

# French claims for compensation of property taken by Bulgaria 1944-1960. A foreign policy interpretation.

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## Abstract

This article examines French policy towards Bulgaria from the end of the Second World War to the dawn of the 1960s' *détente*. It traces French attempts to preserve its traditional influence in this country despite its sovietisation.

This study of Franco-Bulgarian relations relies on French diplomatic archives. To better account for mentalities and worldviews, both statements of policy and diplomatic correspondence will be used. Documents reviewed pertain primarily to this particular case, but also have a broader relevance to post-World War II foreign policies and diplomatic practices.

While it is not the purpose of this article to challenge narratives of the Cold War, it provides a complement to their depictions. It also offers an appraisal of French doctrines and actions, against which historiographies can be tested. Finally, it contributes to the understanding of Eastern Europe's relations with the West in general and France in particular.

## Keywords

Cold War, History, Foreign Relations, France, Bulgaria, Eastern Europe, Diplomacy

## Introduction

Perhaps the most important development in the recent study of the Cold War as a binary conflict between East and West is the acknowledgement that it cannot explain all diplomatic processes between 1945 and 1991. The inclusion of countries beyond the Soviet Union, United States, and other frontline powers, which defined the Cold War, was instrumental in this advance.<sup>1</sup> Such was the case of France, and its reluctance to abide by the realities of this conflict in its early phases.<sup>2</sup>

Early Cold War diplomacy is well examined from a classical, Anglo-American perspective, putting ideology in the foreground.<sup>3</sup> Despite advances in scholarship, however, little exists on relations between France and Central Eastern Europe. French relations with Central Eastern European countries are of particular interest, as this region was both the Cold War's birthplace and traditionally of crucial importance to French foreign policy. Relations between countries of each block are, moreover, an essential part of European history.<sup>4</sup>

Nowhere is this dearth more striking than for Franco-Bulgarian relations, hitherto only discussed in narrow French and Bulgarian works.<sup>5</sup> Studies of British and American relations with Bulgaria during the same period virtually omit France.<sup>6</sup> So does Dimitrov's examination of the Soviet takeover of Bulgaria, despite its coverage of British and American reactions to this process.<sup>7</sup> Boll reduces the onset of the Cold War in Bulgaria to a Soviet-American affair.<sup>8</sup> Economic relations, which were part of all foreign policies, and prominently so in France's ones, are also neglected.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Georges-Henri Soutou. *La Guerre Froide De La France: 1941-1990*, (Paris: Tallandier, 2018)

Pages cannot be given for this work due to a technical issue.

<sup>2</sup> Frédéric Bozo. *French Foreign Policy since 1945: An Introduction* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2016)

<sup>3</sup> Vasil Paraskevov 'Conflict and Necessity: British-Bulgarian Relations, 1944-56', *Cold War History* 11.2 (2011), pp.242-243.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Laurent Césari. 'Les Relations Franco-Bulgares, 1945-1974', *Études balkaniques*, 2-3 (2001), 146-154.

<sup>6</sup> April Curtis. 'British and Us Relations with Bulgaria, 1949-1959: The Bulgarian- American Diplomatic Split and Britain's Fundamental Role', *Bulgarian Studies*, 1 (2017), 5-27; Marietta Stankova. *Bulgaria in British Foreign Policy, 1943-1949*. (London: Cambridge Core, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Vesselin Dimitrov. *Stalin's Cold War: Soviet Foreign Policy, Democracy and Communism in Bulgaria, 1941-48*, (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Michael M. Boll. *Cold War in the Balkans: American Foreign Policy and the Emergence of Communist Bulgaria, 1943-1947* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1984)

<sup>9</sup> Stankova, *Bulgaria in British Foreign Policy, 1943-1949*; Césari, 'Les Relations Franco-Bulgares, 1945-1974'.

France enjoyed an enviable position in Bulgaria before the Second World War. Deft use of political, economic, and cultural levers guaranteed France's influence over Bulgaria and profit at home. Both Vichy and Free France gave the maintenance of these advantages an important place in their post-war planning.<sup>10</sup> The damages wrought by the Second World War, however, seemed to disqualify France from pursuing such ambitions. The sovietisation of the region followed this first disaster. It is also scarcely imaginable for Anglo-American historians that a diminished power, reliant on American assistance, could entertain a foreign policy radically different from its protector's one.

