

Collection of testimonies

"Torture and repression in Bulgaria"

Book References

Chakurov, Stefan. God, Forgive Them, but do Not Forget!. *The Notes of a Convict From "Belene"*. Sofia: Planeta 3, 2000.

Summary: This 120-page book depicts the hardships that Stefan Chakurov endured during the Communist regime in Bulgaria. In the tumultuous early 1950s he was labeled as "Enemy of the Communist State" and arrested in Sofia where he studied in the National University. After beatings and degrading conditions in the cells of Sofia prison, he was soon sent to the infamous labor camp "Belene". He remained there until 1953, when the camp was closed after the death of Stalin. Stefan Chakurov also writes about the difficulties he experienced after being released from "Belene". The label "Enemy of the State" closed many doors for him and hindered his pursuit of education and career. He managed to study and graduate engineering and has been working in the sphere up to his retirement.

Evidence of Torture: Stefan Chakurov writes about the physical and mental torture he experienced both in Sofia prison and "Belene" labor camp. He gives names of torturers and fellow prisoners who were tortured and/or killed. He was tortured to sign false confessions and then was sent to "Belene" without trial and sentence.

Dinolova, Diana. The Runaway. Sofia: n.p., 2000.

Summary: This book is a narrative of Peter Gorgachev's dramatic escape from Bulgaria in the early years of the Communist regime. In the late 1940s, Peter Gorgachev (at that time – Mihail Gorgachev) is a small entrepreneur with a leather-processing workshop in Sofia. He has constant incomes from his private commerce – something intolerable by the regime in times of confiscating private property. One day a friend of Gorgachev, a renegade who is having problems with the Communists, arranges an escape from Bulgaria. Four friends, among whom is Gorgachev, illegally cross the border and surrender to the Turkish border patrols. After they pass the examinations and trials of the Turkish militaries, who suspect them of being Communist spies, the four men are hosted as refugees and finally manage to go to France and to settle there. The book then presents us with some facts about Peter Gorgachev's family life in France and the charity activities of his wife for children in Bulgaria after the fall of the Communist regime in 1989. The Runaway does not present evidence of torture but gives the reader a lively documentary of a dramatic escape of potential victims of the Communists.

Hristov, Hristo. The Secret Trial for the Concentration Camps. Sofia: Ivan Vazov Printing House, 1999.

Summary: This book is written by the Bulgarian journalist Hristo Hristov. It summarizes the trial against some of the Lovech concentration camp authorities. The concentration camp in Lovech was built in 1959 and closed in 1962. The trial against the torturers that worked there took place in the period 1990-1993, right after the fall of the Communist regime. The book both provides information on the trial and gives reminiscence to the horror in the concentration camp.

Evidence of Torture: The author uses some of the official juristic documents to shed light on the torture that took place in the camp. He gives detailed information on the type of torture, the names of the torturers and their victims. He has also applied some pictures from the trial and Post Mortum acts of the victims. There is also a list of people who have died while in concentration camp "Lovech". Therefore, this book is an excellent source of information on the late Communist concentration camps and the trials on them.

Kolev, Hristo. Life Against the Odds. Karlovo: Karlovska Tribuna Ltd.,

1999.

Summary: This book is the narrative of the Bulgarian anarchist Hristo Kolev about his arrest by the Communist officials and his detention in the labor camps "Kucian", "Bogdanov Dol" and "Belene." in the period 1947-1953. The author gives fairly detailed information on events, places and persons that were involved in the events – he names both torturers and victims. He also gives some autobiographical information about his childhood and student years that are related to his formation as an anarchist and enemy of the Communist regime. It is good to notice that Hristo Kolev was kept in custody and tortured both before and during the Communist regime. His anarchistic views set him into the position of opponent of every government.

Evidence of Torture: The author gives rather diligent information on the torture he suffered or was a witness to. He talks about beatings and deprivation of food/sleep in the arrests and then depicts the image of the life in the three concentration camps where he was detained. His narrative of "Belene" concentration camp matches to a great extent with the narratives of the other books reviewed here. They all talk about the same things but each story is told through the vantage point of the particular individual. By combining the different narratives we can see the horror of the concentration camps in its full perspective.

