

BULGARIA AND LATIN AMERICA IN THE COLD WAR YEARS: A CASE STUDY FOR SOVIET BLOC POLITICAL RELATIONS WITH LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES

BULGÁRIA E AMÉRICA LATINA NA ÉPOCA DA GUERRA FRIA: UM ESTUDO DE CASO SOBRE AS RELAÇÕES POLÍTICAS DO BLOCO SOVIÉTICO COM OS PAÍSES DA AMÉRICA LATINA

BULGARIA Y AMÉRICA LATINA EN LOS AÑOS DE LA GUERRA FRIA: UN ESTUDIO DE CASO ACERCA DAS RELACIONES POLÍTICAS DOS BLOQUES SOVIÉTICOS CON LOS PAÍSES DE AMÉRICA LATINA

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Abstract: The study is based on long term reveal of Bulgarian postwar archives and discuss for the first time many still unknown episodes of the Bulgarian relations with Latin American countries in the Cold War era. The establishment and further development of the diplomatic and political relations between a small Balkan state like Bulgaria with Latin America is seen as a case study for Soviet Bloc policy in general toward the Western Hemisphere within the bipolar confrontation IR model. The study is composed in four following the most significant social and political events in the Cold War years – Cuban Revolution, Chilean leftist government of *Unidad Popular*, and Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua, which led to the armed confrontation in Central America in the last Cold War decade.

Keywords: Cold War; Soviet Bloc; Bulgaria; Latin America.

Resumo: O estudo baseia-se em arquivos do pós-guerra búlgaros e discute pela primeira vez muitos episódios ainda desconhecidos das relações búlgaras com países da América Latina na época da Guerra Fria. O estabelecimento e desenvolvimento das relações diplomáticas e políticas entre um pequeno estado balcânico como a Bulgária com a América Latina é vista como um estudo de caso da política dentro do bloco soviético, em geral, para o hemisfério ocidental dentro do modelo do confronto bipolar. O estudo consiste em quatro dos acontecimentos políticos e sociais mais significativos nos anos da Guerra Fria: Revolução Cubana, o Governo da Unidade Popular e a Revolução Sandinista na Nicarágua, que levou para o confronto armado na América Central, na última década da Guerra Fria.

Palavras-chave: Guerra fria; Bloco soviético; Bulgária; América Latina.

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Resumen: El estudio se basa en los archivos de la posguerra búlgaros y discutir por primera vez muchos episodios aún desconocidos de las relaciones búlgaras con países de América Latina en la era de la guerra fría. El establecimiento y desarrollo de las relaciones diplomáticas y políticas entre un estado balcánico pequeño como Bulgaria con América Latina es visto como un caso de estudio de la política del bloque soviético en general hacia el hemisferio occidental dentro del modelo de RI confrontación bipolar. El estudio se compone de cuatro acontecimientos sociales y políticos más significativos en los años de la guerra fría – revolución cubana, gobierno izquierdista chileno de Unidad Popular y la revolución Sandinista en Nicaragua, que condujo a la confrontación armada en Centroamérica en la última década de la guerra fría.

Palabras-clave: Guerra fría; Bloque soviético; Bulgaria; Latinoamérica.

Introduction

The proposed paper was a result of a thorough research at the Bulgarian state, political, diplomatic, and intelligence archives for more than 25 years. Hopefully, the most important records of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) were made available for the whole Cold War period even in 1993, when they were transferred to the Central State Archive (*TsDA*). In addition, the Council of Ministers' confidential files for the same period were declassified a decade later in 2004. According to the actual legal regulation, the records of Bulgarian Security and Intelligence services can be accessed for the entire period (1944-1990), while the Diplomatic Archive at the Foreign Ministry in Sofia follows a "30 years" rule in its declassification process. Furthermore, working on a research project about Bulgarian political relations with Latin America, the author of that publication gained access and revealed in 1988-1989 many still unprocessed files from the "Foreign Relations" departments of both the smaller BCP governmental partner *Bulgarian Agrarian National Union* party and the *Fatherland Front* mass political organization. That long term research led to several scientific publications on the issue², which are a principal base for the current summarized study on Bulgarian-Latin American political relations in the postwar world.

² Baev, Yordan, *Por la Unidad Democrática. Jorge Dimitrov y el movimiento revolucionario en América Latina*. Sofia Press, 1989; Baev, Jordan, "Bulgaria and the Armed Conflict in Central America, 1979-1989. New Archival Sources" – In: *Armies and Politics*. Moscow, 2002, pp. 33-45; "Anti-Americanism as a ground for Bulgarian-Latin American Political Contacts during the Cold War years: A Case Study" - *Bulgarian Journal of American & Transatlantic Studies*, Sofia, December 2007, No. 3; "Bulgaria and the Cuban Missile Crisis" and "Documents on Bulgarian-Cuban Relations, 1960-1975" – *CWIHP Bulletin*, Washington DC, Issue 17/18, Fall 2012, pp. 522-588.

First Contacts in a Bipolar World

The change of rule that took place in Bulgaria on September 9th 1944 and brought about the establishment of a communists-dominated four party coalition government, generated a total transformation in this country's foreign policy orientation. In the preceding decades the political, economic and cultural relations with Latin American countries had been sporadic, non-systematic and predominantly concerned with the conditions of life of the Bulgarian immigrants in that part of the world (mainly in Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil). Bulgaria's efforts to get out of international isolation and strengthen its international position immediately after World War II could have been successful in the New World only through reinstating the relations with Argentina, a country with similar foreign policy problems. The Farrell – Peron regime, barely achieving Argentina's participation in the UN Constituent Assembly in San Francisco, had the strongly negative sentiments of the Western public and media. In a conversation with Prof. Mihalchev, the Bulgarian political representative in Moscow, George Kennan, charge d'affairs of the US Embassy in the USSR, said: "We have made an extremely hard for us concession –Argentina's participation in the San-Francisco Conference."³

After his winning the February 1946 elections Juan Peron proclaimed his notorious foreign policy *Tercera Posicion* doctrine – a midway between the capitalism and communism (characterized by a North-American diplomat as a "political demagogy for domestic consumption" ⁴). The Bulgarian government made use of the anti-US tendency in the foreign policy of the Peronist regime to restore the trade and diplomatic relations between the two countries. At a conference of the Council of Ministers on November 29th 1946, following a proposal of Kimon Georgiev, Minister of Foreign Affairs, a decision was adopted requiring that "the Argentine government is approached for the sake of establishing normal diplomatic relations"⁵. Negotiations were renewed two years later during the Third session of the UN General Assembly in Paris at which the Argentine delegation was one of the few supporting the admittance of Bulgaria to the United Nations. On November 12th 1948 in Paris diplomatic notes for the renewal of the diplomatic relations between Bulgaria and Argentina were exchanged⁶.

The escalation of the bipolar confrontation during the first Cold War years directly affected the Bulgarian contacts with Latin America. In

³ *Diplomatic Archive* (DA), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sofia, Opis 2-S, A.E. 45, p. 198.

⁴ Foreign Relations of the United States (*FRUS*), 1948, vol. IX, The Western Hemisphere, Washington, 1972, p. 281.

⁵ *TSDA*, Sofia, Fond 136, Opis 1, A.E. 398, p. 40-41.

⁶ *TSDA*, Fond 146B, Opis 4, File 1872, p. 41-42.

May 1949 the US Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, sent the following instructions to its embassy in Buenos Aires:

The State Department does not wish for intensification of Argentine economic relations with that part of the world. The expansion of the Argentine economic relations with Eastern Europe might weaken Argentina's political sympathies toward the West.⁷

After the unsuccessful attempt of Gen. Menendez for a military revolt in September 1951 the relations between Argentina and North America deteriorated. In his articles signed with the nom de plume *Descartes* Gen. Peron strongly attacked the "plutocratic imperialism". The propaganda campaign against the USA in the pro-government newspapers "*La Democracia*", "*La Prensa*", "*La Nacion*", appropriately named by "*Die Welt*" "a policy of needle points"⁸, was sharply intensified. In 1953-1954 Argentina actively developed its trade relations with the East-European countries. In September 1954 Juan Peron sent a letter of congratulations on the occasion of the National Day of Bulgaria⁹. It was the first official letter of this kind addressed by a Latin-American President to the communist regime of Bulgaria after the World War II.

In the second half of the 1950s diplomatic talks for renewal of the diplomatic relations of Bulgaria with other Latin-American countries were also reopened. That trend was part of the new foreign policy line which was adopted in the first years of the Soviet bloc "de-Stalinization" process. Additional reason for more intensive foreign policy activities was the Bulgarian admission into the United Nations in December 1955. Similar to some other East European countries, in the early 1956 the changes within the top echelon of Bulgarian political leadership happened. In just a few years (1956-1962) the new Communist leader Todor Zhivkov succeeded to eliminate consecutively his own rivals and to establish a monocratic power under the banner of the collective Politburo decision making.

The negotiations for establishing diplomatic relations with Uruguay started in June 1956 in Buenos Aires and were finalized successfully in May 1958. Soon after the election of the new Brazilian President Juscelino Kubitschek, in May 1956 in Paris started by initiative of the Bulgarian government negotiations for renewal of the diplomatic and commercial relations between the two countries. Bulgarian Foreign Ministry discussed in the same time the proposal to invite a group of Brazilian senators to visit Sofia. Such an invitation was sent on behalf of the Bulgarian Parliament

⁷ *FRUS*, 1949, Vol. II, The Western Hemisphere, Washington, 1975, p. 498-499.

⁸ *Die Welt*, 21 Marz 1952.

⁹ *DA*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Documentation. □/100/6/1/1.

(*Narodno Sabranie*) to the Legislative Assembly of Pernambuco¹⁰. In 1956 Bulgarian Ambassador in Buenos Aires visited also Chile and raised the issue for renewal of the diplomatic relations during a talk with the Chilean Foreign Minister. The political reaction against the Soviet military intervention in Hungary and the lack of interest by the government of Jorge Alessandri spoiled the eventual bilateral negotiations in the next years. However, Bulgaria renewed its diplomatic relations with Brazil in March 1961 soon after the inauguration of the new Brazilian President Janio Quadros, and with Chile - several years later under the Christian Democratic government of Eduardo Frei.