Nevertheless, after breaking relations with Bulgaria in January 1950, the United States asked the *Ministère des Affaires Étrangères* (MAE) to keep it abreast of events in the country. In 1953, it was again through the MAE that Bulgaria sounded the United States on possible negotiations to mend this split.<sup>11</sup> Undaunted by the merciless Soviet onslaught and by its own domestic struggles, France sought to maintain and expand its *présence* in Bulgaria. Early Cold War France did not see itself as a victim of Germany restored by the mercy of the war's winners, but as a victor. Indeed, France occupied part of Germany and Austria and was allied with the Soviet Union. Together with its overseas possessions, it was home to 150 million inhabitants, slightly more than the United States. As *Thirty Glorious* years of growth dawned, industry was revived through nationalisation. France's first nuclear reactor diverged in December 1948, confirming its leading scientific status.<sup>12</sup> By 1952, the French economy was larger than it had been before the Great Depression.<sup>13</sup> These more than sufficient grounds for optimism explain why France could think itself able to carry out an ambitious foreign policy in Bulgaria. Of lesser economic importance than Romania or Yugoslavia, Bulgaria nonetheless serves as a useful case study of French foreign policy towards Central Eastern Europe. Even if limited, it is a case of surprising vitality.

This article asks whether French attempts to retain influence in Bulgaria between 1944 and 1960 were successful. Establishing the existence of sustained French engagement with Bulgaria after the Second World War would cast a new light on the history of both countries. It is not the purpose of this article to directly confront overarching narratives of the Cold War. Evidence towards an independently formulated and successfully realized French foreign policy

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<sup>10</sup> Soutou, *La Guerre Froide De La France: 1941-1990*.

<sup>11</sup> Curtis, 'British and Us Relations with Bulgaria, 1949–1959', p.21.

<sup>12</sup> Jean Fourastié. *Les Trente Glorieuses*, (Paris: Fayard, 1979).

<sup>13</sup> Soutou, *La Guerre Froide De La France: 1941-1990*.

in Bulgaria, however, would be at odds with classical understandings of the Cold War, which paint it as an overwhelming constraint on post-War foreign policies.

This article begins with a review of the historical and political origins of French foreign policy in Bulgaria after the Second World War. The word *présence* is used throughout period documents and is kept here to account for French diplomacy's attempt at long terms implantations. The bulk of this article consist of an account of the means, objectives, and results of French foreign policy towards Bulgaria between 1944 and 1960. French policy towards Bulgaria between 1944 and 1960 can be divided into three periods. There was little doubt on Bulgaria's future status as a Soviet satellite after the war.<sup>14</sup> Until 1948, how tightly it would be kept in orbit was, however, unclear. Between 1948 and 1954, the sovietisation of Bulgaria dealt a seemingly mortal blow to French ambitions. This was not, however, coterminous with a suspension of – admittedly diminished – commercial and cultural relations. The third and final period covers the settlement of French claims for compensation of taken property, which ushered a limited revival of relations with Bulgaria.

## I. French *présence* in Bulgaria 1878-1944.

France established relations with the freshly independent Bulgaria in 1879. Through its representation in the Ottoman Empire, it had already been active in the new-born country's lands. Its Christian population had, indeed, attracted various institutions involved in the diffusion of French culture. The Assumptionist order opened a primary school in Plovdiv in 1864, and a *lycée* twenty years later. Study in these 'French schools', the national character being more important than the religious one, easily led to French universities, as leaving certificates were deemed equivalent to the French *baccalauréat*.<sup>15</sup>

In 1904, the *Alliance Française* opened its first branch in Sofia.<sup>16</sup> Though nominally independent from the French government, it drew most of its staff and resources from the state. Primarily tasked with teaching French, the *Alliance* was most active in regions where the French government sought to gain popular support: French colonial acquisitions in Africa and Central Eastern Europe. The *Alliance's* opening of an office in Prague in 1886, a mere three years after

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<sup>14</sup> Stankova, *Bulgaria in British Foreign Policy*, pp.74-76.

