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The “Banner of Peace” Assembly as a National Brand of Bulgaria during Socialism

On December 21st 1976, the UN General Assembly proclaimed 1979 as the International Year of the Child on the occasion of the 20th Anniversary of the adoption of the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child. In June 1978, Lyudmila Zhivkova, Chair of the Committee for Art and Culture, proposed to organize an exhibition of talented children in Bulgaria to mark the occasion. This was how the idea for the “Banner of Peace” Assembly came about, which evolved into an international festival of children’s art, held under the auspices of UNESCO. In the period of late socialism the “Banner of Peace” movement became a national cultural brand of supranational significance. The communist regime in Bulgaria “advertised” itself and utilized the resources of the “soft power” in an attempt to mitigate the ideological opposition during the Cold War. Unlike “hard power”, which uses military and economic means of coercion, “soft power” works through images and symbols – carriers of positive suggestions: art, creativity, beauty, spiritual development, childhood, peace and cooperation. In this paper the “Banner of Peace” Assembly is juxtaposed to another intercultural project with a political and ideological orientation – “Plovdiv – European Capital of Culture 2019”.

Key words: Banner of Peace Assembly, soft power, cultural diplomacy

Скупштина „Застава мира” као национални бренд Бугарске током социјализма

Генерална скупштина УН је 21. децембра 1976. године прогласила 1979. за Међународну годину детета поводом 20. годишњице усвајања Декларације УН о правима детета. У јуну 1978. Људмила Живкова, председница Комитета за уметност и културу, предложила је да се тим поводом организује изложба талентоване деце у Бугарској. Тако је настала идеја за Скупштину „Застава мира”, која је прерасла у међународни фестивал дечје уметности, који се одржавао под покровитељством Унеска. Покрет „Застава мира” је у периоду позног социјализма постао национални културни бренд наднационалног значаја. Комунистички режим у Бугарској се „рекламирао” и користио ресурсе „меке моћи” у покушају да ублажи идеолошку опозицију током Хладног рата. За разлику од „тврде моћи”, која користи војна и економска средства принуде, „мека моћ” делује посредством слика и симбола који се поимају као предлози са позитивном конотацијом: уметност, креативност, лепота, духовни развој, детињство, мир и сарадња. Пројекат Скупштина „Застава мира” се у раду посматра у корелацији са још једним интеркултуралним пројектом политичке и идеолошке оријентације – „Пловдив – Европска престоница културе 2019”.

Кључне речи: Скупштина „Застава мира”, „мека моћ”, културна дипломатија

“Hallo, hallo, our Sofia Assembly,
Composers, artists, poets,
Future creators of this world,
Let there be on the Planet of Earth
Creativity, unity, beauty!”

From the Anthem of the Assembly

The “Banner of Peace” movement is an original Bulgarian contribution related to promoting children’s rights and creativity and a reflection of the 20th century trends in the preservation of cultural heritage, the international cooperation in culture and the arts, and the goodwill to maintain a balance in the global confrontation during the Cold War. As a positive example of integrating foreign policy with a cultural message the “Banner of Peace” Assembly remains to this day a pinnacle of Bulgaria’s cultural

diplomacy. The international scale of this project was commensurate with the economic development of the country in the late 70's and early 80's of the 20th century – a period now referred to as late socialism or developed socialism. These were years of rising living standards for the population, whose leaders sought to create a positive image for the country abroad, and ultimately achieve their hard policy goals through cultural diplomacy. The strengthening of the cultural exchange with foreign countries included visiting exhibitions of Bulgarian treasures abroad and respectively hosting valuable works of art in Bulgaria. In this way, the country gained international prestige and counteracted its political dependence within the socialist Bloc.

Recently, the research on the scale and importance of culture and cultural diplomacy from the socialist period has multiplied. In his book “The Cultural Front” (2008) Ivan Elenkov examines in great detail the development of culture in Bulgaria during 1944–1989. The subject of his study refers to the political governance, ideological foundations and institutional regimes of the organizations of culture during the decades of communism. Ivo Milev's book “The life and death of Lyudmila Zhivkova” (2018) reviews the cultural diplomacy of Bulgaria from the era of socialism through the life and professional biography of Todor Zhivkov's¹ daughter - Lyudmila Zhivkova.² She was the initiator of ideological programs for aesthetic education and cultural expansion and acted as the major cultural ambassador of the country. In the 1970's, as the face of the Bulgarian culture abroad, Zhivkova contributed to the development of many international initiatives, including the conception and successful realization of the “Banner of Peace” movement. In her recently published work “The Cold War from the Margins” (2021), Theodora K. Dragostinova³ evaluates

¹ Todor Hristov Zhivkov (7 September 1911 – 5 August 1998) was a Bulgarian communist leader of the People's Republic of Bulgaria (PRB) from 1954 until 1989. He was also the General Secretary of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP).