A curious exchange of letters happened soon after the military coup in Guatemala against the leftist government of Jacobo Arbens. On 19 December 1954 the leadership of the Bulgarian youth organization (Union of People's Youth, renamed in 1958 to Dimitrov's Comsomol organization) sent a protest telegram against the detention of a large number of Guatemalan student leaders. There was received an official response in Sofia by the head of the military junta, Col. Castillo Armas, who obviously had no any information about the political regime in Bulgaria, and "competently" argued:

Currently there are no political prisoners in Guatemala, but only some criminals... You were deluded by the forged information, slyly spread throughout the world by the agents of the international Communism... I would like to assert you entirely, that currently in Guatemala exists a truly democracy.¹¹

The Cuban Revolution and the "Rediscovery of America"

The victory of the Cuban Revolution in January 1959 and the October Missile Crisis in 1962 induced a more serious interest of the Bulgarian society in the political events in the Western Hemisphere. On its way back from Argentina and Mexico in the late May – early June 1960 a Bulgarian governmental delegation visited Cuba and had talks with Raul Castro, Ernesto "Che" Guevara and other Cuban officials. At the end of June the proposals for the establishment of diplomatic, commercial, and cultural relations and Bulgaria's rendering of economic and technical aid to Cuba were coordinated between the two governments' representatives. At the Fifteenth UN General Assembly session in September 1960 in New York the first personal meeting between Todor Zhivkov and Fidel Castro was organized. Years later Zhivkov related that their improvised unofficial meeting happened on 27 September 1960 in a small room at the Hotel

¹⁰ TSDA, Fond 1B, Opis 6, A.E. 2857, 3353.

¹¹ TSDA, Fond 1053, Opis 5, A.E. 224, p. 187.

Theresa in Harlem, where Castro also more famously met Nikita Khrushchev. On 8 October 1960 Bulgarian minister of foreign trade Luchezar Avramov and Che Guevara signed in Havana a bilateral commercial agreement. The same day an official communiqué announced the establishment of diplomatic relations between Bulgaria and Cuba.

Few months after Playa Giron invasion, the Bulgarian government responded positively to a request for arms delivery to Cuba. The arms delivery and credits to Cuba in 1961 exceeded 8 million USD. After the Cuban missile crisis CC BCP Politburo adopted another secret resolution for arms delivery to Cuba¹². Soon after the crisis the Bulgarian-Cuban relationship attained more significance focusing on Sofia's economic, technical, and military aid for the Castro government. The first group of Bulgarian agricultural experts was prepared to be sent to Cuba in November 1962. In the next fifteen years more than 4300 Bulgarian technical and agricultural experts worked in Cuba, while only in 1962-1963 about 130 Cuban students and technicians arrived in Bulgaria to continue their education and training.¹³ In May 1965 a joint intergovernmental committee for economic, scientific and technical cooperation started its work. In January 1964 Bulgarian minister of defense Gen. Dobri Djurov visited Cuba for the first time, and Raul Castro returned the visit the following March.¹⁴ During a visit of Angel Solakov, Bulgarian State Security Chairman, to Cuba in May 1966 he discussed with Sergio Del Valle, Cuban Minister of the Interior, and Manuel Piñeiro, Cuban State Security Director, the possibility to organize sabotage and counterintelligence training for 30 Cuban officers in Bulgaria. On 8 June 1966 CC BCP Secretariat adopted a secret decision for counterintelligence training of 30 Cuban state security servicemen. Todor Zhivkov's handwritten resolution on the document stated: "We have no conditions to train people in sabotage".¹⁵ In February 1967 a new Protocol for arms export to Cuba was signed in Havana.

On 5 October 1967 the CC BCP Politburo approved a resolution and measures for increasing and strengthening of Bulgarian-Cuban relations. However, the envisaged first visit of Todor Zhivkov to Cuba in the beginning of 1968 was postponed mainly because of the sharp anti-Soviet critique Fidel Castro made in a secret speech to a Cuban Communist Party plenary session in January 1968. The change of the official Cuban position after the Warsaw Pact military invasion in Czechoslovakia in August 1968 made possible to renew the preparation for Zhivkov's visit to Cuba, which

¹² *TsDA*, Fond 1B, Opis 64, A.E. 314.

¹³ *TsDA*, Fond 1B, Opis 33, A.E. 1172, 1324; Fond 28, Opis 23, A.E. 10; Fond 1053, Opis 8, A.E. 270; Opis 11, A.E. 258.

¹⁴ *TsDA*, Fond 378B, Opis 1, A.E. 140.

¹⁵ *TsDA*, Fond 1B, Opis 64, A.E. 352.

was subject of special discussion at Bulgarian Foreign Ministry in March 1969. Todor Zhivkov's official visit in June 1970 – the first ever visit of an East European leader to Cuba - played a significant role not only for the development of the bilateral relations, but also gave an impetus for the improvement of Soviet-Cuban relations in the next near future. The first visit of a Soviet leader (Leonid Brezhnev) to Cuba was carried out at the end of January – early February 1974.

The talks between Zhivkov and Castro in June 1970 and December 1975 in Cuba and in May 1972 in Bulgaria were held in extremely friendly, informal and frank atmosphere, even without following the customary diplomatic protocol. The next talks between the two leaders in Sofia in March 1976 and in Havana in April 1979 confirmed the existing quite informal and confidential nature of their relations. They were indicative in general for the bilateral political relations between Bulgaria and Cuba in the 1970s-1980s, which influenced as well the development of economic, cultural and public contacts between the two nations.¹⁶

In the 1960s Bulgaria gave some underground Latin American Communist Parties limited financial support, mainly for their political publications and for travel expenses of their leaders to Europe. Following a request from Fidel Castro, on 2 November 1961 CC BCP Secretariat approved a proposal for delivery of 35 000 old German carbines “Mauser” to Cuba¹⁷. The guns had to be transferred by the Cubans to Latin American leftist guerrilla groups. At the same time, the Bulgarian leadership met with a degree of hostility or at least with suspicion during the next years, the strategy of the guerrilla warfare in the region, and all the requests for military training of Latin American guerrillas in Bulgaria were declined. A Bulgarian Embassy in Havana Report of March 1966 clearly stated:

We have recently sent several reports concerning the training of people in Cuba who are subsequently infiltrated back in other Latin American countries with the task to organize armed resistance... The guerrilla actions and their simultaneous opening in a wide range of countries - are considered as task number one. This strategy, its objective being to provoke imperialist occupation of the Latin American countries which will allegedly serve as an incentive for an anti-imperialist final victorious struggle, is very difficult to understand.¹⁸

¹⁶ In 1960 the commercial exchange started with only 500 000 USD, while in 1970 it was increased to 63 mln. USD, and in 1975 to 172 mln. USD.

¹⁷ *TsDA*, Fond 1B, Opis 64, A.E. 291.

¹⁸ *DA*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Opis 22.

The only known documentary evidence of Bulgarian military support for a Latin American armed group in those years referred to a special case of Venezuela. During his talks with Raul Castro in Sofia on 26 March 1965 Todor Zhivkov surprisingly mentioned: “Our partisan [guerilla] commanders are even in Venezuela”¹⁹. What Zhivkov had in mind became publicly known two years later when a former Venezuelan guerilla commander, Teodoro Petkoff escaped sensationally with two other Communist party functionaries from the military prison *San Carlos*²⁰. Teodoro’s brother Luben Petkoff (aka *Sucre*) also a Venezuelan guerilla commander, went illegally via Cuba to their father’s homeland Bulgaria in the beginning of April 1967. On 15 April 1967 CC BCP Secretariat took an unprecedented decision for offering one year military training to ten Venezuelan Communist party activists²¹.

The analysis of the post World War II official relations between Bulgaria and Latin America shows that after the Cuban Revolution in particular those contacts were considerably intensified too. If during the first fifteen postwar years Bulgaria had official relations with only two countries in the region, in the course of the following decade state relations (diplomatic and consular) were established with another six countries, and in 1970-1971 – with three more. Nevertheless, when compared to the other East European countries’ presence in the West Hemisphere, the foreign policy of the Bulgarian government in the region does not seem active enough. At the end of the 1960s Romania had diplomatic relations with 9 Latin American countries, Yugoslavia – with 13, Czechoslovakia – with 15, and Poland – with 18. In the same period, however, Bulgaria had trade relations with 16 Latin-American countries, and in nine of them there were Bulgarian Trade Representations opened.

A month after the restoration of the diplomatic relations with Brazil, the Bulgarian leadership approved a Foreign Ministry proposal on 17 April 1961 for expanding of the political and economic relations with that country. In 1962 Bulgarian Foreign Minister Ivan Bashev proposed to Zhivkov to be invited to visit Sofia the Brazilian Foreign Minister and other senior officials. When in March 1963 Bulgarian Ambassador to Brazil Yordan Stefanov was received by the Brazilian President, Joao Goulart informed him that he intends to visit Poland next June, and it would be a good reason to visit also Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. On 13 April 1963 the Bulgarian leadership approved Ivan Bashev’s proposal for official invitation to Goulart to visit Bulgaria²². Such a visit did not happened due to the complicated internal

¹⁹ *TsDA*, Fond 378B, Opis 1, A.E. 140, p. 24.

²⁰ See: Garcia Ponce, Guillermo. *El Tunel de San Carlos*, Caracas, 1968.

²¹ *TsDA*, Fond 1B, Opis 64, A.E. 362.

²² *TsDA*, Fond 1B, Opis 6, A.E. 4939, 4983, 5123, 5133.

situation in Brazil, which led to the military coup of 31 March 1964.

A strong resonance in Bulgaria had in those years the dramatic events and the military intervention in the Dominican Republic in 1965-1966. Following a report from Havana two years later, CC BCP Politburo discussed the idea to invite the leader of the Revolutionary Party (PRD) and former president of the Dominican Republic Juan Bosch to visit Bulgaria²³. Another military coup in Peru in October 1968 was met initially with some restraint in Sofia; however, by the initiative of the new nationalistic government of Gen. Velasco Alvarado at the end of the year a few months later the diplomatic relations between Peru and Bulgaria were established and the commercial cooperation extended.

In the early 1960's the BANU leadership established contacts with certain farmers' unions, agricultural trade-unions and other agrarian organizations at first in Western Europe and later on in the Third World. That was a trend with some traces at the end of the 1950's when the Bulgarian Communist Party aiming at the realization of its political purposes began to utilize more and more often the activities of its smaller political partner. This trend became a very visible and important new element in the Bulgarian foreign policy mechanism in the next three decades. At the same time, Bulgarian Agrarian Union party regularly rendered support in the process of establishing new international contacts for its other East European partners, like the Agrarian parties in Poland and East Germany.