<sup>15</sup> Julieta Velichkova-Borin. 'Les Écoles Françaises En Bulgarie (1864-1948)', *Documents pour l'Histoire du Français Langue Etrangère ou Seconde* 54 (2015), 171-91.

<sup>16</sup> Raia Zaimova, and Vassilka Tapkova-Zaimova. 'Les Activités Littéraires Et Culturelles De Georges Hateau En Bulgarie', *Études balkaniques*, 2-3 (2001), 299-313

its creation, shows the high importance given to the latter. The Bulgarian government welcomed French endeavours, for instance, financing courses in Paris for its French teachers.<sup>17</sup>

In 1898, French companies won contracts to modernize the ports of Burgas and Varna.<sup>18</sup> The leading firm Schneider won its first weaponry order in 1897 and received several others until 1914. Orders often came at the expense of Krupp and were therefore perceived as blows to the German rival.<sup>19</sup> French banks participated in the financing of these exports. From 1896, they also regularly floated Bulgaria debt, which was well received on French markets. French companies, through exports, investments, and contracts, enjoyed a strong *présence* in Bulgaria and were in all these operations supported by the MAE.<sup>20</sup>

The First World War found the French economic and cultural *présence* in Bulgaria blossoming under the auspices of the French government. The war interrupted the implementation of this promising strategy. Bulgaria joined the Central powers in late 1915 and expelled French citizens, halting the operation of schools. It also suspended the activities of the *Alliance Française*.<sup>21</sup> Trade, already hampered by the increasingly close ties between Bulgaria and the Central powers, stopped.<sup>22</sup> After the war, these setbacks and some initial defiance notwithstanding, relations rapidly resumed along their previous lines. In 1921, a bilateral agreement provided for two lectureships in Roman philology to be created at the University of Sofia, France supplying the lecturers, one of whom was Georges Hateau, and Bulgaria funding.<sup>23</sup> The following year, an *Institut Français* opened in Sofia, broadening the cultural offer and tightening academic links.<sup>24</sup> Transfer of part of the French Institute of Constantinople to Sofia in 1936 laid the groundwork for an Institute of Byzantine Studies, giving Sofia a regional relevance for French academia. The Assumptionists, who ran their own Byzantine studies institutes in Romania and Turkey and published the discipline's leading journal in Paris, were party to this reorganisation and supported it.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> François Chaubet. 'L'Alliance Française Ou La Diplomatie De La Langue (1883-1914)', *Revue Historique* 306.4 (2004), 763-85 (p. 763-765).

<sup>18</sup> Rang-Ri Park-Barjot. 'Une Réalisation Du Génie Civil Français En Bulgarie: Le Port De Burgas (1898-1903)', *Balkan Studies*, 2-3 (2001): 21-37.

<sup>19</sup> Agnès D'Angio. 'Schneider Et Cie Et L'effort De Guerre De La Bulgarie 1897-1914', *Balkan Studies*, 2-3 (2001), 38-47.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Velichkova-Borin, 'Les Écoles Françaises En Bulgarie (1864-1948)'.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Zaimova and Tapkova-Zaimova, 'Les Activités Littéraires Et Culturelles De Georges Hateau En Bulgarie'.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Albert Failler. 'Le Centenaire De L'Institut Byzantin Des Assomptionnistes', *Revue Des études Byzantines (Paris)*

The 1936 Franco-Bulgarian *convention scolaire* extended and reinforced the implantation of French schools.<sup>26</sup> The *convention* gave them a more robust legal standing and, lest these institutions were threatened again as they were during the First World War, precluded any hasty removal. The convention also put staffing under the control of the French ministries of Education and Foreign Affairs.<sup>27</sup> A census commissioned at the signing of the convention reported that nine French schools with an enrolment of 791 students were active in Bulgaria in 1937.<sup>28</sup> Although small, this student body was made up of the scions of the Bulgarian elite. Reports proudly depicted the successful careers of alumni and their enduring adhesion to the worldviews and sympathies imparted upon them.<sup>29</sup>