Kunev, Kuni. Moanings From the Darkness. Memories of Kuni Genchev Kunev. From the Labor Camp on Persin Island (Belene). (Not printed): n.p., n.d.

Summary: This interesting and detailed book is a collectible of the memories of Kuni Genchev Kunev from the events after September 9th, 1944, his arrest and the three years and six months spent in labor camp "Belene". Kuni Kunev's father and uncle were well-to-do agrarian owners. After the nationalization of land and resources by the Communist Regime, their lands and machines were expropriated for the needs of the newly formed Cooperative Agrarian Unions. Kuni Kunev and his family objected to the forceful nationalization of property. Kunev was member of the Youth Agrarian Union, whose members were persecuted by the authorities. In the late 1949, Kuni Kunev was arrested, false accusations were formed against him and he was sent to "Belene" labor camp.

Evidence of Torture: Throughout the book, Kuni Kunev keeps painstaking record of all the names of the torturers and their victims and even of their birthplaces. He has divided his book in paragraphs with different length in which he narrates briefly the life stories of people he met in the labor camp. By using concrete personal stories, the author builds a scheme of the way people were arrested, accused and sent to labor camps after September 9th, 1944. Through the personal stories, Kuni Kunev also depicts the life in the camp and the degrading conditions in which the detainees lived. At the end of his book, Kunev has listed the names of 517 people whom he knew in "Belene" labor camp. He also lists another 18 people whose names he knew and were killed in the camp during his stay. With the detailed information and names, this book is an excellent source for the torture in "Belene".

Mateev, Mitko. On Thy Words I Counted... Sofia: Ora – Bulgaria Printing House, 1993.

Summary: Mitko Mateev was born in 1909 and got religious education in evangelical institutions in Germany and Latvia. From 1934 up to his arrest in 1948, he was a preacher in the Evangelist church in Sofia. In the period 1948-49, many Bulgarian Evangelist and Baptist clerics were arrested and sued for treason and conspiracy. The Communist government viewed them as enemies of the state and agents of foreign intelligence services. The sued clergymen were forced to sign false confessions and got different harsh sentences by the "phony" juristic trials – typical for the Communist regime. Mitko Mateev spend the period 1948 – 1961 in the prisons of Sofia and Varna and the infamous labor camp "Belene."

In 1971 he fled to Austria as political emigrant and later lived in Germany and Canada where he continues to reside up to now.

Evidence of Torture: Mitko Mateev sheds light on the oppressive methods of the Communist officials for obtaining confessions and forming sentences for the innocent victims. He shares with us the torture he lived through in the prisons of Sofia and Varna and the labor camp "Belene". He reports the killings of some of his fellow Evangelist preachers and gives information on the mercilessly sadistic torture methods of the Communist investigation, prison and police officials. Mateev also credits his sturdy faith in God as the thing that saved his body and soul and helped him live through the calamities.

Mutafchieva, Vera, et al. The Trial of the Historians. Bulgarian Historical Science. Documents and Discussions 1944-1950. Sofia: Academic Printing House Prof. Marin Drinov, 1995.

Summary: This serious historical study was carried, edited and formed into a book by a group of distinguished Bulgarian historical scientists. The editor, Vera Mutafchieva, is recently the most prominent Bulgarian historian. The book compiles a considerable amount of documents collected by the authors from the archives of Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, the Internal Affairs Ministry, the State Archive of Bulgaria, the Communist Party and the Parliament. Those documents reveal the position of the Communist Party toward the historical science, the role of particular persons and the government decisions concerning education and history in the period 1944-1950. The book reveals how the Communist Regime manipulated the society through its own misrepresentations of history in general. Even events from the dawn of the Bulgarian state, occasions that took place more than twelve centuries ago, had to be censored and put through the prism of the Communist ideology. The Trial of the Historians is serious and fulfilling study of the historical science in the period 1944-1950, assembled thoroughly by well-reputed professionals.

Novev, Metodi. Behind the Barbed Wire. Sofia: n.p., 1999.