The Chilean Experiment and the Military Dictatorships

In June 1970 the CC BCP Politburo adopted an important resolution (No. 351) for intensifying the relations of Bulgaria with Latin America countries²⁴. The new "policy, strategy and tactics related to the Latin-American continent" was predominantly motivated with the "common struggle against the American imperialism" and the strategic goal "to gradually win these countries and their peoples as our friends". That new line of the Bulgarian communist leadership was not a surprising solo action. As early as December 1969 on a session of the Warsaw Pact Political Consultative Committee in Moscow Todor Zhivkov suggested "coordination" of the steps undertaken in regard of the Middle East and Latin American countries²⁵.

In the 1970's the BANU also strengthened its relations with influential Centrist, Radical, Liberal, Christian-democratic and other parties, the greater number of which were members of government coalitions in

²³ *TSDA*, Fond 1B, Opis 36, A.E. 235, p. 1-2.

²⁴ *TSDA*, Fond 1B, Opis 35, A.E. 1458, p. 8-28.

²⁵ *TSDA*, Fond 1B, Opis 35, A.E. 1044, p. 49.

their countries. Looking closely at the BANU international activity one can definitely say that this Bulgarian party showed far more intensive and much wider activities in comparison with similar parties and organizations in the other East European countries. It was exactly the BANU that was quite often used in the last two Cold War decades as a principal East European non-Communist organizer of representative international meetings and conferences for “détente, peace and international dialogue”. This policy was supplementary to the more limited possibilities for political contacts on the part of the Communist parties. On the other hand, obviously, quite a few parties in Western Europe, Asia and the Americas did find it much more politically acceptable to maintain official relations with an agrarian rather than with a communist party in Eastern Europe.

The victory of the *Unidad Popular* leftist coalition in Chile in September 1970 was a significant political event, which gave a strong impetus for the development of Bulgarian-Chilean relations and was the most commented Latin American political phenomena among the Bulgarian public opinion. On 3 April 1971 CC BCP Politburo approved a special resolution for further versatile development of the bilateral relations with Chile, which was discussed during the first visit of a Chilean Foreign Minister, Clodomiro Almeyda in Bulgaria in the beginning of June same year. Another Socialist Party leader, its Secretary General Carlos Altamirano also visited Bulgaria in 1971.

In June 1971 one of the BANU leaders, Petar Tanchev, in his capacity of Deputy Prime Minister, visited twelve Latin American countries and apart of signing commercial and economic treaties there, he also had talks with leaders of various political parties in the region in his capacity of political figure. In October 1972 during a state visit in Chile a BANU Secretary, Georgi Andreev was invited to dinner in the house of the Chilean President, Salvador Allende. Then Allende informed Andreev of the opposition circles’ “Plan September”, the purpose of which was to destabilize the political situation in the country²⁶. To Lalyu Ganchev, another agrarian party important personality, who visited Chile during the same period of time, Allende allegedly addressed an “appeal for help to the socialist countries in Europe”. On the invitation of the BANU in 1972 Bulgaria was visited as well by Luis Maira Aguirre and Julio Silva Solar, two of the nine Christian-democrat members of parliament who passed on the side of the Popular Unity Bloc – *Unidad Popular*. In November 1972 the president of the Chilean Radical Party, Carlos Morales also paid a visit to Bulgaria. In a letter to the BANU Secretary and Deputy Chairman of the State Council Georgi Traikov Morales noted that he will inform the Chilean government

²⁶ *BANU IRD Records*, Information of G. Andreev, November 1972, p. 1-6.

and President Allende about the results of his visit²⁷.

In November 1972 Bulgarian government discussed a special analysis on the results of the two year term of *Unidad Popular* rule in Chile. Todor Zhivkov discussed the issue also with the Secretary General of the Communist Party of Chile Luis Corvalan, who visited Sofia at the end of the same month²⁸. A new loan of 20 mln. USD was granted for the Allende government in January 1973. The most substantial financial and technical aid Chile received in 1971-1972 from the Soviet Union, which exceeded 260 mln. USD.

The military coup in Chile, led by the Commander-in-Chief Gen. Augusto Pinochet and the next mass repressions against the leftist, liberal, and syndical functionaries provoked a strong international campaign in Europe. Following the Soviet Union, on 22 September 1973 Bulgarian government broke its relations with the military junta, while the head of state Todor Zhivkov sent a protest declaration to the UN Secretary General. In March 1974 a Bulgarian Committee for solidarity with the Chilean people was established in Sofia. The BCP maintained in the mid and late 1970s parallel contacts with the leaders both of the Communist and Socialist parties in Chile. When in February 1974 Carlos Altamirano and Volodia Teitelboim talked with Todor Zhivkov in Sofia, it was agreed that a financial aid of 30 000 USD will be given to Chilean Communist Party, and other 20 000 USD to Chilean Socialist Party. In response to another request by Teitelboim, who presided the emigration center of the Chilean communists in Moscow, on 14 October 1974 CC BCP Secretariat approved a secret decision for military training of twenty Communist militants from Chile. However, during a meeting between Zhivkov and Altamirano in January 1976, a new decision was agreed for organizing six month military training of fifteen Socialist Party activists. In fact, that secret agreement was not made effective until 1983, when the Socialist Party faction of Clodomiro Almeyda requested again to be organized military training of fifteen Socialist functionaries in Bulgaria in 1984, and other ten functionaries in 1985²⁹.

The returning of the Peronists to power in Argentina in 1973 after seven years of military rule provoked a discussion in Sofia for the possibilities of establishment of direct contacts with some “anti-imperialist” groups among the political elite. Even in March 1973 the Bulgarian Ambassador

²⁷ *BANU IRD Records*, Letter from Carlos Morales to Georgi Traikov, Santiago, 25 November 1972.

²⁸ *TsDA*, Fond 1B, Opis 36, A.E. 2507, p. 1-4; Opis 60, A.E. 102, p. 1-47.

²⁹ *TsDA*, Fond 1B, Opis 64, A.E. 435, 449, 467, 776, 807, 847, 889. The military training of Chilean communists and socialists was given at Bulgarian military schools until 1987. In April 1988 CC BCP Secretariat declined a new request for military training with the argument that “there no exist favorable circumstances for armed resistance in Chile, which could be as well an additional factor for disunite of the anti-Pinochet political opposition in the country”.

in Buenos Aires Georgi Stefanov in a cable to Sofia proposed such an initiative for establishment of contacts between BANU and some leaders of the Civic Radical Union and Justicialist Party in Argentina³⁰. However, the growing political and economic instability in Argentina in the next two years discomfited those plans. In March 1975 Bulgarian Foreign Minister Petar Mladenov visited Buenos Aires. After his return back home he shared with his colleagues in the government that the Argentinean President Maria Estela de Peron created an expression for “a weak and incompetent person, manipulated by members of her cabinet” like her former private secretary Lopez Rega.

After the military coup in Argentina in March 1976 the BANU widened its contacts with number anti-dictatorship political forces. On BANU's invitation Bulgaria was visited by a number of leaders of different Radical party factions - Raul Alfonsin, Chairman of the Movement of Renovation and Change in the Civil Radical Union, Arturo Illia, leader of the Civil Radical Union of the People and ex-President³¹, and Hipolito Irigoyen, leader of the Bureau of the Argentine Radicals in Emigration. Contacts were also established with the Intransigent Party, led by Oscar Alende. In May 1980 a non public session of the Bureau of Argentinean radicals in emigration (OIERA) was held in Bulgaria.

During the rule of the President Louis Echeverria in Mexico (1970-1976) a new tendency for strengthening of the contacts with Europe was observed in the Mexican foreign policy orientation. On 11 June 1974 finally, after a decade of bilateral negotiations, the diplomatic relations between Bulgaria and Mexico were restored. The bilateral cooperation in the political, economic, and cultural areas achieved extremely dynamic development under the rule of the next president Jose Lopez Portillo, which was facilitated by the established personal contacts between the leaders of the two countries. In May 1978 Jose Lopez Portillo was the first Mexican President to visit Bulgaria, while a year later in April 1979 Todor Zhivkov paid a return visit to Mexico. During the presidency of Lopez Portillo (1976-1982) more than twenty bilateral agreements between Bulgaria and Mexico had been signed. The ruling from 1929 Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) in Mexico established political cooperation in 1979 with both BCP and BANU.

Shortly after diplomatic relations with Venezuela were established in August 1974 on the invitation of the BANU leadership two Venezuelan

³⁰ *BANU IRD Records*, Cable from Georgi Stefanov to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Buenos Aires, 21 March 1973.

³¹ A. Illia's visit to Bulgaria was reported in the Argentine political emigration's press – *La Republica*, Paris, No. 11, Febrero de 1980. See also: *BANU IRD Records*, Information on the visit of Arturo Illia to Bulgaria, Sofia, 19 October 1979, p. 1-6. According to the information, the ex-president of Argentina expressed strong interest for collaboration with the BANU “on a new base in the struggle for peace”.

delegations, one after another, visited Bulgaria. One of them was led by Armando Gonzales, Political Secretary of the *Acción Democrática* ruling party, and the other – by Dr Gonzalo Barrios, Chairman of the same party and Speaker of Parliament. In 1977 another leader of *Acción Democrática* party, its organization secretary – Luis Alvaro Usero visited Sofia. As early as 1970 the BANU established contacts with the most influential party in Colombia. In October 1979 the leader of the Liberal Revolutionary Movement and ex-President of Colombia Alfonso Lopez Michelsen visited Bulgaria with a main task to establish regular contacts with the BANU leadership. Actually, this visit had been proposed by the Colombian ambassador in Sofia, who was a functionary of LRM, and a close fellow of Michelsen.³² The Colombian ex-president expressed before his Bulgarian hosts his firm belief that “the moment was ripe for the change of the military regimes in Latin America with civilian governments”³³. In 1980 the BANU leadership welcomed in Sofia as well the Chairman of the Liberal Party, Victor Mosquera. During his talks with the BANU Secretary and Deputy Chairman of the State Council Petar Tanchev, the Colombian politician presented a view that his Liberal Party worked for the decrease of the country’s gradual dependency from the USA, and for a more active orientation toward the strengthening of its relations with Europe.