Regular purchases of Bulgarian tobacco by the French national monopoly further increased the familiarity of the state's apparatus with Bulgaria.<sup>30</sup> Financial operations retained the same forms, with regular offerings of Bulgarian debt realized by French banks on both markets. After the war, the peace treaties provided for Bulgaria to take on part of the Ottoman Empire's debts, mechanically increasing its financial obligations to France. In 1938, a French mining company based in Yugoslavia incorporated a Bulgarian subsidiary to exploit copper in Luda-Yana, near Panagyurishte. This was one of the largest French foreign direct investments at the time.<sup>31</sup>

Several subsidiaries of French-controlled Romanian oil companies also opened in Bulgaria in the interwar period.<sup>32</sup> This was part of a wider attempt by the government and banks to take a leading position in the region's oil industry.<sup>33</sup> A report by an officer of the *Service des Essences* proposed that oil companies be incited to participate in cultural efforts.<sup>34</sup> Among other recommendations, it favoured the creation of schools in factories.<sup>35</sup> This formalized the linkage

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53.1, (1995), 5-40.

<sup>26</sup> Although sharing its origin with 'scholar', *scolaire* here relates to primary and secondary education.

<sup>27</sup> Velichkova-Borin, 'Les Écoles Françaises En Bulgarie (1864-1948)'.

<sup>28</sup> Zaimova and Tapkova-Zaimova, 'Les Activités Littéraires Et Culturelles De Georges Hateau En Bulgarie'.

<sup>29</sup> Velichkova-Borin, 'Les Écoles Françaises En Bulgarie (1864-1948)'.

<sup>30</sup> Paul Berend. 'Le Monopole français des tabacs', *La Revue administrative*, 7.40 (1954), 356-370.

<sup>31</sup> Archives Diplomatiques, centre de La Courneuve (French Diplomatic Archives, La Courneuve center, hereafter AD), Série Z Europe 1944-1949 (SZEU 1944-1949) ; Bulgarie, Relations Bilatérales franco-bulgares (183QO/20), Luda-Yana affair, 13 February 1945.

<sup>32</sup> AD, Accords techniques 1944-1954 (AT), Biens et spoliations en pays libérés: Bulgarie (19QO/63), Interest of the company 'Omnium Français des Pétroles' in the company 'Pétroles de Sofia' 27/09/1947.

<sup>33</sup> François Pelletier. 'Paribas en Roumanie, influence bancaire et impératifs politiques', *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains: revue d'histoire*, (2016), 105-122.

<sup>34</sup> A branch of the military in charge of oil and lubricant supply, often consulted on national energy policy.

<sup>35</sup> Pelletier, Paribas en Roumanie, influence bancaire et impératifs politiques'.

of commercial, industrial, and security policies, mixing private interests with more diffuse state ambitions of influence.

The defeat of 1940 had little effect on bilateral relations. Both countries fell under the influence of the Axis and maintained diplomatic relations until the Soviet invasion of Bulgaria. Undeterred by wartime restrictions and German hostility, Hateau, now head of the *Institut*, maintained a tight teaching schedule and indefatigably lobbied the MAE for an increase in book and newspapers deliveries.<sup>36</sup> That he was not entirely without success illustrates the enduring appeal of influence policies.<sup>37</sup> An agreement for the sale of seventy fighter planes to Bulgaria was expected in 1942. German occupation authorities were indirectly interested, as they were keen to see Bulgarian defences strengthened. Losing patience with the dithering Franco-Bulgarian bargaining, they seized a hundred fighters of another type, and shipped them to Bulgaria. As this was never formalized in any contract, Bulgaria declined to pay for the aircraft. It argued that no document scheduling payments for the fighters delivered by the Germans existed, and that it was consequently free of any obligations.<sup>38</sup> German authorities in France regularly repeated such operations according to their needs, and, among others, took railway cars, harbour cranes, or tugboats to Bulgaria.<sup>39</sup>

These isolated spoliations injured various French corporations and individuals.<sup>40</sup> Albeit not nationalisations *stricto sensu*, post-war French diplomats bundled claims for indemnification of these spoliations with claims for compensation resulting from later nationalisations, warranting inclusion in this article. The Bulgarian government nationalized the Luda-Yana mines in 1943 to prevent their taking by Germany.<sup>41</sup> The French government rejected Bulgarian offers of compensation as insufficient, and claims remained at the end of the war. Albeit somewhat scattered by the war, the various agents of the French *présence* still stood in an impressive order of battle in 1944.