² Born on July 26th, 1942 in Sofia, Lyudmila Zhivkova was the only daughter of the Chair of the State Council of the People's Republic of Bulgaria Todor Zhivkov and Dr. Mara Maleeva. Her political career up until her death in 1981 was marked by upward trajectory: in the period 1975–1981 Lyudmila Zhivkova was the Chair of the Committee for Art and Culture with the rank Minister of Culture. Her other official positions included the following: 1975 – Chair of the Council of Chairmen of the Creative Unions and of the National Complex “Artistic creative work, cultural activity and mass media”; 1976 – Member of the Central Committee of BCP and of the Bureau of the Council of Ministers; 1979 – Member of Politbureau.

³ Theodora Dragostinova is an Associate Professor of History at Ohio State University whose work focuses on nationalism, migration, global history, and Cold War culture.

the global 1970's from the perspective of a small socialist state – Bulgaria. Through its cultural engagements with the Balkans, the West, and the Third World, the communist leadership of Bulgaria relied heavily on cultural diplomacy to reinforce its legitimacy at home and promote its agendas abroad. In this period Bulgarian officials and artists traveled the world to open museum exhibitions, show films, perform music, and showcase the cultural heritage and future aspirations of their “ancient yet modern” country. As Dragostinova shows, these encounters transcended the Cold War mentality – as a result Bulgaria’s relations with Greece and Austria improved, the émigrés once considered enemies were embraced, and new cultural ties were forged with India, Mexico, and Nigeria. The strategy of establishing contacts with the West, and in the same time, pursuing solidarity with the Global South reinforced Zhivkov’s regime by securing new allies and unifying its population.⁴

In this paper I argue that the “Banner of Peace” movement was instrumentalised to serve a political agenda related to the cultural opening of Bulgaria to the world. In this way this far-reaching project became a “soft power” tool for achieving international prestige and recognition. Based on archival materials, documents and online sources revealing the significance of the movement, this research addresses the question: how successful was the “Banner of Peace” Assembly as an instrument of cultural diplomacy and a soft power strategy? The goal of the paper is to show the significance of culture in shaping domestic and international agendas and in creating a national brand in the context of the domineering paradigm set by the Cold War politics.

THE “BANNER OF PEACE” MOVEMENT AS A “SOFT POWER” STRATEGY

The concept of “soft power” was developed by the American political scientist Joseph Nye in 1990. In his words, soft power “is the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from the attractiveness of a country’s culture, political ideals, and policies” (Nye 2004, x). According to Nye, soft power strategies are based on persuasion and seduction: “Seduction is always more effective than coercion,

⁴ Cornell University Press. 2022. “The Cold War from the Margins. A Small Socialist State on the Global Cultural Scene by Theodora K. Dragostinova”. <https://www.cornellpress.cornell.edu/book/9781501755552/the-cold-war-from-the-margins/> (Accessed January 22, 2022).

and many values like democracy, human rights, and individual opportunities are deeply seductive" (Nye 2004, x). Among the soft power resources of a nation are its cultural products (films, music, books, etc.), language, history and political values, visions and aspirations. Soft power, thus, is a conceptual tool applied in international politics and related to the values a nation expresses in its culture. Unlike "hard power", which uses military and economic means of coercion, "soft power" works through images and symbols – carriers of positive suggestions: culture, art, creativity, beauty, brotherhood, spiritual development, childhood, peace and cooperation.