Summary: This is a collection of poems by Metodi Novev who spent seven years in prisons and concentration camp "Belene" in the period 1952-59. He was a member of a conspiracy against the Communist regime while he was a studying in Sofia University. The members of the conspiracy were young intellectuals who saw the terror and repressive nature of the regime. They collected weapons and planned to overthrow the oppressive government that imprisoned their fathers and brothers, took their land and abused them pursuing its Bolshevik interests (source: The speech in front of the conspiracy members held in 1949, published in Behind the Barbed Wire). The conspiracy was revealed and its members were arrested and sent to the cells of the infamous State Security. After 100 days of torture by the investigation agents, Metodi Novev was going to be sentenced capital punished but a fellow of him took all accusations. Therefore, Novev was sentenced 15 years in prison and actually remained in custody for seven. While in prison and in "Belene", Metodi Novev created his poems and memorized them. His symbolic poetry reflects his feelings as a prisoner, his thoughts and emotions about Bulgaria and his family.

Ogoiski, Petko. Among the Roads of Horror. Memoir and Biography of Angel Pandev. Sofia: n.p., 1998.

Summary: This book depicts the life of the Bulgarian Agrarian Union figure Angel Pandev. He was chairperson of the Academic Agrarian Youth Union in 1947 – at that time the Bolshevik Regime was ravaging Bulgaria with its political intolerance. Angel Pandev held speech in front of Sofia University students against the dictate of the Communists. In the evening after the speech he was arrested, tortured by the investigation agents and sent to the concentration camp "Bogdanov Dol" and to "Kucian" later. In 1948 he was released and managed to escape from Bulgaria by illegally crossing the border with Greece. He then went to Paris and finally settled in Montreal, Canada, where he continues living. The book contains archives from

the letters exchanged between Angel Pandev and Dr. George M. Dimitrov – another political figure of the Bulgarian Agrarian Union that was living in exile. In addition to the epistles and the biography of Angel Pandev, the book contains an introduction by the author, Petko Ogoiski, and pictures related to the life of Pandev.

Ogoiski, Petko. Cause of Life. Sofia: Ral Kolobur, 2000.

Summary: This is a biographical memoir dedicated to the 70th anniversary of the writer Petko Ogoiski. Mr. Ogoiski was repressed during the Communist Regime because of his membership in the forbidden Agrarian Youth Union and his intolerance to the injustices of the new political system. He was arrested in 1949 and accused of "conspiracy against the government" and writing "poetry against the established regime". He was sentenced to five years in prison, which he spent in Pleven and Shumen state prisons and the concentration camp "Belene". He was released in 1953 but in 1962 he was sent to prison once again for "writing against the authority". He spent two years in the prisons of Sofia and Stara Zagora. After his release, he had to make his living as a construction worker because he carried the label "Untrustworthy" as an ex-political prisoner and enemy of the Regime. Gradually, after the softening of the Regime, Mr. Ogoiski managed to publish some of his poetry and employed his talent in the work he was meant to do – writing. After the fall of the Communist Regime, Petko Ogoiski was a member of the Parliament. He now continues writing about the torture he and others lived through during the years of Communist government in Bulgaria.

Cause of Life contains excerpts of Petko Ogoiski's books, pictures of his family and him, an interview with the writer, and full bibliography of his writings and press publications. The book has been compiled and edited by Georgi Ralchev.

Ogoiski, Petko. Notes on the Bulgarian Sufferings (1944 – 1989). Vol.3. Sofia: Vulcan 4, 2000.

Summary: This is the third book of Petko Ogoiski's trilogy Notes on the Bulgarian Sufferings (1944 – 1989). The title is allusion (as the author shares in the preface) to the Bulgarian classic Notes on the Bulgarian Rebellions by Zahari Stoyanov – a trilogy that depicts the struggle of the Bulgarians against the yoke of the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century. Mr. Ogoiski's book depicts the sufferings and struggle of the Bulgarians against the Communist regime that ruled the nation for almost half a century. The book contains two parts – the first one is about the repressions during the Communist Rule and the second one is about the political changes and events after the fall of Communism in Bulgaria.