## II. French policy towards Bulgaria 1944-1960

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<sup>36</sup> Zaimova and Tapkova-Zaimova, 'Les Activités Littéraires Et Culturelles De Georges Hateau En Bulgarie'.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> AD, AT, 19QO/63, Note on the Bulgarian government's debt for delivery of fighter planes in 1942, 11 February 1947.

<sup>39</sup> AD, AT, 19QO/63, Repatriation of Bulgarian debt. Negotiations preparing a commercial agreement 9 January 1950.

<sup>40</sup> AD, AT, 19QO/63, 22 November 1946.

<sup>41</sup> AD, AT, 19QO/63, Expropriation of the Luda-Yana mine, 4 December 1944.

### A. 1944-1947: 'To new times, new methods'.<sup>42</sup>

In 1944, Bulgaria was at war with the United Kingdom and United States, but not with the Soviet Union. On September 5<sup>th</sup>, the Soviet Union gave Bulgaria, as well as its British and American allies, notice that a state of war would exist between the two countries an hour after reception of the declaration.<sup>43</sup> The Bulgarian government hoped to secure its survival by declaring war to Germany on September 8<sup>th</sup>. This neither stopped the communist-led Fatherland Front from toppling it, nor Soviet troops from marching into the country.<sup>44</sup> France was briefly without representation in Sofia after the Soviet takeover. The legation's activities stopped due to the recall of the minister on account of his proximity with Vichy.<sup>45</sup>

Relations with the new Fatherland Front government resumed on 11 October 1944, with the appointment of Georges Hateau as head of the Provisional French Government's representation.<sup>46</sup> The MAE regarded him as one of the most influential Frenchmen in Bulgaria, noting that the *salon* he ran with his Bulgarian wife was one of the centres of cultural life in the country. Hateau, thanks to his 1937 survey of Bulgarian literature, was also highly regarded in French academia.<sup>47</sup> He shrewdly proved his commitment to France by maintaining his activities as head of the *Institut* and professor at the University of Sofia throughout the war.<sup>48</sup> Hateau saw Soviet troops and Bulgarian communists as threats, but not insuperable ones. He suggested that, having withstood German hostility, they would survive the Soviet one.<sup>49</sup>

A February 1945 report defined French interests in Bulgaria as 'financial and cultural'. Despite foreboding speculations on the rise of Bulgarian communists, it did not paint it as an existential threat to the position of France in Bulgaria. The report's principal tenet, around which all policy recommendations and reporting will revolve for 1944 to 1947, is an ambition to maintain influence, regardless of political changes.<sup>50</sup> In March 1945, primary education in state schools became compulsory for Bulgarians. This reduced the enrolment and income of local French

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<sup>42</sup> Cyril E Black. 'The Start of the Cold War in Bulgaria: A Personal View' *Rev Pol* 41 (1979), 163-202, (pp.169-174).

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> French diplomatic representation in Bulgaria took the form of a legation headed by a minister. Legations were originally smaller posts in countries regarded as of lesser importance. Except for protocol, they were in all intent and purposes similar to embassies. All legations were converted into embassies during the 1960s.

<sup>46</sup> AD, SZEU 1944-1949, 183QO/1, 2 October 1944.

<sup>47</sup> Georges Hateau. *Panorama de la littérature bulgare contemporaine*. (Paris: Éditions du Sagittaire, 1937).

<sup>48</sup> Zaimova and Tapkova-Zaimova, *Les Activités Littéraires Et Culturelles De Georges Hateau En Bulgarie*'.