The importance of culture in international relations was recognized by the Bulgarian political elites early on.⁵ Thus I argue that the design and implementation of the "Banner of peace" Assembly could be seen as a soft power strategy. Underlying the project was the emphasis on universal values such as children's rights, friendship, creativity and spirituality along with various expressions of the arts and culture. In this conception children were seen as the messengers of universal brotherhood and cooperation. The regime used the concept of "childhood" to communicate a global vision of peace and harmony among nations. In the ideological platform "culture" and "children" were put together to reinforce this vision. The practical objectives of the project involved making lifelong friendships and attracting potential political allies among the children and the agents of culture who visited Bulgaria during the Assembly. The realization was that there was no more valuable asset to the country than the friendship of future world leaders who had spent time in Bulgaria as children. The young participants in the Assembly usually returned home with a greater appreciation of Bulgarian culture and institutions, so they would constitute a remarkable reservoir of good will for Bulgaria.

The beginning of the Assembly coincided with two important events for Bulgaria internationally. One was the death of Georgi Markov, a Bulgarian dissident writer, who immigrated to the United Kingdom and was killed in London in September 1978. The other key event was the assas-

⁵ Emil Aleksandrov, a close associate of Lyudmila Zhivkova, gives the following definition: "Diplomacy through culture is an official activity aimed at implementing the foreign policy and international cultural policy of a country through specific means, methods and forms, including extensive use of the achievements of the arts, culture, science, education, information and other spiritual achievements, exchange of artists and agents in the field of culture, an activity that is in accordance with the principles and norms of the international law and the requirements for maintaining peace and security and ensuring international cooperation, assisting them by achieving better knowledge among peoples and establishing an atmosphere of trust between them, respectively between the states" (Aleksandrov 1981, 125-126).

sination attempt on the Pope John Paul II on May 13, 1981 in St. Peter's Square in Rome, with which the country had been associated for years. These two events badly damaged the image of socialist Bulgaria. The initiatives in the sphere of culture helped to partially overcome these negatives. Thus, the main mission of the Assembly in the context of the country's cultural opening to the world (and to the West in particular) was to establish international contacts in support of Bulgaria, promote international cooperation in science, culture and art in the process of balancing the ideological differences between the two Blocs.

In 1979, announced as the United Nations' International Year of the Child, Lyudmila Zhivkova organized the first ever meeting of children from around the world in Bulgaria. That event gave the start to the first International Children's Assembly, which later grew into the "Banner of Peace" movement.⁶ The Assembly aimed to unite the creative ambitions of children around the ideal of peace, creativity and perfection. For two weeks in August 1979, Bulgaria hosted 1,321 children from seventy-seven countries. Accompanied by 1,100 Bulgarian pupils they participated in artistic, musical, and performance events – chalk art competitions, joint choir performances in public venues and sightseeing excursions to historical sites. The creative activities of children were united under the motto of the event – Unity, Creativity, Beauty, inspired by Zhivkova's ideas (Dragostinova 2021, 38).

The Patron of the First Assembly was Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow, Director – General of UNESCO.⁷ Further information about the international recognition of the initiative can be found on the website of "Lyudmila Zhivkova – Banner of Peace" Foundation:

"In November 1978, at the 20th Session of UNESCO's General Conference M'Bow assessed the International Children's Assembly as one of the greatest initiatives, related to the International Year of the Child, and underlined that the 'idea for its organization offered an opportunity to many children, who had been brought up with various cultures, to understand that despite the differences there existed an universal language of brotherhood and solidarity, which was a guarantee of and a hope for the future'. The First World Children's Parliament was

⁶ On the normative basis of the "Banner of Peace" movement, see Elenkov 2010.

⁷ Apart from the United Nations and UNESCO, "The Banner of Peace" Movement was also supported by UNICEF, InSEA (International Society for Education through Art) and other international organizations.

held at the National Assembly in Sofia, where a 'Letter-Appeal' was adopted by the children participating in the International Children's Assembly 'Banner of Peace', who addressed the children of the world. At the 34th Session of the UN General Assembly the 'Letter-Appeal' was distributed as an official document among the member countries. The Secretary – General of the United Nations Kurt Waldheim also gave his appraisal of the International Children's Assembly, its goals and significance. He underlined that "the entire and effective realization of the children's rights, as well as the stimulation of their artistic gifts, to which the International Children's Assembly 'Banner of Peace' allotted special attention, would promote the enrichment of every society and every nation" ("Lyudmila Zhivkova – Banner of Peace" Foundation 2022).⁸

