Kyrill, the Prime Minister Filov, and the Minister of War Michov. On 26 October, 1944, the Bulgarian government announced that Bulgaria was withdrawing from the war and that all German troops which were found on her soil thereafter would be disarmed. The Soviet government, impatient of the vacillations of the Bulgarian government, stated that she would not recognize the neutrality of the country and declared war on her a few days later (5 September, 1944). On the same day, Bulgaria declared war on Germany and demanded an armistice with the Soviet. Soviet troops entered without resistance into Bulgaria and on 9th September, Radio Moscow announced the end of military operations in Bulgaria. The armistice was finally signed in Moscow on 28 October, and the Bulgarian army participated to the end of the war on the side of the Yugoslav and Soviet troops.

## B. WARTIME ACTIVITIES OF THE VARIOUS GROUPS IN BULGARIA

### 4. IMRO.

This famous secret society was founded in 1893 with the purpose of freeing Macedonia from the Turks. Gradually, however, IMRO developed into a terrorist organisation with the aim of creating an independent Macedonia. However, toward the end of the nineteenth century it fell under the influence of the Bulgarian government, from which it received subsidies and arms. Consequently one branch of the organisation began to agitate for a united Macedonia within the Bulgarian state. The history of IMRO is extremely complicated, since it was torn by feuds amongst its own leaders. Broadly speaking, there were three main groups in IMRO :

- (a) the Supremists (named after the Supreme Committee in Bulgaria) which aimed at uniting Macedonia with Bulgaria,
- (b) the Federalists, who looked more to Yugoslavia for help in achieving independence,
- (c) the United IMRO (OIMRO) which looked to Soviet Russia to sponsor the Macedonian state as a unit in a Communist-Balkan-Slav federation. The Chief mover in OIMRO was Dimitar Vlehov who now holds high office in Yugoslavia. The present Macedonian Republic which forms part of Yugoslavia is really the outcome of OIMRO aims.

In 1923, IMRO controlled almost all of the Bulgarian district of Petrich and conducted frequent raids on Yugoslav territories, creating not only a terroristic regime in these regions but also a friction between the Bulgarian and Yugoslav governments. At the same time the organisation began to play a more important role in Bulgarian politics, especially after 1923, when one of its groups under the orders of Ivan Mihailov assassinated the Prime Minister Stambouliski. Little by little, by these terroristic actions, IMRO became a force so powerful that it was in a position to impose its wishes on the government between the years 1923 and 1934. It was at that time united between its two chiefs Protoguerov, who was moderate and pro-Yugoslav, and Mihailov, who was more extreme and terroristic. As a result of the rivalry of the two men, the group split up into the factions outlined above. However, because of the internecine battles and the terroristic methods followed by it, it became very unpopular and was finally dissolved in 1934, when the ZVENO group staged its coup d'Etat. Mihailov who had become chief of the movement after Protoguerov had been assassinated, fled to Italy, where he allied himself with Ante Pavelic, who was also a refugee in Italy. His faction of the party, the Mihailovists, was disbanded at this time. On the other hand, the Protoguerovists were interned by the civil authorities. However, after the annexation of Macedonia by Bulgaria, those who signed a declaration affirming that they renounced their federalist ideas were given their freedom. It is reported that the Organisation is now acting in Greek Macedonia in an attempt to wrest the territory from Greece and include it within the present Macedonian Republic.

### 5. ZVENO.

This party was established in 1928 by the officers of the Bulgarian army, and it developed around the newspaper ZVENO, from which it took the name. Its chiefs, Colonel Damian Velchev, General Zlatev, and Simon Guerguev, attempted to suppress the reign of terrorism current at that time as well as all other political parties. It was pro-Nazi in its internal policy, although it was liberal in its foreign policy, advocating reconciliation with the Yugoslavs and federal-statehood with Macedonia. After the overthrow of

the party by King Boris, ZVENO did not play an important part until 1944-45, when it overthrew the monarchy and established a republic, which concluded an armistice with the United Nations.

6. *The Rodna Zashchita* (Defence of the Fatherland and the Race) was a strongly nationalistic and anti-semitic movement, which embraced fascist principles. Although it was dissolved in 1929, certain members flourished under the German occupation.

7. *The National Legion* (*Legioneri*) was a patriotic society founded between 1925 and 1934, when it was officially dissolved. During the war it was supported by the Nazis. General Lukov, who was assassinated in January 1943, was a leading member of this organisation, as was General Jekov. Its membership was estimated at about 40,000.

8. *Brannik* was founded in May 1941 as a Nazi youth organisation by Doctor Klech- and to prepare them for military service.

9. *The State Security Police* (*Darjavna Sigurnost*) were the secret political police of Bulgaria. They were responsible for all political arrests, internments and for the guarding of concentration camps within Bulgaria.

10. *The Military Police* (so-called V. P.—*Voenna Politsia*) were the most powerful of all the police forces, and from 1939 on were under Colonel Nicho Georgiev, who was violently pro-German.

11. *The Motorized Police.*

The commanding officers of this unit comprised the most pro-German elements of all the police forces. In fact, all officers of this unit were trained in Germany.

12. *The Uniformed Police* (*Uniformina Politsia*) was the largest branch of the police force and is equivalent to the ordinary police which one sees in the streets of any country. Most of its senior officers received special training in the Berlin and Rome police schools. The majority of these were pro-Nazi or pro-Fascist in character.

### C. ELIGIBILITY STATUS OF THE ABOVE GROUPS

13. *IMRO.*

When interviewing Macedonians an attempt should be made to assess the association individual members may have had with Mihailov, who collaborated with Pavelic and the Ustas during the war. Members of IMRO who come from Greek Macedonia are *prima facie* outside the mandate of IRO under paragraph 6 (a) of Part II of the Definitions.

14. *ZVENO.*

Members of this group who participated in the Jewish persecutions of 1941-44 are outside the mandate of IRO under the terms of paragraph 2 of Part II of the Definitions. However, no presumption should be made that all members were pro-Nazi and anti-semitic; each case will have to be dealt with on its own merits.

15. *Rodna Zashchita.*

Members of this movement who supported the Germans are *prima facie* outside the mandate.

16. *National Legion.*

All senior members of this society are *prima facie* outside the mandate of IRO under the terms of paragraph 2 of Part II. This presumption may be rebutted by refugees who make it plausible that they did not assist the Nazis. It is reported that members

of this society are leaving Bulgaria and applying for IRO assistance on the grounds that they have been politically persecuted and point to imprisonment after the war. It is reported that the majority of these persons were imprisoned in fact because of their pro-Nazi attitude during the war.

17. *Brannik.*

Membership in this organisation does not raise any presumption although members should be closely interviewed as to their war-time activities since the organisation was pro-Nazi in character.

18. *State Security Police.*

All members of this force are *prima facie* outside the mandate of IRO.

19. *The Military Police.*

All officers of this group are *prima facie* outside the mandate. Other ranks will have to be dealt with on their own merits as many of them may not have known the policy of the Organisation.

20. *Motorized Police.*

To be treated as the Military Police above, although it should be borne in mind that this unit was much more pro-German than the Military Police.

21. *The Uniformed Police.*

Officers of the rank of captain and above are *prima facie* outside the mandate. Others will have to be treated on their individual merits.