With several top secret resolutions Bulgarian Communist party leadership granted in the 1970s financial aid to several clandestine Communist parties in Latin America, which had to work under the military dictatorships in their countries. For instance, in November 1976 CC BCP Politburo approved proposal for granting the Communist Party of Paraguay with 12 000 USD for support to its information center in Buenos Aires. In May 1978 CC BCP Politburo agreed a clandestine session of the Political Commission of the Communist Party of Paraguay to be held in a state residence near Sofia and to paid the travel expenses of fifteen party functionaries from different European and Latin American countries to Bulgaria³⁴.

“The Third Wave” in Central America

While in the first half of the 20th Century the Mexican Revolution provided the pattern of a radical revolution in the Western Hemisphere, and

³² DA, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Opis 36-P, Information from Luben Avramov, head of Department 8th, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to Maria Zaharieva, Deputy Foreign Minister, Sofia, 4 October 1979.

³³ BANU IRD Records, Information on the visit of Alfonso Lopez Michelsen to Bulgaria, Sofia, 18 October 1979, p. 1-3.

³⁴ TSDA, Fond 1B, Opis 64, A.E. 485, 526.

the Cuban Revolution became a new political Latin America phenomenon of the mid-20th Century, the Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua was notable with its attempt to achieve a new pro-Marxist social regime in the region in the last quarter of the 20th Century. Differently from any other previous conflict in Central America, the last year of the armed struggle against Anastasio Somoza in Nicaragua was rather closely monitored by the Bulgarian mass media. As early as the autumn of 1978 the Bulgarian Communist Leadership had obtained reliable information regarding the correlation of the forces in Nicaragua and established for the first time initial direct contacts with the Sandinist Front of National Liberation (FSLN). In November 1978 strictly confidential information under the title "Regarding the Events in Nicaragua" limited for circulation for the Politburo members only pointed out that the anti-Somoza struggle turns into "an event of importance beyond national borders". This analysis ended with the following conclusion: "The most probable outcome of the political crisis in Nicaragua is deposition of the Somoza regime and forming of a coalition bourgeois government"³⁵.

On 2 July 1979 Bulgaria provided for the first time material aid (uniforms, military equipment, medical supplies) for about 120 000 USD, which had to be transported via Havana³⁶. A month after the Sandinista victory on July 19th 1979 the top Bulgarian Leadership discussed new confidential information - "On the Political Situation in Nicaragua after the Somoza Regime Deposition". This analysis was a result of new information received from Soviet, Cuban, East German and Mexican diplomatic and political sources. Bulgaria was one of the first East European countries recognizing the new Nicaraguan government. As early as the beginning of August the *Otechestven Front* [Fatherland front] – a Bulgarian political mass organization - delivered food and medicines to Managua with two charter flights.³⁷

On October 18th 1979 the first official FSLN delegation led by Henry Ruiz and Louis Carrion, members of its national leadership, arrived in Sofia. At the very opening of the talks with their Bulgarian hosts Henry Ruiz declared the Sandinista desire to establish an "urgent, close alliance with the Soviet Union, with the GDR, with Bulgaria and then we shall consolidate the contacts according to the circumstances". Louis Carrion who was also a Deputy Commander-in-chief of the country's armed forces spoke particularly on the situation of the army during the transitional

³⁵ *TsDA*, Fond 1B, Opis 81, Unprocessed Record of *Foreign Policy & International Relations* Department [VPMV], CC BCP, 1967-1990.

³⁶ *TsDA*, Fond 1B, Opis 64, A.E. 557, p. 1-3.

³⁷ Archive of the International Relations Department, National Council of the Fatherland Front, Sofia [unprocessed].

period of its turning from guerrilla forces into a regular army. According to his information, the Nicaraguan armed forces had at their disposal a small number of ‘Sherman’ tanks and World War II English light tanks as well as less than 10 artillery batteries with Chinese arms, obtained from Cuba. The country was practically with no Air and Naval forces since the Somoza’s troops had taken away the few airplanes and coast patrol boats. The Sandinist Army only found several old British airplanes “T-28” and “T-33”, one helicopter and one patrol boat. The infantry was also poorly armed with a very limited number of machine-guns and “M-16” guns. Following the information presented the Nicaraguan delegation asked for definite economic and military assistance. In reply the Bulgarian representatives promised to consider most urgently the material assistance to be extended to Nicaragua as well as the training of Sandinista military personnel in Bulgarian Military Academies.³⁸

Very soon after the first FSLN delegation’s visit in Bulgaria, on November 17th 1979 an official announcement of establishing diplomatic relations between the two countries was published. In reply to the Nicaraguan request the CC BCP Secretariat adopted a top secret Resolution No. B-23 for giving Nicaragua a special military and other aid to the extent of a total of 2 mln. USD. 26 Bulgarian physicians (15 military and 11 civilian) were sent to Nicaragua. In December 1979 another top secret Resolution No. B-34 was adopted providing for the training of 20 Sandinist functionaries intelligence and counter-intelligence courses in the Darzhavna Sigurnost [State Security] High School in Sofia, with a subsequent resolution of February 19th 1980 their number is increased to 60.³⁹ New special assistance points were agreed during the visit of the Nicaraguan Ministers of the Interior and Defense, i.e. - Thomas Borge and Humberto Ortega in Bulgaria in March 1980. At a special meeting of some leading figures of the Bulgarian State Security Services with Thomas Borge and his deputy Lenin Serna in June 1981 the parameters of cooperation between the secret services of the two countries were defined.⁴⁰

In January 1981 there was signed a new agreement for giving Nicaragua three credit loans amounting to a total of 18,5 mln USD. 30 Nicaraguan fighter pilots passed a course of training on the Soviet airplanes MiG-21 and MiG-23 at an Air Forces Academy in North-East Bulgaria. In August 1982 the Bulgarian Government adopted a top secret Resolution No.143 for giving Nicaragua a free aid amounting to the currency equivalent of 374 000 BG Lv (about 200 000 USD) in the form of arms and military

³⁸ *TsDA*, Fond 1B, Opis 60, A.E. 257, p. 1-130.

³⁹ *TsDA*, Fond 1B, Opis 64, A.E. 578, 583.

⁴⁰ Archive of the Commission for Bulgarian State Security and Military Intelligence Dossiers (*COMDOS*), M, Fond 1, Opis 12, A.E. 356, p. 5.

equipment. The delivery consisted of 25 light machine-guns □G-34, 2000 sub-machine guns “Shpagin”, 300 revolvers Zbrojovka M-27, 1000 army uniforms and other military outfits.⁴¹ Another secret government decision No. 63 of 7 May 1983 granted arms and military equipment (100 light machine-guns, 6 cannons, etc.) for 476 000 BG Lv to Nicaraguan armed forces. In January 1984 a new “special” aid of 340 000 BG Lv was given⁴². According to the bilateral agreements for economic and technical cooperation, Bulgaria provided technical support and participated in the construction of several economic projects (the international port “El Bluff”, Mina “Vesuvio”, a hydropower complex, a vegetable cannery in Sebaco Valley, a freezing plant, an agricultural plant near Bonanza, etc.). In 1982 the commercial exchange between Bulgaria and Nicaragua reached 13 mln. USD, while in 1985 it exceeded 50 mln. USD.

The political contacts between the two countries enjoyed the utmost dynamics and intensity. In the first five years after July 19th 1979 nearly all the members of the Sandinista Leadership visited Bulgaria. In 1984, for instance, the CC BCP Secretariat voted more than ten resolutions referred to Nicaragua! During the talks with the visiting Nicaraguan delegations exchange of information and consultations regarding the situation in Central America were always the central topics. The Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs held also regular consultations on the situation in the Central America with the COMECON partners, in particular, with the Foreign Ministries of the USSR, Cuba and the GDR.

Following the tacitly accepted ‘division of tasks’, the BANU was obviously given the task to keep in touch with political parties, rival to the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN). In 1981 the BANU established contacts with the People’s Social-Christian Party. At that party leadership’s request the BANU organized in the course of the following several months printing of a number of PSCP program and propaganda materials in Bulgaria. In 1982 the party chairman, Carlos Garcia, and in 1985 its Secretary General – Mauricio Diaz, visited Bulgaria. Soon after the 1984 elections in Nicaragua dissension arose between the PSCP and the FSLN. It is rather significant that in those circumstances the leaders of the PSCP asked their Bulgarian partner to help them settle their misunderstandings with the sandinists.

In 1986 the BANU established its first contacts with one of the oldest political parties in Nicaragua – the Conservative-Democratic Party. At the 1984 elections for President that party’s candidate, Clemente Guido, came second, after Daniel Ortega, obtaining 13, 9% of the votes. In a

⁴¹ *COMDOS*, M, Fond 1, Opis 12, A.E. 386, p. 1-2.

⁴² *TeDA*, Fond 1B, Opis 64, A.E. 677, p. 3-5; A.E. 680, p. 1-2; A.E. 707, p. 1-3; Fond 136, Opis 86, A.E. 957, p. 1-3.

conversation with the the BANU leader, Petar Tanchev, during his visit in Bulgaria in July 1989 Guido declared: "Our Party supports the revolution but we are in opposition of the FSLN because they are unwilling to share the authority with any other political force."

The information received from the Bulgarian embassies in Havana and Managua show that the Bulgarian government had a realistic view of the political development in Nicaragua and the increasing problems of the country. During the second stage of the Sandinista rule (1985 - 1989) Sofia continued to give the Sandinista regime considerable economic aid and foreign policy support. The agreements reached during the visit of Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega in Bulgaria during his tour of several European countries in April-May 1985 were of particular importance. At his talks with the Bulgarian leader Todor Zhivkov in the evening of May 2nd Ortega informed that because of the devastation the country suffered in consequence of the civil war, Nicaragua needed urgent economic aid to the extent of 356 mln. USD. The Nicaraguan President informed that he had allegedly agreed with the Spanish Prime Minister Felipe Gonzalez to receive 25 mln. USD credit and to have the refund of other 10 mln. USD postponed. As a total the Sandinista government expected to receive from West Europe 190 mln. USD as credit and 50 mln. USD as free aid but the other funds required were to be provided by the COMECON countries. Todor Zhivkov promised that Bulgaria will give the Nicaraguan economy "considerable material aid".⁴³ Additional "special" assistance was promised (it actually being lights guns and electronic devices). In 1986 after talks between Todor Zhivkov and Bayardo Arce during the 27th CPSU congress in Moscow Bulgarian government approved decision for delivery of additional 20 000 t petroleum to the previously agreed 20 000 t in 1985, and a new loan for arms and ammunitions of 10 mln. USD⁴⁴. As a total during the period 1979-1988 Bulgaria gave Nicaragua credits for more than 200 mln. USD, including 60 mln. USD free aid. In March 1989 the Council of the Ministers adopted a resolution to give Nicaragua another 2 mln. USD of free aid and to write-off a Nicaraguan debt amounting to 16 mln. USD⁴⁵.