In 1987 the UN honored the Assembly with the title "Messenger of Peace".⁹

Initially, the Assembly was planned as a one-time event, but its great success, the worldwide interest, and the desire expressed by the World Children's Parliament resulted in its continuation and the decision for the meetings to be held once every 3 years in Bulgaria. In the years 1982, 1985 and 1988 three more International Children's Assemblies were carried out in Sofia, along with four meetings of children from all over the world. A total of 3,900 children from 138 countries and 14,000 children from Bulgaria took part in them.¹⁰

The headquarters of the "Banner of Peace" was established in Sofia in 1982 – the year of the second Assembly in Bulgaria. Regional complexes were also set up in Varna, Blagoevgrad and Kuystendil. The movement was popularized abroad by international centers¹¹ in many countries like Poland, France, Portugal, Belgium, the Netherlands, Austria, Brazil, Mexi-

⁸ "Lyudmila Zhivkova – Banner of Peace" Foundation. 2022. "The "Banner of peace" Establishment". <https://www.znamenamira.bg/en/banner-of-peace/the-banner-of-peace-establishment> (Accessed February 10, 2022).

⁹ "Lyudmila Zhivkova – Banner of Peace" Foundation. 2022. "Messenger of Peace". <https://www.znamenamira.bg/en/banner-of-peace/activity/messenger-of-peace> (Accessed February 15, 2022).

¹⁰ Spomeni ot Narodnata republika. 2014. "Spomen za asambleyata "Zname na mira". <https://socbg.com/2014/08/спомен-за-асамблеята-знаме-на-мира.html> (Accessed November 11, 2021).

¹¹ In 1990, eighteen foreign structures of the movement were closed.

co, Japan,¹² and India. They unified the followers of the “Banner of Peace” Assembly worldwide.¹³ The institutional support for the movement corresponded to an expansionist political vision – setting goals in a long-run perspective. The main objective was forging alliances and making friends with the artistic and cultural elites abroad.

The Assembly had a motto, an emblem and an anthem. The emblem was created by the Bulgarian artist, Asen Starejshiski, and featured two chickens just hatched from the “shell” of the planet Earth looking at each other with amazement and curiosity. These little birds represented the meetings between children during the Assembly. The emblem was widely recognized in Bulgaria and appeared on postage stamps, coins, cards.

The creative activities of children from around the world resulted in a large corpus of art works – paintings, poems, musical compositions.¹⁴ Many of these works were published in book collections and bulletins dedicated to the Assembly. Generally, the focus on children and related state policies during socialism encouraged local filmmaking dedicated to childhood themes, telling about the everyday life of children in Bulgaria. Also, there are numerous books with children’s poetry written by Bulgarian authors from this period.

One of the lasting material evidences of the Assembly is “The Banner of Peace” Monument¹⁵ also called “the Bells”, located at the outskirts of Sofia at the foot of the Vitosha Mountain. It was officially opened on the last day of the First Assembly – August 25, 1979. At the opening, the General Secretary of UNESCO, Amadou Mahtar M’Bow has said, “this monument

¹² Japan was one of the countries that made remarkable commitments to the International Children’s Assembly - the country sent the biggest bell, cast especially for the “Banner of Peace” Monument; more than 500 children’s drawings and 36 children arrived in Bulgaria: “The Japanese very quickly understood what can be the role of cultural policy in the spirit of Zhivkova, how it can be a convenient occasion and conductor of interests, including economic” (Milev 2018, 571).

¹³ “Lyudmila Zhivkova – Banner of Peace” Foundation. 2022. “The “Banner of peace” Establishment”. <https://www.znamenamira.bg/en/banner-of-peace/the-banner-of-peace-establishment> (Accessed February, 15, 2022).

¹⁴ The paintings of children from the Assembly are kept in the collection of “Lyudmila Zhivkova – Banner of Peace” Foundation.

