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Journalist Alexenia Dimitrova: Saxe-Coburg Had No Illusions He Could Come back as Bulgarian Tsar

Author: Ivan Dikov

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Alexenia Dimitrova, author of the book "The King's Secret Files" on former Bulgaria Tsar and PM Simeon Saxe-Coburg. Photo by 24 Hours Daily

Interview with Alexenia Dimitrova, a Bulgarian journalist from the 24 Hours Daily, whose book "The King's Secret Files" has recently been published.*

Even though Bulgaria's former Tsar Simeon Saxe-Coburg was elected Prime Minister in 2001, there was little information in Bulgaria about his life as an emigre, especially for the period between 1962 and 1996. How does your book change that?

I don't know why you focus on the years after 1962. There wasn't much information about the period between 1946 and 1962 when the royal family left Bulgaria as well. Now this has become possible in the "King's Secret Files" thanks to the reports that were written by a host of agents and operative

collaborators for a period of 57 years.

The book is based on documents as well as about 150 facsimiles from 17 folders containing about 3 000 pages of information gathered primarily by the First Main Directorate of the former State Security, i.e. the intelligence service. They paint a very detailed picture of the life and contacts of royal family in exile not only because it was part of the so called enemy emigration, which was followed very carefully.

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There is a second reason for this variety of information - the different education, mentality, and values of each operative collaborator or agent left their stain on the seeking and presentation of various aspects of the life of the emigration, including of the Tsar's.

To what extent did the image that Saxe-Coburg had in Bulgaria in 2001 when he won the Bulgarian Parliamentary Elections, correspond to the truth about him according to your research?

If you mean his high public popularity which brought his the 2001 election victory, the documents do not refute this. There is data confirming that he supported financial some emigrants, that he let them stay at his home.

Parallel to that, there are reports that at the end of the 1950s and then again at the beginning of the 1970s Simeon stayed away from engaging actively in political activities. Because of that he received a lot of criticism on part of the emigration but the documents do reveal the reasons for his distancing from political activities.

For example, at the end of the 1950s the reasons for that include the splits and quarrels among the political emigration which in some cases, as the reports indicate, have been fomented or orchestrated by the State Security.

The Tsar's second distancing from public activity occurred at the beginning of the 1970s as a result of a pressure on the Spanish government by the Bulgarian government. At that time the two countries were conducting negotiations for establishing diplomatic relations, and Bulgaria set the condition that Simeon abstain from political activity against Bulgarian on the territory of Spain.

This is a little surprising because there are no documents proving that the Tsar did that earlier, unless we count a few statements on his part in which he addressed emigrants in person or through letters, in which he spoke against communism as a system, and in defense of the freedom that has been taken away from the Bulgarian people.

Which is the greatest myth in Bulgaria and perhaps abroad about Simeon Saxe-Coburg that your book debunks?

I can answer if you tell me one myth. But, frankly, I do not like to listen myths, and I am not sure what you mean. My years-long work with the archives has led me to place documents on a pedestal. My understanding is that I have to present them to the readers conscientiously, and they should make their own conclusions.

Would you reveal for the readers of Novinite.com one of the most unique findings about Saxe-Coburg that your book contains?

Whatever might be a unique finding for your, might not be one for someone else that is why I wouldn't like to impose my view. I have been impressed by the fact that my readers and colleagues, who called me after the book was published, had discovered for themselves various points and interesting moments from the book.

The "King's Secret Files" does include a little something for everyone - from the infatuations of the young Simeon to his relations with world leaders; from his private meetings and dinners to his business activities and contacts...

But in order not to disappoint you, I am going to say that there was one thing I found that really surprised me - as early as March 1960 Simeon in a private conversation Simeon expressed his readiness to become the Prime Minister of Bulgaria. This is written in a report that I discovered in the folders.

Your book is based on declassified documents of the former State Security about Simeon Saxe-Coburg. What is the truth about the connections between Saxe-

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Coburg and the State Security? What was the purpose of the Bulgarian intelligence service with respect to Saxe-Coburg?

The truth, or at least what I found in those folders about the period between 1946 and 1993, is that the State Security was definitely interested in Simeon, as it was in a number of other representatives of the so called enemy emigration. Their purpose was to know as much as possible about him, what he thought about his coming back to Bulgaria, in what capacity does he plan to come back, and so on, i.e. collecting a lot of varied information from different sources and viewpoints - the usual goals of any secret service.