Nicaragua and the other Central American countries were mutually bound in more than one aspect, and they followed the same line of logic. Similarly to the mutual political and military assistance which the three Central American states (Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras) and their Armed Forces gave to each other and to the anti-Sandinista guerrilla groups, the guerrilla forces of these three countries proceeded in the same way with the FSLN and Cuban leaderships. The Bulgarian archives show the existence

⁴³ *TSDA*, Fond 1B, Opis 60, A.E. 356, p. 1-39.

⁴⁴ *TSDA*, Fond 1B, Opis 64, A.E. 831, p. 1-4; Fond 136, Opis 86, A.E. 1042, p. 1-9.

⁴⁵ *TSDA*, Fond 1B, Opis 64, A.E. 908.

of intensive information exchange between the leftist guerrilla forces in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras and the extent of the special aid received by them via Havana and Managua.

Soon after the Sandinista victory, the Sub-commission of Inter-American Affairs held an important discussion on the “Cuban-Soviet” connections in the Western Hemisphere. Detailed information was presented by the vice-director of the DIA, the head of the Soviet and East-European Department at the CIA Political Analyses Office and other intelligence aces.⁴⁶ By the end 1980 the North-American intelligence services got also some documents of the Salvadorian Communist Party and Revolutionary People’s Party which included data of armament and ammunitions delivered to the leftist rebels of El Salvador. Those materials showed that Bulgaria had delivered to the El Salvador guerrillas 300 sub-machine guns produced in Germany with 200 000 cartridges and 10 000 combat uniforms. Hungary and Czechoslovakia contributed considerable shares of material aid as well while Vietnam and the GDR supplied the biggest part of the armament.⁴⁷ The archival documents show that the information circulated in the West in regard of the Bulgarian involvement in the Central American armament traffic was in general true.

The Bulgarian leadership received periodically classified summary information about the political situation in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras both - from delegations of these countries visiting Sofia and through the Bulgarian embassies in Havana, Managua and Mexico. Rather often the analyzed information came from Moscow, East Berlin and Prague (where the international communist periodical *Problems of the Peace and Socialism* had its main office).

In December 1980 a BCP Delegation, visiting Havana to participate in the Second Congress of the Cuban Communist Party, held long talks with four of the National Liberation Front “Farabundo Martí” [FMLN] leaders. The representative of the FMLN informed of their intentions to undertake an armed offensive in January 1981 and appealed for military, medical and other material assistance. The Bulgarian aid for the period 1981-1984 following summary data amounted to a total of 854 000 BG LV, covering mainly infantry armament, medical supplies and clothing. In 1982 twenty wounded FMLN rebels arrived for medical treatment in Bulgaria, and following a resolution of the CC BCP of March 1983 the Bulgarian Red Cross sent a large quantity of medical supplies. During one of his visits

⁴⁶DA, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Documentation: *Impact on Cuban-Soviet ties in the Western Hemisphere*. Hearings before the Subcommittee on Inter-American affairs of the Committee on Foreign Affairs. House of representatives, 96th Congress, Second Session, Washington 1980.

⁴⁷DA, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Documentation: *Communist Interference in El Salvador*. US Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, Washington, Special Report No. 80, February 23, 1981, p. 1-8.

to Bulgaria (one of a total of 5 for the period 1980-1984) the leader of the Salvadorian communists Jorge Shafik Handal appealed on behalf of the Front for a new "special" assistance to the extent of 250 000 BG Lv (50 granade-discharges with ammunitions, combat uniforms, medical supplies, type-writers), he also asked for a team of five Bulgarian physicians to be sent to Managua to help with the treatment of wounded Salvadorian guerrillas. In the period 1982-1986 more than 30 FMLN guerrillas received military training in Bulgarian military schools, including five pilots of small transport planes. In his personal memo for Todor Zhivkov the Secretary of the CC BCP in charge of the international affairs, Dimitar Stanishev informed that from the beginning of 1980 to the end of 1983 the aid given to the leftist rebels in El Salvador (for armament and medical supplies) amounted to a total of 600 000 BG Lv. A CC BCP Secretariat secret resolution of 8 July 1987 approved delivery of 225 machine guns and 500 pistols for FMLN via Cuba. Another Secretariat resolution of 19 September 1988 approved a new delivery of 100 RPG-7 anti-tank rocket propelled grenade launchers, 1000 hand grenades and other armament for about 200 000 BG Lv.⁴⁸

The Bulgarian Politburo kept its regular contacts with functionaries of the Front of National Liberation "Farabundo Marti" and the Revolutionary Democratic Front of El Salvador till the end of 1989. After the disastrous earthquake in that country which result was more than 1500 deaths, the Bulgarian Red Cross sent humanitarian aid to the population affected by the disaster. At a session of the Expert group on the international information at the Warsaw Pact Political Committee held in June 1988 the Bulgarian delegation presented its assessment of the development of the multilateral discussions and the prospects to put the military and political crisis in El Salvador and Guatemala under control in the course of the next few months.⁴⁹

The first contacts between Sofia and the four leftist resistance forces in Guatemala were established in 1979. In November 1980 those groups reached an agreement to build up a united front - The Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity [URNG]. The united organization of the resistance forces announced its establishment in January 1982, and several months later a delegation of the URNG visited Bulgaria. The Bulgarian Communist Party maintained regular contacts not only with Guatemalan communists but also with the main armed force of the Front - the Revolutionary Organization of the Armed People [ORPA]. In 1985 three leaders of the URNG visited Bulgaria. They were - the Commander-in-chief of the Guerrilla Army of the Poor peoples [EGP] Rolando Moran \Ricardo Ramirez de Leon\, the Commander-in-chief of the ORPA Gaspar Ilom \Rodrigo Asturias\ and

⁴⁸ TSDA, Fond 1B, Opis 64, A.E. 592, 599, 665, 733, 871, 896 ; Opis 81, VPMV, 1967-1990.

⁴⁹ DA, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Opis 45-10, A.E. 30, p. 37-42.

the Commander-in-chief of the Forces of the Armed Rebels [FAR] Pablo Monsanto \Jorge Soto Garcia\). During the talks in Sofia it was agreed that the Bulgarian side would cover the travel expenses of a large group of the Front activists who are to attend a special course in “guerrilla warfare” in Vietnam. In the same year through the Bulgarian Fatherland Front to the URNG medical supplies, food products and 150 tents of a total value of 80 000 BG Lv were sent via Cuba.⁵⁰

The process of unification of the left forces in Honduras, encouraged by Cuba and Nicaragua, took longer than in the other two Central American countries. During his visit in Sofia in October 1982, at a meeting with Todor Zhivkov the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Honduras Rigoberto Padilla Rush informed that after a number of unsuccessful attempts, in February 1982 at a meeting in Havana with the participation of Fidel Castro representatives of five left organizations agreed to establish a National Unitary Leadership of the Revolutionary movement of Honduras.⁵¹ In April 1983 the establishment of the Front of National Unity “23rd July” was announced. It was composed by the Morazanist Front for the Liberation of Honduras, Cinchoneros People’s Liberation of Honduras, Revolutionary Unity Movement, Lorenzo Zelaya Revolutionary People’s Forces and the Communist Party of Honduras. From 1982 to 1984 the Bulgarian government sent to the leftist guerrillas in Honduras via Managua “special” aid amounting to a total of 15 000 USD (including 100 sub-machine guns “Shpagin” and 200 pistols)⁵². The request for training of Honduras rebels in Bulgaria was answered in the negative. At that time according to information received in Sofia, personnel of the Honduras rebel groups attended short-term military training courses in the USSR, the GDR and Cuba.

Obviously, following again the “division of tasks”, the contacts with the newly established left radical fronts and guerrilla formations in Central America (El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala and Costa Rica) in the 1980s were established by the BCP and the Fatherland Front. The BANU maintained relations with representatives of the so-called “moderate left” in Honduras. On invitation of the BANU in July 1983 a delegation of the Liberal National Union, the left wing of the Liberal party of Honduras visited Bulgaria. In 1981 in a report to the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kiril Zlatkov, Bulgarian Ambassador in Costa Rica, analyzed the possibilities for extension of the political contacts with the major parties in that country. In that report he also pointed out that the BANU might create

⁵⁰ *TsDA*, Fond 28, Record of the International Relations Department, National Council of the Fatherland Front, Sofia [unprocessed].

⁵¹ *TsDA*, Fond 1B, Opis 81, VPMV, 1967-1990.

⁵² *TsDA*, Fond 1B, Opis 64, A.E. 649, 661, 698, 792, 794.

relations with the ruling party of the Democratic Renovation, with the republican Calderonist Party as well as to keep on maintaining its contacts with the National Liberation party of the ex-President Daniel Oduber⁵³. In his report the Bulgarian Ambassador also stated that according to the political forecasts, the next president after the forthcoming 1982 elections will most probably be Luis Alberto Monje, indeed the candidate of the National Liberation party, which is what as a matter of fact happened. At the same time, the Fatherland Front leadership established contacts with *Pueblo Unido*, an electoral leftist coalition of the Communist (Vanguardia Popular) and Socialist Party, and People's Revolutionary Movement (MRP). When in December 1981 the Secretary General of MRP, Erick Ardon in a letter to Todor Zhivkov proposed the establishment of direct contacts with the BCP, Bulgarian Communist leadership assessed that the contacts with MRP should continue to be maintained via the Fatherland Front.

During the rule of Gen. Omar Torrijos in Panama the activity of the political parties was with the status of "semi-legal". From the early 1970s the BANU established irregular contacts with the created with the support of Gen. Torrijos national agrarian organization CONAC (Confederacion Nacional de Ascentanicientos Campesinos). In November 1973 CONAC Secretary General Julio Bermudez paid a visit to Sofia. A BANU delegation attended the 3rd congress of CONAC in January 1974. It was the only East European delegation at the congress due to the CONAC organizers' considerations to avoid accusations of "anti-American manifestations" during the Panama Canal negotiations with the USA representatives. However, the Bulgarian delegate Dimitar Dimitrov delivered a detailed speech at the CONAC congress, and had talks with the President of the Parliament, and with the Minister of Agriculture, Gerardo Gonzalez, a close friend of Gen. Torrijos⁵⁴.