¹⁵ Other distinctive monumental constructions were built during the same period – the Monument House of the Bulgarian Communist Party also known as the Buzludzha Monument located in central Bulgaria, the National Palace of Culture (NDK) in Sofia, and the memorial “Founders of Bulgarian state” in Shumen. Dedicated to honour the 1300 anniversary of the Bulgarian state, these key objects were the result of the Complex Program for Memorial Construction.

is an expression of faith".¹⁶ According to Luydmila Zhivkova the monument is "rising as a symbol, carrying the necessity for creative spiritual awakening and development, calling for brotherhood and cooperation, and reminding of the need and inevitability in creating a New United World."¹⁷

THE ASSEMBLY AS A CONCEPTUAL PROJECT

The International Children's Assembly bears the name "Banner of Peace" not by chance. The emblem of the "Banner of Peace" was created and promoted by the Russian painter, writer, archaeologist, theosophist, philosopher, and humanitarian Nicholas Roerich (1874–1947). The emblem was supposed to designate cultural and historic monuments, museums, scientific, artistic, educational and cultural institutions – all objects safeguarded under the Roerich Pact.¹⁸

"The 'Banner of Peace' emblem is a red circle with three red spheres inscribed inside it on a white background. The circle symbolizes the indivisibility of the world, and the three spheres – the unity of present, past and future. Roerich's Banner is an expression of the basic philosophy of the Pact about the eternal evolution of the Universe, based on its laws and harmony, manifested by the unity of past, present, and future. This is the idea behind the International Children's Assembly 'Banner of Peace' (Aleksandrov 1979, 54–55).

Furthermore, the Assembly was part of a larger cultural program for the activities of the National Complex "Artistic Creativity, Cultural Activities and Mass Media" created to mark the 1300th anniversary of the founding of the Bulgarian state. The program was implemented in several directions, one of which was titled "Bulgarian youth – heir to millennial traditions and creator of the new communist culture", where events were held for the early detection and promotion of adolescent talent and development of the Children's Assembly (Milev 2018, 571–574).

¹⁶ A detailed description of the monument is provided in a video posted on the YouTube channel of Atrium Bulgaria. 2014. "The Banner of Peace", Sofia. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NdORyU8_hhk (Accessed December 21, 2021).

¹⁷ Central State Archive (TsDA), ф.288Б, оп.1, а.е. 21, л. 24

¹⁸ The Roerich Pact is also known as the Treaty on the Protection of Artistic and Scientific Institutions and Historic Monuments, signed by the USA and the Latin American nations in 1935.

The International Assembly of Children was envisioned as a conceptual project that evolved around several key concepts – culture, children / childhood, creativity. In the article “Under the Banner of Peace – towards the wonderful world of perfection”, Luydmila Zhivkova presented the conceptual basis of the movement:

“The essence of the assembly is directly related, derives and is determined by the evolutionary goal – necessity the development of each child to continuously and consistently reveal the creative nature of humanity, the attention and consciousness of children from an early age to be directed towards the beautiful in life, the strengths and energies of development to be turned to the boundless world of perfection. In its specific forms, the assembly will include and cover a number of cultural, national and international events related to the field of fine arts, literature, music, etc. Revealing their need to create according to the laws of beauty and expressing their ability to strive for beauty, thousands of young artists from different parts of the world will meet in the exhibition hall, on stage, meet and talk through the direct language of art, will share their dreams, aspirations, visions for the present and the future” (Zhivkova 1982, 10).

The importance of culture is further highlighted in the article:

“The etymology of the term ‘culture’ takes us back to ancient times – the dawn in which the current human civilization was born – and contains the essence of the eternal universal pursuit and respect for light, the evolutionary need for man to strive for communion and merging with the purest and most eternal element of existence. The fiery principle, which pulsates in every evolutionary process and which turns man into an artist, can be excited and ignited only under the influence and necessity of culture” (Zhivkova 1982, 14).

The central object in the conceptual framework of the Assembly project was naturally the child and its creativity:

“The child is the symbol of the eternal beginning at the infinite end of the spiral development. The child is the hope, the child is the faith, the child is the future, in the name of which it is necessary to consciously experience every present moment” (Zhivkova 1982, 14).

The “Banner of Peace” Assembly was conceptually and ideologically connected with the unified complex national program for aesthetic education, which has been developed as an ongoing project since the early 1970's. This program, according to Lyudmila Zhivkova:

“aims to create the necessary conditions and prerequisites to develop the creative principle in every human individual, through the continuous development and expansion of this principle to expand human consciousness, man to be built as a multifaceted, versatile and harmonious personality” (Zhivkova 1982, 16).