Is there anything true about the rumors that Saxe-Coburg had connections with the KGB? Did he have connections with the CIA and other secret services?

I did not find any evidence in those 3 000 pages that he had any connections with the KGB. The CIA is mentioned by the way in one or two reports. They say that the Tsar knew or had met with someone who in turn had been connected with the CIA.

What conclusions have you reached regarding Simeon Saxe-Coburg's goals, or what he wanted to achieve with respect to Bulgaria in the period before 1993? Did he aim by all means at the restoration of the monarchy, or did he want to achieve certain more modest goals such as the restitution of the so called estates of the royal family?

There are reports citing his explicit claims that he made during meetings with emigrants or in public interviews for Western media that he had not abdicated, and that de jure he was still the Tsar.

However, there are also interviews in which he said he had no illusions about the restoration of the monarchy in Bulgaria, or that he might come back as the Tsar some day.

As far as the issue about his "estates" is concerned - I found a report, according to which his mother, Tsaritsa (i.e. queen) Ioanna, said that the time of monarchies had passed but that one day when that becomes possible, the family would have its estates restored to its ownership.

Does your book reveal the answers to all questions around the personality of Simeon Saxe-Coburg? Are there any more questions left without answers?

I wouldn't dare say that even though I would love to. The work with the archives is an equation with many unknowns, and one can never know where something interesting might come from. The book is based upon documents from the declassified folders that had arrived, and had been processed by the so called Files Commission. Neither do I know if any more documents would arrive from the different departments of the State Security, nor do I have any idea what new information might come from other folders.

According to the Files Commission, it was handed those folders when its members were carrying out an inspection of whether any of the former Prime Ministers of Bulgaria was ever involved with the structures of the State Security. However, I can assure you that I am not going to forget this topic, and that I am going to request materials regularly if any new ones have appeared.

After Saxe-Coburg's party NMSP did not even make it to the Parliament in the last elections of July 2009, do you believe that Saxe-Coburg have stepped down from the Bulgarian political stage for good? Is it possible that anyone of his descendants would ever play a public role in Bulgaria that is comparable to his?

As I already said, I work only with facts and documents. Forecasts are not my strength, and I do not have a fondness for them. But I discovered two facts in the reports that are relevant to your question.

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The first one is that the emigration pressured Simeon to declare his first-born son Kardam the successor to the throne. The second one is a statement of his, which found its place in the reports, that the Bulgarian crown would end with him, and that he cherished no illusions that this role could be assumed by his sons.

Having completed such a detailed research, how would you evaluate the role of Simeon Saxe-Coburg in the history of Bulgaria?

I wouldn't take the risk to do that. History is written long after us - we are only participants. My modest part is that I gathered conscientiously and leave to the regular readers and the historians materials on which they can base their assessments. But I am certain that if they want their assessments to be objective and complete, they will take into account many other facts as well, and not just these documents.

* *The King's Secret Files is a five-month documentary investigation of 24 Hours Daily journalist Alexenia Dimitrova in the ex communist Bulgarian Intelligence archives. All documents and more than 150 facsimiles of them - 384 pages - are being published for first time.*



They feature materials about Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, written and collected by 50 agents of the Communist State Security between 1946 and 1993. The documents tell the story of young Simeon's amorous exploits, about the plotting of several attacks and extortions against him in 1950 and 1990, about his probes whether he or one of his children could visit Bulgaria during the communism period, about his readiness to become prime minister, shared as early as the 1960s, about his meetings with the Pope.

The book reveals that the State Security tried to find a Bulgarian girlfriend for one of

Simeon's sons - Konstantin, and that the State security watched at his relations with world leaders and the CIA.

The documents discuss that the royal family received only restricted financial help from the Communist Government when it was exiled in 1946, and that the Pope advised him to give up the throne. The State Security gathered information about his connections with Moroccan, French and Spain companies.

Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha (72) became Tsar of Bulgaria in 1943 at the age of six after the mysterious death of his father King Boris III. He was exiled from Bulgaria to Egypt in 1946. He retained his title as Tsar and became a businessman, making periodic political pronouncements through his chancellery located in Madrid where he lived since 1951. He returned to Bulgaria in 1996 after the fall of communism and became prime minister in 2001, serving until August, 2005.

Tags: Alexenia Dimitrova, 24 Hours Daily, Simeon Saxe-Coburg, State Security, former secret police, former PM, Prime Minister, Tsar, Tsar Boris III

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