After the re-legalization of the political parties activities in Panama by the end of the 1970s the BANU established relations with the ruling Revolutionary Democratic Party (PRD) and its Secretary General Gerardo Gonzalez. On behalf of the BANU leadership an invitation to visit Bulgaria was sent to PRD's leaders Bertha Torrijos and Romulo Bethancourt. That party's representatives took part in the BANU's congresses and in the international agrarian meetings in Sofia in the 1980s. The Second Congress of the ruling party of Panama held in February 1984 explicitly declared that country's orientation to a foreign policy of independence and non-commitment in the spirit of the "Torrijism". Meanwhile, the Fatherland Front established contacts with another "Pro-Torrijos" political organization

⁵³ DA, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Opis 38-P.

⁵⁴ BANU IRD Records, Information from Dimitar Dimitrov, Sofia, January 1974, p. 1-11; III Congreso Nacional de CONAC. Discursos, Panama, Enero 1974, p. 3-6, 51-54.

Frente Amplio Popular (FRAMPO), which Secretary General Renato Pereira visited Bulgaria in 1982.

The restoration of the democratic civil authorities in the bigger Latin American states in the 1980s offered new possibilities for development of political contacts with influential parties and social organizations in that region. Much to the surprise of many analysts, the leader of the Civic Radical Union, Raul Alfonsín, who indisputably eliminated the candidate of the Justicialist party, won the presidential elections in Argentina in 1983. A delegation from Bulgaria, led by Petar Tanchev, Deputy Chairman of the State Council (an equivalent of Vice President of the country) and Secretary of the BANU, was present on the new President's inauguration ceremony in December 1983 in Buenos Aires. The leadership of the ruling party treated the Bulgarian delegation with noticeable attention. The assistance the BANU had rendered for holding a clandestine meeting of the country's radical political emigration in Europe was particularly remembered. Talks for signing a special agreement of collaboration between the BANU and the CRU were held. When the Argentine President gave audience to Petar Tanchev, he accepted the invitation to visit Bulgaria, at the same time recollecting with good feelings his previous visit in that country in 1975. As a matter of fact, in April 1985 Victor Martínez, Vice-President of Argentina and Deputy-Chairman of the CRU paid a visit to Sofia. According to the contents-analysis of 57 materials printed in the Argentine press in relation to the above mentioned visit, made by the Bulgarian Embassy in Buenos Aires, only two of the materials were openly negative in regard to Todor Zhivkov's political regime. In November 1985 also on the BANU's invitation the Secretary General of the ruling CRU, Dr Adolfo Gass, came to Sofia. A month later another leader of the same party, Hipólito Irigoyen also arrived there. The character of the personal relations between Irigoyen and Angel Dimitrov, Secretary of the BANU in charge of international affairs is evident from a letter of Dimitrov's of February 19th 1986. With reference to the organization of the 35th Congress of the BANU, set to take place in May 1986, Angel Dimitrov wrote Irigoyen: "I would like to ask you for your personal assistance in securing the participation of prominent and important Latin American political figures of similar to yours ideas from Brazil, Uruguay, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Costa Rica, etc., some of whom we talked about in Bulgaria". A year later, during his stay in Argentina in March 1987, Dimitrov was received by Raul Alfonsín. The President of Argentina discussed with his Bulgarian guest the problem of the "painful democracy" of Central and South America and expressed his genuine desire for further development of the Bulgarian-Argentine relations.

The reports from Buenos Aires received in the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs were more and more confidently forecasting that the next

presidential elections in 1989 would be won by the Justicialist party. The first more direct contacts with representatives of the Justicialist party were established by the BANU as early as 1984. In October 1984 one of the young leaders of the Justicialist party and Governor of Chaco province, Florencio Teney, who was of Bulgarian origin, visited Bulgaria. Besides the talks regarding the prospects of economic collaboration between the two countries, Teney also discussed the likely contacts to be developed between his party and the BANU. At the 35th BANU Congress in May 1986 there was for the first time a representative of the Justicialist party. In 1987 Antonio Cafiero, an influential peronist leader and Governor of the Buenos Aires province, received an invitation to visit Bulgaria. BANU's leadership paid special attention to other "public figures with good prospects" in the Justicialist party as well, such as Carlos Menem, Governor of the small province Rioja who later on defeated Cafiero in the rivalry for presidential nomination and subsequently won the elections for President in 1989.

In November 1981 for the first time in twenty years a Brazilian Parliamentary delegation, led by the Vice-President of the Senate, visited Bulgaria. In March 1982 the visit was returned, and Petar Tanchev, Deputy Chairman of the State Council and leader of the BANU went to Brazil. He was received by the Brazilian President, Joao Baptista Figueiredo, and also met the Chairman of the ruling Democratic-Socialist Party, Jose Sarney as well as the leader of the second important political force in Brazil – the Brazilian Democratic Movement.

The largest catholic state in the world (with population of 145 million people at the end of the 1980s), where one third of the practicing Catholics of the world live, and with the most impressive Episcopal synod (5 cardinals and 365 bishops), was understandably stricken by the news of the attempt on the life of the head of the Roman Catholic Church, Pope John-Paul II. However, the campaign related to the so-called "Bulgarian connection" never reached the extent and the effect it had in the Western Europe and the USA. The balanced approach predominated in the Brazil press and it gave a considerable space to the official Bulgarian version in regard of the accused Bulgarian citizens. In this respect certain important part should be assigned to the strong influence the radical "theology of liberation" had upon the Christian congregations in Brazil, which influence was noticed by Pope John Paul II during his visit there in 1983 too.

In March 1985 a Bulgarian delegation, led by Petar Tanchev, took part in the Presidential inauguration ceremony for Jose Sarney, the first in 20 years civilian President of Brazil who acquired the post through a "stroke of fate" following the sudden death of the President elected – Tancredo Neves. The BANU leader and Deputy Chairman of the State Council of Bulgaria had talks with Jose Sarney, with the Brazilian Minister of Foreign Affairs,

with Ulisses Guimarães, Chairman of the Brazilian Democratic Movement and other Brazilian politicians⁵⁵. A year later Ulisses Guimarães and Leonel Brizola, leader of the Democratic Trabalhista party and Governor of the state of Rio de Janeiro received invitations from the BANU leadership to take part in the 35th Congress of the BANU. Representatives of those two parties did take part in the BANU Congress and the meeting-dialogue, which took place after the Congress in Sofia. On their arriving back to Brazil, they presented a special report on that international forum to the House of Representatives⁵⁶. When a Bulgarian parliamentary delegation visited Brazil in August 1988, the Communist deputies paid attention also to the leftist *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (PT), whose leader Ignacio Lula da Silva ran in the presidential elections next year for the first time.

Apart of Brazil there was another Latin American country which sent to history the military dictatorship that had ruled it. After the restoration of the civil rule in Uruguay, in 1984 Julio Sanguinetti, the presidential candidate of the most influential party “Colorado”, was elected for President of the country. The BANU established active contacts with the two most important forces in Uruguay. In 1985 Enrique Tarigo, Secretary General of the Battlista Party (Colorado), leader of one of the ruling party’s wings, Vice-President of the country and a Presidential candidate subsequently, addressed a letter to Petar Tanchev, Secretary of the BANU to invite him to take part in the celebrations on the occasion of the 150th Anniversary of the Party. On his part Tanchev invited the National leadership of “Colorado” and the leadership of the National Party (Blanco) to take part in 35th BANU Congress. In July 1986 Uruguayan Foreign Minister Enrique Iglesias visited Bulgaria, while in September 1987 Todor Zhivkov received an official invitation by the President of Uruguay to visit Montevideo. In 1987 the BANU invited the Chairman of the National Party, Ulysson Feriera in person as well as the leaders of some of the party’s wings to visit Bulgaria. Following the invitation Senator Blanco Alberto Sumaran, Secretary General of the party fraction “For the Homeland” and previous candidate for president of the country arrived in Sofia. He emphatically expressed his satisfaction from the talks he had had with representatives of the BANU – the first political party in Eastern Europe that his party established direct contacts with. Sumaran gave information about the situation in Uruguay and the efforts of Blanco to stabilize the “fragile democracy” founded in the country.

In June 1987 the leader of another wing of the National Party, Senator Luis Lacalle was in Bulgaria. It was his first visit in a Warsaw Pact country. Lacalle informed his Bulgarian hosts of the agreements reached

⁵⁵ *Zemеделско Zname*, Sofia, 16, 18, 19 March 1985.

⁵⁶ *BANU IRD Records*, Information from Bulgarian ambassador in Brasil Georgi Gyurov, 7 October 1986.

at the meeting of the presidents of Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay. In an interview with a correspondent of the highly regarded Spanish newspaper *El País* Luis Lacalle emphasized: "Though we proceed from different political conceptions, contacts with countries like Bulgaria are necessary." At the same time, Bulgarian Fatherland Front continued to maintain in the 1980s its close contacts with the leftist Frente Amplio, which leader Gen. Liber Seregni visited Bulgaria in September 1985, accompanied by a representative of the Christian Democratic Party.

In the time of Gen. Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship and predominantly in the mid-1980s the evolvement of two inside antipodal processes characterized the political opposition forces in Chile, i.e. – discord among the leaders of the different parties and tendency for uniting and re-grouping on non-party principles. Differentiation and divisions occurred in the Christian-Democratic party, which split in three main wings, the Socialist party – in two main wings, and the MAPU party – in two main wings as well as within the Communist party. In the course of the nearly 15 year period after the military coup of Gen. Pinochet of September 1973 the Bulgarian political organizations maintained contacts mainly with representatives of the "extreme left" who appealed for military actions and "national uprising" against the dictatorship. Certain contacts were also maintained with some of the representatives of the "moderate" (social-democratic) left. While BCP continued to maintain close relations with the Communist Party and the Socialist Party faction of Clodomiro Almeyda, the best relations of the BANU were with political figures of the MAPU (labour-agrarian) party. In May 1989 with the assistance of BANU in the resort town of Bankya, not far from Sofia was held a clandestine meeting of above mentioned party's leaders, led by its Secretary General Claudio Ramos (Cesario Flores). Though not regular, contacts were also maintained with the Christian left and the Radical party whose representatives were invited to the BANU congresses in 1981 and 1986.