When presenting the ideological platform of the Assembly, Lyudmila Zhivkova¹⁹ used metaphorical language that reflected her interests in the field of esotericism, mysticism, religious philosophy of the East. The Thracian Orphism, the Bogomils, Peter Dunoff²⁰, the living ethics of Nikolas Roerich (Agni Yoga) were among the main influences that shaped her worldview. Her interests in spirituality, belief systems and what we may call today a New Age philosophy had an impact on her public speaking and writing. Her words sounded exotic and incomprehensible to the orthodox communists in the Party who occupied the top positions of the state. The Bulgarian diplomat, Bogomil Gerasimov, wrote in his memoirs, “During the years when Lyudmila was at the top, our cultural policy was not based on Marxism – Leninism or dialectical materialism, but on the teachings of Peter Dunoff” (Gerasimov 2015, 354).

Kostadin Chakârov, a close associate of Todor Zhivkov in the last years of his reign, made the following statement regarding the Assembly:

“Lyudmila was a phenomenon, and she wanted to protest with all her energy and change the conditions; and she wanted to introduce into this post-war world, in conditions where human life cost little, which was rude, hostile, administrative, with military-political systems and headquarters, etc. She wanted to mount spirituality. She wanted to mount values. She

¹⁹ Lyudmila Zhivkova was seen as a controversial figure in late socialism. Her public image and political role have been subjected to new interpretations and revisions in the debate on the communist past (see Luleva 2014).

²⁰ Peter Dunoff [Bulgarian: Петър Дънов (July 11, 1864 – December 27, 1944 – author's note), also known by his spiritual name Veinsa Douno [Bulgarian: Веинса Дуно – author's note]. Addressed as the Master by his followers, Peter Dunoff was a Bulgarian philosopher and spiritual teacher. He has many followers in Bulgaria and worldwide united in the Universal White Brotherhood.

resisted everything related to the party, to the state, which bore the marks of coercion, of class relations. As a scholar, she was also interested in Buddhism, Islam and Christian values. She said: 'Everyone is talking about military space, political space, economic space, but no one is talking about a single spiritual space, biblical space, and a conflict of civilizations is emerging on religious grounds'. [...] What was her project? [...] She was looking for opportunities, points of intersection between these three value systems that I mentioned. In this sense, she escaped traditional class-party notions. Her speech was strange because she was looking for synthetic concepts, integral terms that can unite – Beauty, Advance, Spiral, etc. She said: 'We need to build a system (and this was the 'Banner of Peace' Assembly) in which young people will begin to master this new value system; this spiritual space will unite them'. Each country had to send young talents in the field of the arts, and first, Bulgaria would win as *a small country* that was not burdened with class / colonial history like other great nations. She wanted to encourage children to lend a hand and add this value system to politics. All this, however, she did not dress in class-party, Marxist – Leninist [...] she did not want in these terms – she was looking for a new phraseology."²¹

Anyway, the Assembly did not become an ideological prop in the struggle between the two social and political systems – socialist vs. capitalist. Lyudmila Zhivkova and her close associates avoided propaganda clichés and did not allow the project to be used for narrow party interests; its goal was global and universal. In this way, Bulgaria used "the advantages of smallness" and redefined its position as a Soviet satellite "by asserting an image of national uniqueness" (Dragostinova 2021, 224). The "Banner of Peace" movement was promoted as an independent cultural initiative that showcased the achievements of the modern Bulgarian society and the socialist way of life.

THE LEGACY

One tangible outcome of the Assembly was creating circles of friends of Bulgaria abroad. Distinguished writers, musicians, artists, activists were attracted to these circles. After the death of Lyudmila Zhivkova in 1981, these agents of culture, science and education, representatives of business, reli-

²¹ Kostadin Chakârov "Interview for Bulgarian TV 7 Program "Good morning, Bulgaria" July 22, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HDxDMRvxunk&t=424s> (Accessed January 28, 2022).

gious and public circles from different countries gathered in Sofia on October 20, 1982 to establish the International Foundation "Lyudmila Zhivkova", renamed International Foundation "St. St. Cyril and Methodius" on February 24, 1990. Among the declared objectives of the Foundation were contributing to international understanding, to the education of the younger generation in the spirit of enduring universal values and virtues; supporting the development of capable young people by providing equal opportunities based solely on professional qualities and skills; promoting the building of high environmental awareness of the young generation. According to the Founding Act the Foundation supports research in the fields of education, science and culture, in addition to facilitating the education, vocational training and creative development of talented children and gifted young people; charity aimed at the younger generation; supporting the preservation, maintenance and promotion of cultural and historical heritage.²²