Evidence of Torture: Mr. Ogoiski has thoroughly included a lot of data about the victims of the Communist Regime. The names of victims of arrests and torture are sorted by areas (there is a separate chapter for each of the Bulgarian nine districts) and also by different political, religious or social groups that were persecuted by the communists. The book sheds light on the attempts for resistance against the Communist authority, the members of the resistance, their actions and their fate. Most of the victims are mentioned briefly and the most shocking cases are revealed more meticulously. The book is meant to be a "Commemoration for the forgotten martyrs for freedom and justice".

If one is looking for a certain victim of the Communist regime and wants to learn his/her fate, this book might be an excellent source.

Stamov, Stefan. Love and Anger. [Bulgaria]: n.p., n.d.

Summary: This is a book of verse by Stefan Stamov – a victim of the Communist Regime. Stamov was born in 1920 and got university degree in Vienna and later in Sofia. He was an active member of the Academic Agrarian Union in Bulgaria. In 1948 he was expelled from the Union and accused as activist of the Peasant Freedom Army. He was sentenced 10 years in prison with harsh conditions. Love and

Anger contains more than fifty poems and short verses by Stamov. Some of them are related to the oppressions of the Communist regime and the torture suffered by Stamov and other victims. Other poems express the political and patriotic visions of the author while yet others are dedicated to his wife and family.

Tzvetkov, Joro. The Crucifix. The Trials Against Bulgarian Catholic Church Officials in 1952. Sofia: Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, 1994.

Summary: This book sheds light on the biased farce trials against Bulgarian Catholic Church officials in 1952. It gives many facts for the arrests and the trials afterwards. The book has the names of the arrested and their sentences. Mr. Tzvetkov thoroughly depicts the juristic mechanisms of the repressive Communist regime in its most violent Stalinist period.

Evidence of torture: The author gives lots of detailed information about the repression and torture that "prepared" the clerics for the farce trials. Even though he was not a direct observer, he is informed on the manners of the Communist torturers and the way they took the confessions they wanted. The book gives the names and sentences of the victims and the state officials that were involved. Among the victims is the famous bishop Evgeni Bosilkov, sentenced to death and executed in Sofia prison on November 11th, 1952. Maybe the best quality of this well-written book is the information on the trials and the testimonies of the victims. All of the sued clerics confess being involved in treason and conspiracy – it is obvious that they have been tortured and forced to confess crimes pointed to them by the Communist officials.

Znepolski, Dencho. Last Confession. Ed. Maria Znepolska. Sofia: Hristo Botev Printing House, 1997.

Summary: This book contains the memories of Dencho Znepolski who was guerilla fighter before the Communist regime but after 1944 was kept in custody for four years in arrests and labor camp "Belene". In the period 1951-1954, the so-called "personality cult", many communists were blamed for treason and deviation off the party's mainstream. Znepolski was one of them and was treated as a criminal and traitor in the degrading conditions of arrests and "Belene". He was released in 1954 and rehabilitated himself in the society. His memories are collected and compiled by his wife, Maria Znepolska, who edited and prepared the book for release.

Evidence of Torture: The book gives considerable evidence of the torture that Dencho Znepolski endured both in "Belene" and the arrests of the State Security. In the arrest he is tortured for two years by State Security agents and forced to give false confessions that reveal him as agent of foreign intelligence agencies participating in conspiracy and treason against Bulgaria. He has been persistently beaten, deprived of sleep and food, psychologically tormented through verbal abuse and dramatic situations. He shares that the torture was so violent that even he who was accustomed to torture and arrests by the police before 1944, could not endure it. He was forced to sign the false confessions and then sent to Belene concentration camp without having the right of pleading or having a lawyer. He was tortured in Belene and he describes the sufferings of himself and the other prisoners there. He mentions the names of his torturers and some of his fellow prisoners. The book is a great documentary of the cruelties of the Communist regime and is told from the first-person perspective of the victim, which contributes to its credibility and accuracy.

Technology of Evil. Documentary by Tatyana Vaksberg. Dir. Marta Ilieva. Bulgarian National Television, 2000.