In 1988 the BANU leadership made certain efforts to establish contacts with the most influential opposition force – the Christian Democratic party (PDC). In June 1988 a Chilean agrarian delegation composed of PDC's activists visited Bulgaria. The BANU Secretary, Petar Tanchev sent through the delegation a letter to the PDC Chairman, Patricio Aylwin, inviting him to visit Bulgaria for "exchanging views on future collaboration" between the two parties. The account of the BANU's international activities in 1988, approved on a session of the BANU leadership in January 1989, pointed out: "Taking into consideration the results of the recently held referendum in Chile and the fact that the Chilean Christian Democratic party appears to be a leading alternative force in a future democratic government, we should most highly evaluate the contact established with that party..." As a matter

of fact, though, no real working contacts between the BANU and the PDC were established. Patricio Aylwin's becoming the new President of Chile on March 11th 1990 and Bulgaria's adopting the route of pluralistic democracy after the changes of November 10th 1989, made possible the renewal of the diplomatic relations between the two countries after 17 years of break and it took place on April 6th 1990.

In spite of the effect the petrol crisis had on the Mexican economy, the Bulgarian-Mexican relations kept on developing during the presidential turn of Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado who won the expected absolute majority in 1982 with appeals for "revolutionary nationalism", "social democracy" and "national unity". However, the financial and economic crisis in Mexico in the beginning of the 1980s had its negative effect also on the bilateral economic cooperation with Bulgaria and other East European countries. As a result the commercial exchange between Mexico and Bulgaria drastically felt from 10 mln. USD in 1982 to 317 000 USD in 1984. The political contacts of the ruling Mexican party continued to be intensive both with the BCP and BANU. At the invitation of the National leadership of the Institutional-Revolutionary party (PRI) in 1982 and 1985 Petar Tanchev visited Mexico. The BANU's leadership maintained relations of friendship with the PRI leaders who, following the established tradition for changes in the state administration, assumed the important posts of federal ministers and governors – Victor Pacheco, Gustavo Carvajal Moreno, Mario Hernandez Posadas, Jorge de la Vega Dominguez, Manuel Camacho Solis, Luis Donaldo Colossio, Rafael Rodriguez Barrera and others. The BANU was the only foreign party invited to the congresses of the official central agrarian association in Mexico. In 1986 (June-September) and a year later (October 1987 – March 1988) the BANU sponsored agrarian training courses for activists of the PRI⁵⁷. In January 1989 in a letter to Jose Murat, PRI Secretary in charge of the international matters, his Bulgarian counterpart in the BANU, Angel Dimitrov suggested:

We should put an end to the formal approach and should not limit our relations within the prescriptions of protocol, they are to become more dynamic and to be amenable to the part and position our two political formations hold in the their respective countries as well as to our politic responsibilities at this moment of radical changes in the international life.

The energy crisis of the late 1970s seriously affected the leading petrol producer of Latin America – Venezuela. That reflected on the bilateral diplomatic and economic relations between Bulgaria and Venezuela. During

⁵⁷ BANU IRD Records. See also: *La Vanguardia Campesina*, Nexico, Septiembre de 1986; *El Excelsior*, Mexico, 20 de Abril de 1988.

the rule of the Social-Christian Party, COPEI, the political contacts between the two countries were realized mainly through the BANU. At his visit in Caracas in 1980 Svetla Daskalova, Minister of Justice and member of the BANU leadership, was received by the President Luis Herrera Campins and had talks with the leaders of the main opposition party Gonzalo Barrios and Jaime Lusinchi. In May 1982 the head of BANU, Petar Tanchev was also received by the President of Venezuela and had talks with the leadership of the ruling party COPEI (Comite de Orientacion Politica Electoral Independiente). At the request of BANU's leadership the Bulgarian Ambassador in Caracas handed Jaime Lusinchi, Secretary of the Democratic Movement (AD), an invitation to visit Sofia. The Bulgarian Embassy had in the due course informed Sofia that Lusinchi had an extremely good chance to win the forthcoming presidential elections in Venezuela.

At the presidential election that took place in the end of 1982 Jaime Lusinchi had achieved a most convincing victory. A Bulgarian delegation, led by Petar Tanchev, was present at his inauguration ceremony in February the following year. Tanchev handed the new Venezuelan President a letter with an invitation for him to visit Bulgaria from the Bulgarian head of state, Todor Zhivkov. The leader of BANU had meetings with the Chairman of the ruling *Accion Democratica* party as well as with Jovito Villalba, the leader of the smaller party – partner in the coalition cabinet, the Republican Democratic Union. Following an invitation from the BANU, Villalba visited Bulgaria in June 1984. At his talks with Petar Tanchev in Sofia in July 1986 Ruben Carpio, Chairman of the Commission of Foreign Policy at the Senate of Venezuela, defined the relations between the *Accion Democratica* and the BANU as “excellent”. In May 1987 in a letter of his, addressed to the Venezuelan President, Tanchev pointed out: “We believe that a visit of yours in our country and your talks with our head of Party and state would open a much wider span of possibilities for the development of all-embracing collaboration between Bulgaria and Venezuela”. Information of the Bulgarian Embassy in Caracas stated that an eventual visit of Lusinchi in Bulgaria after his already scheduled visits to Italy and Yugoslavia had actually been discussed but the inner political situation and the confrontation among the different groups in the party had forestalled the realization of that plan. In September 1988, at the eve of the new presidential elections Angel Dimitrov, Secretary of the BANU visited Venezuela at an invitation from the *Accion Democratica*. The Venezuelan President, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the leaders of the ruling party received him. In his report on the visit Dimitrov informed of the discussed possibilities for increasing the dynamics of the bilateral relations between the two countries and forecasted that the nearly sure election of Carlos Andres Perez for President of the country might open new vistas for the development of the official Bulgarian-

Venezuelan relations. At a meeting with official Bulgarian representatives after his victory and assuming the presidential post, the new President of Venezuela expressed his conviction that the “relations between the two countries will develop in a more energetic and dynamic way”. A month later, induced by the economic crisis, social disturbances (the so-called “Caracaso”) broke out in Venezuela and caused one of the most serious political crises in that country’s contemporary history.

In one to the neighboring to Venezuela countries, Colombia, the fragile parliamentary democracy kept on being just a formal stage screen for the civil war, rioting in there from the 1940s on. In view of that inner political situation it might be assumed that the political relations between Colombia and Bulgaria would be extremely restrained. As a matter of fact, the ‘dirty war’ affected to a certain extent mainly the economic relations between the countries while characteristic for the political ones was their stable development. A solid base for that were the intensive contacts established with the leaders of the two main political forces – the Conservative and the Liberal parties. As early as 1982 influential activists of the Liberal party visited Bulgaria. Quite soon after that party’s candidate, Virgilio Barco Vargas, won the presidential elections in 1986, an influential Liberal Party politician, Otto Morales Bermudez visited Bulgaria. After his return home, Morales made a high appreciation of his talks with the BANU leaders.⁵⁸ In March 1987 the new chairman of the party national leadership, Eduardo Mestre visited Bulgaria⁵⁹. Later on same year the BANU Secretary for International Relations, Angel Dimitrov had talks in Bogota with Ernesto Samper, the new leader of the Liberal Party⁶⁰. At the end of 1988 in Bulgaria a training course on “Economics and Organization of the Agrarian Cooperative” was organized. It was attended by 22 functionaries of the Liberal Party of Colombia.

As early as 1985 on behalf of the BANU Senator Luis Carlos Galan, the popular leader of the New Liberalism party was invited to visit Bulgaria. His visit in Bulgaria took place in June 1987.⁶¹ Two years later, in August 1989, the most probable future president of Colombia was killed by the contract assassins of the “drug cartel”. That gave the Colombian government reason to open a total war to the “narcobaron” from Medellín and Cali which resulted in the arrest of the most notorious of them but did not bring about the total extermination of the organized crime in the country.

⁵⁸ *El Espectador*, Bogotá, 5 de Enero de 1987.

⁵⁹ *El Espacio*, 13 de Marzo de 1987; *El Tiempo*, 19 de Marzo de 1987.

⁶⁰ *BANU IRD Records*, Information from Angel Dimitrov, 9 November 1987, p. 1-3.

⁶¹ *BANU IRD Records*, Information from Victor Valkov, Sofia, 6 July 1987, p. 1-5. Press interview with Galan in: *Zemledelsko Zname*, Sofia, 2 July 1987.

In the beginning of the 1980s several leaders of the Colombian Communist Party in confidential talks during their visits to Sofia and Moscow requested that some FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia) wounded guerrillas to be treated in Bulgarian military hospitals and to receive further military training in Bulgaria. The request was rejected by CC BCP Secretariat with the motive that Bulgaria and Colombia had “normal diplomatic relations”. Soon after the establishment of the left electoral coalition *Union Patriótica* in February 1985, its leaders contacted the Fatherland Front leadership in Sofia. In March 1989 the president of *Union Patriótica* and a Colombian Senator Bernardo Jaramillo visited Bulgaria by invitation of the Fatherland Front. He informed about the state of the “dirty war”, his own efforts to collaborate with the Socialist International, and the negotiations with the left wing at the Liberal Party in order to ensure the development of the democratic process and the establishment of a “pluralist rule” in Colombia⁶². On 22 March 1990 the *Union Patriótica* candidate for the Presidency Bernardo Jaramillo was murdered at the airport of Bogota.

Early in March 1983 Stoyan Venev, Bulgarian Ambassador in Lima, met the new Secretary General of the most influential opposition party in Peru, APRA, the thirty-three years old Alan Garcia. In his report to the Bulgarian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Petar Mladenov, the Bulgarian Ambassador motivated his proposal for developing relations between the APRA and the BANU. After the APRA had won the parliamentary and presidential elections in 1985 the relations between the two parties became closer. Both sides took steps for their extension. The Secretary in charge of International Relations of the ruling Peruvian party, Carlos Lopez attended the 35th BANU Congress. In January 1988 on an invitation of the BANU Armando Villanueva, Secretary General of the Peruvian Aprist Party and Chairman of the Senate Commission of Foreign Policy visited Bulgaria. On January 9th 1988 in Sofia a Memorandum of Cooperation was signed between the BANU and the APRA. According to that memorandum the two parties were to cooperate for the sake of “interaction in the field of international activities”, exchange of information, joint activities in the sphere of education and publishing, exchange of work-groups and so on. On May 16th 1988 Petar Tanchev sent letter of congratulations to Armando Villanueva on the occasion of his election for Prime Minister of Peru.