The realization of the "Banner of peace" Assembly corresponded to Bulgaria's claims to occupy a greater place in international relations. The institutional and financial support for the movement correlated with the economic and demographic rise of Bulgaria in the late 70's and early 80's of the 20th century. The Assembly is now part of the cultural memory of Bulgarians who are not indifferent to this manifestation of international prestige. Reflections on the event can be found in personal blogs and sites dedicated to nostalgic memories of socialism such as *Memories from the People's Republics*.²³

Since 1989 onwards the ensuing political and economic changes precluded the future organization of the Assemblies and the "Banner of Peace" head office in Sofia was closed. In 1999 "Lyudmila Zhivkova – Banner of Peace" Foundation was founded on the occasion of the 20th Anniversary of the First International Children's Assembly. The head of the Foundation became and still is the daughter of Lyudmila Zhivkova – Evgenia Zhivkova. Its mission is to perpetuate the ideas of "Banner of Peace", namely Zhivkova's ideal of "Unity, Creativity, Beauty". Since its establishment, the Foundation has organized eleven Children's Assemblies from 1999 to 2019. The participants were mainly children from Bulgaria who had the opportunity to demonstrate their talents in singing, dancing, drawing. Traditionally, the Assemblies were held in Sofia, but this is no longer the case. In 2005 for the first time the Assembly was held outside Sofia – in Vratsa. Two more Assemblies were carried out in Kazanlâk – in 2007 and in 2008.

²² International Foundation "St. St. Cyril and Methodius". June 2, 2001. "Founding Act." http://www.cmfnd.org/about/bg/ConstAct_bg.htm (Accessed February 20, 2022).

²³ Spomeni ot Narodnata republika. <https://socbg.com/> (Accessed November 11, 2021).

The latest editions of the Assemblies have seen major changes – firstly, they do not have such a large international scope. They are held with a limited number of children and official guests. Another major change and difference with the socialist Assemblies of the recent past is the presence of clergymen from the Bulgarian Orthodox Church – something unthinkable before 1989. It was explicitly stated on the Foundation’s website that “the Assembly in 2000 is carried out under the patronage of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, represented by His Holiness Maxim, Patriarch of Bulgaria, His Grace Galaktion, the Archbishop of Stara Zagora, and the Right Reverend Makariopolski Archbishop Gavril and the Levkiisky Archbishop Pavel, as well as by other clergymen” (“Lyudmila Zhivkova – Banner of Peace” Foundation 2022).²⁴

In addition to organizing Assemblies, the Foundation carried out initiatives to honor young Bulgarians who had received international awards in the spheres of the arts, sports and sciences. Their names were engraved on a memorial wall:

“An artistic panel with the letters of the Bulgarian Alphabet had also been put up there. In June 2004 a memorial in honour of the children who had become victims of terrorism was erected at the ‘Banner of Peace’ Monument as a present from the Bulgarian Children” (“Lyudmila Zhivkova – Banner of Peace” Foundation 2022).²⁵

On November 12, 2019 an exhibition with photos from the Assembly in 1979 and children’s drawings from the “Banner of Peace” collection was opened at “Seasons” Gallery in Sofia. This event commemorated the 40th jubilee of the First International Children’s Assembly “Banner of Peace”.

THE ROAD TO EUROPE AND THE RESUMPTION OF INTERCULTURAL COOPERATION

In 1980, the XXI UNESCO Conference was held in Belgrade, Serbia. On September 30, L. Zhivkova addressed the delegates:

²⁴ “Lyudmila Zhivkova – Banner of Peace” Foundation. 2022. “Banner of Peace Assembly 2000.” <https://www.znamenamira.bg/en/banner-of-peace-today/banner-of-peace-assembly-2000> (Accessed February 15, 2022).

²⁵ “Lyudmila Zhivkova – Banner of Peace” Foundation. 2022. “The “Banner of peace” Establishment”. <https://www.znamenamira.bg/en/banner-of-peace/the-banner-of-peace-establishment> (Accessed February 10, 2022).