<sup>49</sup> AD, SZEU 1944-1949, 183QO/20. Note on the circumstances in which the French Institute of Sofia and the *Alliances Française de Bulgarie* operated between 1939 and 1944, 25 October 1944.

<sup>50</sup> AD, SZEU 1944-1949, 183QO/20, On Franco-Bulgarian relations, 15 February 1945.



schools. With the MAE's approval, the legation in Sofia deemed protests useless, given the slim chances of obtaining an exemption from this measure. The *Alliance*, *Institut*, and secondary schools were spared. This explained the legation's lack of reaction. A combative position was, moreover, regarded as likely to attract unwarranted attention to these other institutions.<sup>51</sup>

Claims were still limited to spoliations and the uncompensated nationalisation of the Luda-Yana mines. All shares of the Yugoslavia-based parent company of the mines were transferred to the French state in February 1946. This arrangement gave the MAE a free hand to seek compensation, the French government now being the injured party. The Bulgarian government was duly notified by verbal note. This and other notes delivered during this period were reminders, without any trace of ultimatum or mentions of retaliation.<sup>52</sup> Pressing of these, comparatively small, claims was subordinated to the protection of cultural and educational policy. Rumours that insurance was soon to become a state monopoly were received with indifference. France had itself recently nationalized insurance companies, and could not credibly take exception with another state doing the same. France had, however, offered appropriate compensation and expected the Bulgarians to carry the process of nationalisation along similar lines. As this project was explicitly limited to insurance companies, it did not threaten the economic *présence* of France in Bulgaria. Moreover, although discussed since 1945, it was only executed with the bulk of other nationalisations from December 1947. Mentions of nationalisations before this date were thus, conveniently, dismissed as baseless musings.<sup>53</sup>

The 1946 legation's *rapport annuel* found that the 'prestige of France had continuously grown' during this year, a formulaic expression of satisfaction which was not entirely devoid of substance in this case. The *rapport* hailed the unimpeded activities of schools, the *Alliance*, and the *Institut*. Trade is not discussed in the report, merely mentioned as a vector for the diffusion of publications and films. Nonetheless, cables to Paris from JE Paris, who had replaced Hateau in August 1945, on approaches by Bulgarian diplomats to restart trade were enthusiastically received.<sup>54</sup> Claims resulting from the nationalisation of the Luda-Yana mines are absent from the *rapport*. Despite being frequently mentioned in diplomatic correspondence, protests from

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<sup>51</sup> AD, SZEU 1944-1949, 183QO/20, French schools in Bulgaria, 15 April 1947.

<sup>52</sup> AD, Affaires économiques et financières (AEF), Affaires bilatérales (ABBUL) 1945-1960, Bulgarie, Biens et intérêts français en Bulgarie (14QO/95), French interests in Bulgaria, Luda-Yana affair, 26 March 1946.

<sup>53</sup> AD, AEF, ABBUL, 14QO/95, Insurances in Bulgaria, 21 July 1945. AD, Correspondance politique et commercial (hereafter CPCOM), Bulgarie 1944-1960 (28CPCOM/244), Nationalisation of insurance firms in Bulgaria, 6 July 1947.

<sup>69</sup> AD, AEF, ABBUL, 14QO/95, 13 October 1947.

holders of Bulgarian debt were also absent. The Bulgarian government debt had indeed been irregularly serviced since the end of the war, further adding to French grievances.

The *rapport* proudly mentioned a Bulgarian foreign policy declaration putting France as its third highest priority, above Yugoslavia. Confidence for 1947 is also visible in plans to obtain the repeal of the ban on primary education. The Fatherland Front's sweeping victory at the September 1946 Sobranie election, leaving only 101 of 465 seats to the opposition makes this seem all the more ambitious.<sup>55</sup> The *rapport* hailed the success of past policies, given that 'despite the near total change in leadership, we find in many positions men who have received the imprint of French culture'. Pointing to the Soviet example, the *rapport* expected future Bulgarian elites to be of proletarian stock. The *rapport* therefore suggested a change that the bulk of the cultural policy be shifted from the schools to the *Institut* and *Alliance*. Whilst French schools catered to upper classes, these outfits could attract workers by offering more affordable courses and evening classes, as well as conferences. The report also recommended the extension of university scholarships to ensure that Bulgarian students would continue to attend French universities. Those measures were to yield results in a matter of years, if not decades. This shows that the legation expected its situation to remain mostly unchanged. The transfer of the influence policy to these new vessels was, nevertheless, a precaution too. Non-religious institutions were indeed less susceptible to persecutions and closure. One can easily surmise the spirit in which the legation's ever optimistic staff faced the future from the last sentence of the *rapport's* education and culture chapter: 'to new times, new methods'.<sup>56</sup>