Summary: This is the first documentary to present the events from the violent renaming of the Bulgarian ethnic Turks in the 1980s in great profundity and detail. The movie contains interviews with people who were tortured and witnessed torture during the process of forceful ethnic assimilation. It also presents archives from

speeches and meetings of the Communist Party highest government officials.

Evidence of Torture: In 1984, there were 840,000 ethnic Turks living in Bulgaria. They lived peacefully with the Bulgarians and other minorities as integrated community with its own religion, customs and language. Most of the ethnic Turks inhabited the Southeastern part of Bulgaria (around the town of Kardjali there were 300 thousand ethnic Turks). By that time, the first secretary of the Communist party, Todor Jivkov, had decided to render a mass assimilation of the Bulgarian Turks. Similar forceful assimilation has been accomplished in Southwestern Bulgaria in the 1970s. This time its size had to be much greater and to involve all of the Bulgarian Ethnic Turks. The Bureau of the Communist Party started the Assimilation in 1984. It had to be carried in three stages. The first stage was dedicated to propaganda and closing the Turkish media and culture centers in Bulgaria. In the second stage, the party carried a mass deportation of ethnic Turks, by taking them to other regions of Bulgaria and settling young Bulgarians in their places. The goal was to separate the Turkish communities and mingle them with Bulgarians. The third phase of the preparation for the violent assimilation involved the Bulgarian historians who were engaged in devising a whole new history of the Bulgarian Turks, which stated that they were in fact purely Bulgarians. Those stages of the initial assimilation were all rendered with the notion, taken up by the Communist Party, that Turkey and the Turkish minority were dangerous enemies of the integrity of the Bulgarian State.

The forceful assimilation started in the end of 1984, when newly formed commissions cruised the villages in Southeastern Bulgaria, expropriated the documents of certain ethnic Turks and changed their names with Bulgarian ones. This created a sense of panic among the Turkish minority members who would fled their homes and hide from the commissions. The step was taken, there was no turning back for the Communists – a mass and violent shift of names and identity was soon to be carried on. In November 1984, the Bureau of the Communist Party took a secret decision - a military offensive against the Bulgarian Turks was to be started. The action was to be carried by the army and the forces of the Ministry of Internal Affairs under the command of the generals Djurov and Semerdjiev. The infamous State Security agency, under the command of Dimitar Stoyanov, also had a major role – its 6th department was involved grossly in the campaign against Bulgarian Turks.

On December 24th, 1984, when all were peacefully celebrating Christmas Eve, an armed force of 1400 people entered the district of Kardjali. The district was immediately separated from the rest of Bulgaria with 11 checkpoints. A curfew was set; all telephone and telegraph connections were closed, no mail was to be delivered. The army, police and people's armed militia have taken control of the district following direct orders from the Communist Party. Civil police agents flooded all villages near the border and expropriated the documents of the Ethnic Turks. Four were killed, eight were injured, and many were arrested at the 11 civil demonstrations that took place in the district for one week. The soldiers shot at everyone who was running. Even the fire brigades were mobilized against the civil disobedience. There were no leaders of the protests so the authorities decided to arrest all educated and respected people among the Ethnic Turks. The infamous "Belene" concentration camp was reopened in 1985 to take up 1500 of the most respected and literate Turks. The goal of the camp was to make traitors and secret agents of some of the Turks through systematic interrogations and torture. Some prisoners were converted into Communist agents but most of them persisted and endured the duress.

At the beginning of 1985, the assimilation was continued in another fourteen districts. The methods remained the same – curfew, inner checkpoints, more than 3000 soldiers were mobilized for the operation. Half of the soldiers were below 23 years of age and the Communist Party manipulated them and labeled the assault as "patriotic". The Party created the "Inner Army" under the direct commandment of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and with the sole

purpose of participating in the Mass Assimilation of Bulgarian Turks. Parallel to the military campaign, the tools of propaganda were widely used. The official name for the violent assimilation was "Revival Process" (given by the Prime Minister Georgi Atanasov) and the media broadcasted its benefits for both the Turks and the Bulgarians. The effort to eradicate the identity of the Turkish minority was complete – all of their documents were replaced with ones having their new Bulgarian names, their customs, language and traditional clothes were forbidden. Millions were paid for the new documents and yet millions were paid for the hiring of government agents among the Turkish minority. The plan was to have 3,6 agents on every 1000 Bulgarians and 6 agents on every 1000 Turks. The government planned to take away the children of Bulgarian Turks and educate them at specially created campuses where they could be mingled with Bulgarian children.