“Bulgaria is part of Europe – its future is with Europe; the cultural cooperation of the peoples of Europe is predestined – it is the guarantor of the world cooperation. Culture, this bright phenomenon of our age, will be one of the main pillars in the construction of that global culture and civilization [...] when human knowledge and consciousness will be wide enough to accommodate and harmonize the elements of historical and cultural experience of all countries and peoples, of every culture and civilization, and will live with the wealth of the whole”.²⁶

This expressed geopolitical vision about the European orientation of Bulgaria came true when the country became a member of the European Union in 2007. Culture and the arts once again played a major role in establishing partner relationships with other member states. The EU cultural policies and related programs for academic and artistic exchange proved to be powerful integration instruments, confirming that the European Union as a symbol of a united Europe carries a good deal of soft power (Nye 2004, 77). One major EU initiative accomplished in Bulgaria was the successful realization of the intercultural program “Plovdiv – the European Capital of Culture 2019”.²⁷ In this campaign the use of “culture” understood as *creative industries* and *cultural entrepreneurs* was the main engine for the renovation of urban spaces, reviving deserted neighborhoods (e.g. Kapana²⁸ in Plovdiv), stimulating tourism and creating capacity to implement artistic initiatives (see Bogdanova 2019). Volunteering was a key priority of the project, which also relied on the mass participation of young people to give content and meaning to the various creative workshops. The involvement of young talents, as well as the international character of most projects is among the main similarities between the “European Capital of Culture” (ECC, author’s note) program and the “Banner of Peace” Assembly. While the Assembly engaged talented children from all over the world, the ECC was pushing for cooperation with European partners, which did not exclude participants from outside the European Union. But in general, the ECC program aimed to emphasize the country’s affiliation to the European political project. The Assembly, for its part, set “diplomatic” goals - interstate mediation and internation-

²⁶ Central State Archive (TsDA), ф.288Б, оп. 1, а.е.24, л.10

²⁷ For a detailed description of the program “Plovdiv – European Capital of Culture 2019”, see Bogdanova 2020.

²⁸ The example of Kapana was soon followed by other Bulgarian cities that came up with projects for urban renovation through culture, the arts and heritage preservation.

al cooperation, achieved through promoting universal human values and rights – “peace”, “childhood” and “children’s creativity and rights” under the auspices of UNESCO and UNICEF.

From the fast adoption of the European cultural concepts and practices in Bulgaria, along with the intensification of contacts with European partners after 2007, it seems that the road to Europe has been paved by the cultural diplomacy during socialism.

CONCLUSION

The cultural opening of Bulgaria to the world took place in the years of late socialism. One of the goals was to showcase Bulgarian socialism as a successful way of life. Large-scale cultural initiatives such as the Assembly “Banner of Peace” became an instrument of soft power and laid the foundations of the Bulgarian cultural diplomacy. Soft power strategies aim to achieve geopolitical and hard power results through persuasion and agreement, and not with the methods of coercion, aggression, competitiveness. The Assembly has also become the national brand of Bulgaria by addressing the hopes and dreams of people for a peaceful cooperation between the nations. For that reason, it did not become a symbol of the ideological opposition between the West and the East; on the contrary, it contributed to strengthening the good will and maintaining the balance of powers through the equal treatment of all participating countries. The large international scope of the Assembly (uniting participants from every continent), its sustainability and legacy through the years makes it a successful example for achieving foreign policy goals by the means of cultural diplomacy (“soft power”). Over the years of its development (1979–1988), this initiative gained international recognition and was addressed as one triumphant act by the UN officials. The Assembly certainly improved the image of Bulgaria and paved the way for its future in the European Union.

In the years of the postsocialist transition following 1989, the Bulgarian state withdrew from sponsoring large scale cultural projects such as the “Banner of Peace” Assembly. The difficult economic situation, the fall of a large part of the population into poverty, the demographic crisis and subsequent emigration had negatively affected cultural institutions, artists, academics, etc. In 2007 Bulgaria became part of the EU and since then European funds and programs have helped in terminating the cultural isolation. Cultural initiatives with a pan-European orientation were launched, such as the “European Capital of Culture”, the “European Bauhaus”, etc.

In recent years Bulgarians started traveling the world vigorously and, in contrast to socialism, now they can personally visit European and world museums, see works of art, attend concerts and exhibitions abroad. Culture in Europe and worldwide, only accessible to elites during socialism, has become immediately widely available with the opening of borders and increased opportunities for individual experiences of other cultures and traditions. The cultural capital, accumulated during the socialist period, has facilitated the process of appreciating and embracing these new ways of seeing the world.

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