

# Comment on the Article by Piotr Śmiłowicz

by Jordan Baev

On July 25th, 2003, the influential Polish daily “Rzeczpospolita” published a commentary article, related to the issue of declassification of Polish archival records, regarding the Warsaw Pact. Discussions on this issue in Poland are mainly related to the infamous Article 3 of the Protocol for Termination of Activities of the Warsaw Pact’ Military Structures of 25th February 1991. This issue was subject of animated discussions within the PHP too, and I shall later remind of the main arguments used there. But above all I’d like to clarify some new points to the rhetorical question, stressed by the Deputy Director of the Polish Central Military Archive, Mr. Andrzej Żak: “Could one imagine, for example, that the Bulgarians would release documents about the supposed role of their military special services in the attempt to assassinate the Pope?”

It is obvious that, among the international professional community, still little is known about the positive efforts made shortly after the overthrowing of the Bulgarian communist dictator Todor Zhivkov for a thorough exploration of all documentary evidences regarding the so called “Bulgarian connection” in the assassination attempt on the Pope in May 1981 by the Turkish terrorist Mehmet Ali Ağça. As early as the summer of 1990, an inter-institutional investigation of all documents related to this issue began, initiated personally by the first democratically elected Bulgarian President and former dissident Dr. Zhelyu Zhelev. During the next months, all available information was studied in the Bulgarian Classified Records. In a letter to Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski dated 25th March 1994, President Zhelev specifically underlines:

“During the last several years, many meetings and discussions took place with governmental institutions and private organizations of the USA and several European countries interested in the Bulgarian archives concerning this incident... The Bulgarian side, represented mainly by the Ministry of the Interior, and with my personal involvement, led to the gathering of all the documentation – altogether more than two hundred volumes of investigation materials – that was available to all that desired to make photocopies for their own expense.

Thanks to the analysis of all the existing documents and facts involving the investigation led during the past few years, together with representatives of the Italian Justice Department, with all the responsibility of the Head of State of the Republic of Bulgaria, I would like to assure you of the following:

Up to this moment there is not one convincing piece of evidence to confirm the hypothesis that there was Bulgarian involvement in the attempt to kill Pope John Paul II. You are all aware that I am not among the supporters of the repressive machine of the ex-State Security Service, in fact the opposite is true – I, personally, was a victim of its illegal activities. But this specific issue is very sensitive for me, since it concerns the international prestige of my own country...”

In regard to the declassification of archival documents in Bulgaria, in some ways this process is comparable to the situation in Hungary and the Czech Republic. The handing over of the Records of the Bulgarian Communist Party to be preserved at the Central State Archive in 1993 practically made it available for use in relation to the whole period up to November 1989. With special order by the Bulgarian Foreign Minister in late 1999, the Diplomatic Archive was made available up to the year of 1974. We received similar permission in 2000 for doing research at the Archive of the Ministry of the Interior. With the passing of the Law for Protection of the Classified Information in May 2002, the deadlines for declassification of the “Top Secret” documents were clearly defined – up to 30 years of their creation. An interdepartmental commission was created, which already is working on the complete declassification of the historical archive documentation the Central Military Archive in Veliko Turnovo up to the late 60s.

In regard to references to Article 3 of the Protocol of 25th February 1991, I would like to mention just few main points: 1. The Protocol was not precise even at the time of its signing, since it did not involve other countries that were previously members of the Pact – Albania (till 1968) and East Germany (till 1990). It would be logical to assume that most of the archival documents of the GDR from the near past are to become publicly available in united Germany, including materials regarding the Warsaw Pact activity; 2. Very shortly after the signing of the Protocol, two of the member-states – the USSR and Czechoslovakia – lost their previous juridical status. After the break up of the Soviet Union, some of its former republics (for instance, the three Baltic States) declassified a

range of materials related to Foreign Affairs and the Security policy of the ex-Communist Bloc; 3. Moreover, due to the public trail of the CPSU in 1992, even in Moscow many classified documents regarding East Europe were “publicized and distributed to third parties”. I’ll give just one personal example. In the Library of Congress in Washington and the Hoover Institution’s Library in Stanford I found copies of Top Secret documents regarding my own country taken from the famous “Fund – Collection 89” of the Russian State Archive of Contemporary History (RGANI). Such document, for instance, is a request by the Bulgarian Minister of Defense Gen. Djurov to the Unified Command of the Joint Armed Forces in April 1976 that still continues to be classified as “Top Secret” in our Central Military Archive, since in accordance to Bulgarian law it can be declassified no sooner than 2007. Does this mean that in this and other similar cases we are to complain of the Government in Moscow for not respecting the mentioned above Article 3?

With the existence of such serious defects and imperfections, which practically make pointless what was clumsily agreed in February 1991, I believe that we should try to harmonize the requirements of modern democratic practice in accordance with the internal legislation. As to my own country, at present we are putting as much effort as possible in coordinating our own national interests with all the responsibilities that we accept for full membership to the North Atlantic Alliance. In this sense, we have a serious overlapping of established declassification’ criteria and practice in principle for the period of 30 years of its creation.

*JORDAN BAEV is graduate of Sofia University and received his PhD in History at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. He was a Senior Research Fellow on Military, Political, and Security issues at the Rakovski Defense College. Currently he is a Senior Expert at the Bulgarian Ministry of Defense and Associate Professor of National Security and Conflict Management at the University of National and World Economy and New Bulgarian University in Sofia. He is Vice-President of the Bulgarian Association of Military History and Executive Director of the Center for Conflict Studies as well as the coordinator of the Cold War Research Group-Bulgaria, a PHP affiliate.*