Having tried everything for the obliteration of the ethnic identity of the Turks, the Communist Party decided to deport at least 200 thousand of them. The Turks were free to leave Bulgaria and the first secretary Todor Jivkov appeared on national television and made an appeal to the Turkish government to accept the refugees from Bulgaria. People's paramilitary squads were formed to assist the deportation of Turks. Eight people were killed in their actions. The propaganda machine was again working, this time blaming Turkey for not accepting the refugees. The expatriation of the Turks was called "excursion" by the authorities. The "Revival Process" stopped with the shift of first secretary Todor Jivkov and the end of the Cold War. It did not succeed in obliterating the Turkish minority in Bulgaria but the torture and horror it spread will not be soon forgotten.

"Discussions with people, repressed during the Communist regime."
The Truth. Agarta TV. Sofia. 2000.

The cable television Agarta broadcasted several episodes (240 min.) of its TV talk show The Truth which featured people, repressed during the Communist Regime, who told their stories and current views of life. The first guest was Mr. Ivan Nevrokopski, leader of the Bulgarian Agrarian Union and the Union of the Repressed during the Communist Regime. He shared his experience of the prisons of Sliven (the most horrifying, according to him), Shumen, Pazardjik and Pleven. In his opinion, the cruelest form of torture is isolation. He accented on the fact that many of the young political prisoners kept their spirit and virtue and rejected the attempts of the Communists to turn them into traitors and spies.

The next guest of The Truth was the Bulgarian Jewish writer Betty Mayer. He shared mementos of his youth and the peaceful multi-ethnic cohabitation in his hometown Pleven. Betty Mayer is another victim of the Communist Regime. In the 1950s, his wife suffered from a form of tuberculosis for which there were not enough medications available in Bulgaria. He contacted his brothers in Israel who sent him medications through the Israel embassy. His visits to the embassy had been observed by agents of the State Security and in 1960 Mr. Mayer was arrested and accused of espionage in favor of Israel. He spent five months in the interrogation section of the infamous State Security during which he suffered not from beatings but from the psychological torture of isolation and lack of information. Then he was sent to prison. Nowadays, Mr. Mayer is a respected fiction writer.

The only lady that participated in the TV program was Mrs. Tsvetana Draganova Djermanova. She is from the town of Pernik. Mrs. Djermanova was hindered in pursuing her educational degree and repressed because of her anarchistic views and political affiliations. She was arrested in December 18th, 1948 and sent to the female concentration camp "Bosna" in Northeastern Bulgaria (Dobroja). She spent three years in the camp, the total number of the women there was 250, 50 – 60 of them were political prisoners. Mrs. Djermanova now is still politically active as a member of the Bureau of the Union of the Repressed.

An ex – political emigrant in France, Mr. Georgi Konstantinov, took

part in one of the issues of The Truth. He has spent 10 years in prisons (3 of which in concentration camp "Belene") because of his anarchist political orientation. At the early years of the Communist Regime he was an active anarchist and took part in several sabotages – when he was 19 years old he armed a bomb to blow out a monument of Stalin. He mentions that he does not remorse for the time he spent in custody – for him this time is not lost because he met many interesting and influential figures who shared his destiny and from whom he learned a lot. One of this figures was the deceased Mr. Petar Dertliev who kept his friendship with Mr. Konstantinov for half a century. An interesting thought of Mr. Konstantinov is that during an oppressive regime one is free only in prison because he has nothing to lose there.

The popular author, mentioned in the Book References, Mr. Petko Ogoiski was also interviewed in The Truth. He expressed his disappointment of the fact that the actual torturers of the Communist Regime have not received any judicial penalties for their actions. Mr. Ogoiski that instead of being penalized, many of the Communist ex – officials live peaceful lives with the money they have stolen while their victims live in misery.

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