In a meeting during his visit to Sofia with Dimitar Stanishev, BCP Secretary for International Affairs Armando Villanueva suggested also the establishment of inter-party relations between the two ruling parties. In September 1988 a Declaration for cooperation between APRA and BCP was signed in Lima, where it was underlined “the existence of similar views on broad issues about the international situation”. At the same time, Fatherland

⁶² An interview by the author with Bernardo Jaramillo, Sofia, 28 March 1989.

Front leadership maintained political contacts with the Revolutionary Socialist Party (PRS) of former Velasco Alvarado's adherent Gen. Leonidas Rodriguez, and the leftist coalition *Izquierda Unida*, led by former mayor of Lima Alfonso Barrantes. In 1987 Barrantes visited Bulgaria as a guest of the 10th congress of the Fatherland Front.

Though comparatively late, after civil rule in Ecuador was restored in 1979 the conditions for development of political contacts between Bulgaria and Ecuador improved. In September 1983 for the first time an Ecuadorean Foreign Minister, Lous Valencia Rodriguez visited Sofia. In January 1985 on the initiative of Stancho Popov⁶³, Charge d'affaires of the Bulgarian Embassy in Quito and as guests of the BANU, Eduardo Carminiasi, ex-Chairman of the Social Christian party and Leonidas Plaza, an MP of the People's Forces Union (Concentracion de Fuerzas Popular) visited Bulgaria. They raised the question for establishing more regular contacts between the parliaments of the two countries. In 1988 the leadership of the BANU got in touch with a Member of Parliament of the party of National Democracy (a Christian Democratic Party) visiting Bulgaria. Later on same year the BANU Secretary for International Relations, Angel Dimitrov "tacitly evaded" the proposal for establishment of closer contacts between the BANU and the Democratic Left (ID) Party, a member of the Socialist International⁶⁴. Most probably, such a position was motivated by the Bulgarian Communist Party intentions at the end of the 1980s to maintain broader contacts with the Social Democratic and Socialist parties. The leader of the Democratic left, Rodrigo Borja won the 1988 elections in Ecuador. In his speech at his inauguration ceremony on August 10th 1988 in the presence of eight heads of states of Latin America Borja declared: "We would like to achieve a three-dimensional democracy in which political freedoms are united with social and economic rights... Now Ecuador has a President who prefers a democratic dialogue to a totalitarian monologue."⁶⁵ The Fatherland Front established contacts in the early 1980s with the leftist coalition *Frente Amplio de Izquierda* (FADI) and with a smaller leftist organization *Comite del Pueblo*, whose president Dr. Carlos Rodriguez visited Bulgaria in September 1982. However, when in 1984 one of the leaders of *Comite del Pueblo* sent a request for military training of their functionaries in Bulgaria, the Fatherland Front leadership rejected the request with the motive that their organization does

⁶³ *BANU IRD Records*, Correspondence between Bulgarian Embassy in Quito and Sofia: Letter from Stancho Popov to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 25 September 1984; Letter from BANU IR Department to Bulgarian Embassy in Quito, 25 December 1984; Letter from Stancho Popov to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 11 January 1985.

⁶⁴ *BANU IRD Records*, Information from Lubomir Ivanov, Sofia, 25 September 1988.

⁶⁵ In his capacity of National Director of the Democratic Left Party and its presidential candidate Rodrigo Borja visited Bulgaria as early as June 1984.

not “support armed actions in foreign countries”⁶⁶.

Early in August 1989 on the invitation of the BANU Bulgaria was visited by Rene Vargas Pasos, Deputy Chairman (till June 1989 Chairman) of the the christian democratic party of the National Democracy of the ex-president Urtado. Army General-of-the Reserve Rene Vargas, ex-Commander-in-Chief of the ground forces of Ecuador, who had received his training in Fort Gulig and other Pentagon bases, was visiting a “Soviet Bloc” country for the first time. At that, his visit took place at the eve of the destruction of the “Berlin Wall”, the mental barrier between the Eastern and Western Europe. In his official statements made during his stay in Bulgaria Gen. Vargas said that he was impressed with the “achievements of the socialist Bulgaria”⁶⁷.

In private conversations, though, he did not miss the opportunity to express his irony and scepticism caused by the substantial discrepancy between the display of make-believe and the reality⁶⁸. That was one of the last visits of political figures from Latin America paid to a small communist Balkan country just before the destroying of the political system established in the East-European countries under the Soviet pressure and on a Soviet pattern after the World War II.

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The demolition of the *Berlin Wall* as a monument of the division between Eastern and Western Europe symbolized as well the fall of the Communist regimes in the region. On the same day when the *Berlin Wall* break up started, the longest ever Communist ruler in Eastern Europe, Todor Zhivkov was forced by some of his most close collaborators (with indirect pressure by Moscow) to leave the power. After the political changes in Poland, Hungary, and East Germany, it was the next dramatic event, which was followed a week later in Czechoslovakia and a month later in Romania. The fateful turn in Eastern Europe provoked a sharp indicative reaction by the former Latin American ally – the Cuban leadership. On 23 November 1989 the Bulgarian embassy in Havana informed Sofia that the actual political events in Bulgaria were met with negative and restrained comments by the Cuban authorities because they “were not certain of the correctness of the CC BCP decisions”. On the other hand, it was perceived “increasing doubts among the Cuban functionaries about the rightness of Mikhail Gorbachev’s policy” at all. Another ciphered telegram from the Bulgarian embassy three weeks later informed Sofia about a Fidel Castro

⁶⁶TsDA, Fond 28, Record of the International Relations Department, National Council of the Fatherland Front, Sofia [unprocessed].

⁶⁷ *Zemедelsko zname*, Sofia, No. 160, 18 August 1989.

⁶⁸ According to a statement of Radka Nencheva, responsible for the Latin American region at the BANU IR Department, made confidentially to the author in Sofia on August 18th 1989.

statement of 7 December 1989. The Cuban leader predicted that the political transformation in Eastern Europe would affect as well the Third World countries since an increase of the eventual West European financial and material aid and loans to their neighbors in the East will reduce the loans for the underdeveloped countries⁶⁹.

The radical changes in the Bulgarian political system influenced this country's relations with Latin America, too. The intensive contacts at different political and state levels between Bulgaria and Latin America were nearly completely cut down in the first years of post-Communist transition, and the official bilateral relations became rather symbolic. The development of the internal political process in Nicaragua and electoral loss of the Sandinistas caused additionally significant corrections in the Warsaw Pact countries' policy in Central America as well and their urgent withdrawal from the region. Relations suffered drastic changes after the "velvet revolutions" in Eastern Europe, as Fidel Castro predicted. Soon after the "palace coup" on 10 November 1989 in Bulgaria the bilateral ties with Cuba, which were established on a purely ideological base, deteriorated visibly. Several new Bulgarian periodicals in the beginning of 1990 for the first time criticized the Castro regime defects, while the correspondent of Bulgarian Telegraph Agency in Havana, Andrei Apostolov even tried to suggest a definition for the specific model of the "tropical bureaucratic socialism" in Cuba. Though in 1990 Bulgaria had a Socialist government, headed by Andrei Lukanov, the relations with Cuba undergo a short period of deterioration. After the representatives of Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria at UN Committee of Human Rights in Geneva vote in support of a resolution regarding human rights in Cuba, in a public speech on 7 March 1990 Fidel Castro strongly criticized his allies of not too long ago: "If an aggression is undertaken against our island, the responsibility for the blood shed will rest with the leaderships of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Bulgaria..." This sharp critique was followed as well by some Latin American Communist periodicals.⁷⁰

However, Cuba had to take into consideration the new realities of the irrevocable process of political changes in Bulgaria and other East European countries, which affected totally their previous Foreign Policy principles and priorities. Soon after the victory of the anti-Communist opposition Union of Democratic Forces (SDS) in the parliamentary elections in October 1991 in Bulgaria and the election of the first non-Communist president Dr. Zheliu Zhelev in February 1992 the Cuban leaders confirmed with official messages the intention of their government "to activate and stabilize the traditional friendly contacts between the two nations."⁷¹

⁶⁹ *COMDOS*, VR, MF 1765, A.E. I-48, D. 300, vol. 5, pp. 36-37, 156-157.

⁷⁰ For instance see: *Vôz*, Bogota, 15 Marzo de 1990.

⁷¹ *Informatsionen bulletin na posolstvoto na Republika Kuba v Republika Bulgaria* [Information

Conclusion

Since the end of the Cold War the Bulgarian civil society has reassessed the ideological and political motivation of the economic and military support given to the “Third World” countries in the course of the previous three decades. Nowadays new interpretations and questions come forward in regard of that “special assistance”. At what point does it go beyond the accepted international norms and in what degree does it turn from a natural obligation under the spirit and according to the international community’s principles into an unjustified “burden” to the economy of the small Bulgaria? The generous free aid extended to left radical fronts and movements in many cases with no doubt was dictated by political propaganda motives and matter of prestige in the “united antiimperialist struggle” and was by no means within the limited resource and economic possibilities of Bulgaria, especially during the period of the intensifying economic recession of the 1980’s. Though, the opposite US propaganda of Soviet bloc “subversive support for terrorist groups” in the region as a principal reason for the civil wars and bitter political confrontations evades the real problems and disguises their own harsh interference in Latin American internal affairs.

It is definitely hard to understand, however, the practical base of the gradual intensification of the political contacts between Latin America and the Warsaw Pact countries from the 1960s until the fall of the Berlin Wall. Unlike the Middle East region, the East European governments had no any significant projects for economic cooperation with the Latin American countries. It would be incorrect and strange as well to explain the contacts of the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe with some influential political parties in power in Latin America just on the base of a probable delivery of financial and material aid, as happened, for instance, with their new partners in the decolonized Africa and Asia. In some way, such intentions could be explained with the policy of so called Soviet bloc “peace offensives” aiming to gain more allies in the Third World periphery of the global bipolar confrontation. On the other hand, many Latin American political leaders used to propagate the theories for unification of the “smallest” countries against the domination of the “biggest” empires. Thus, one of the main reasons for such phenomena – the new and actual discovery of the Western Hemisphere by the East European elites, was grounded on more or less manifested common feelings against the hegemony of the Western superpower – the United States of America. The whole diverse story of Soviet bloc parallel multiple contacts with various political circles in Latin America showed at least that the previous uniform and schematic views on

Bulletin of the Embassy of Republic of Cuba to Republic of Bulgaria], Sofia, No. 2, February 1992, p. 1-3.

the East European intentions and foreign policy activity in the region were rather imperfect and one-sided.

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