Bulgarian offers for a trade agreement became increasingly insistent in late 1946. Commenting on future exchanges, the Minister of France in Sofia acknowledged their 'limited interest' for France. Compared to total French exports, it was indeed of small value. Moreover, French demand for Bulgarian exports was weak. The Minister, however, added that 'the question should not only be seen through an exclusively commercial lens'. The legation hoped to gain prestige from being the first to trade with the first country evacuated by Soviet troops. It also hoped to gain a head start on its Western rivals for the Bulgarian market. The importation of publications and films, which were seen as important means of cultural influence, also depended on the signing of a commercial agreement.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Stankova, *Bulgaria in British Foreign Policy, 1943-1949*, pp.151-153.

<sup>56</sup> AD, SZEU 1944-1949, Rapports annuels du poste (183QO/2), Annual report 1946, 15 January 1947.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

The contemporary framework of currency and exchange control required a protocol between central banks on currency exchanges to give full effect to the trade agreement. This arrangement would ease transfers of funds for Bulgarian students in France. This was an apt way to bring financial matters without directly mentioning Bulgarian debt and consolidate various policy ambitions. A cable discussing this issue concluded that ‘the re-establishment of a stream of exchanges with us [...] will be the tangible sign of our recovery and our will to continue to assert our *présence* in this part of Europe’.<sup>58</sup> A trade agreement was signed and ratified in June 1947. Despite lobbying from bondholders’ committees, diplomatic action remained timid, and debt repayment was left out of the agreement altogether. Notes sent to the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs were devoid of convictions, and, unsurprisingly, without consequences.<sup>59</sup> This moderate reaction was the result of a belief in an essentially sympathetic Bulgarian government, constrained by financial difficulties and Soviet interference. This made tougher options unsuitable. The MAE was also open to compromise, as it did not wish to risk its recent commercial successes or draw attention to cultural institutions.

Georgi Dimitrov himself recognized progress in bilateral relations. In a conversation with JE Paris, the Bulgarian leader asked for further extension of trade, both in volume and types of products. Dimitrov also alluded to the possible renewal and expansion of the 1936 *convention scolaire*, which was due to expire shortly.<sup>60</sup> On another occasion, Dimitrov declared France to be second only to the USSR in matters of influence in Bulgaria. Although an exaggeration, this statement indicated France’s good standing in the new Bulgaria. The regime of daily slander applied to the United Kingdom and United States provided convincing evidence for this opinion.<sup>61</sup>

Notwithstanding, the *rapport annuel* for 1947 anxiously reported the ‘definitive triumph of totalitarian trends through the sheer elimination of the parliamentary opposition’, likely referring to the execution on fabricated charges of its leader, the agrarian Nikola Petkov, in September. The report forecasted the closure of schools in the next two years were Bulgarian domestic policy to continue on this path. Nevertheless, noting the friendly attitude of Bulgarian leaders, the *rapport* finished on a note of uncertainty rather than pessimism.<sup>62</sup> The first peace

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<sup>72</sup> AD, AEF, ABBUL, Accords franco-bulgares et Questions financières (14QO/92), Franco-Bulgarian economic negotiations, 28 January 1947.

<sup>59</sup> AD, AEF, ABBUL, 14QO/92, Bulgarian debt, 11 March 1947.

<sup>60</sup> AD, SZEU 1944-1949, 183QO/20, 31 May 1947.

<sup>61</sup> AD, SZEU 1944-1949, 183QO/20, 17 May 1947.

<sup>62</sup> AD, SZEU 1944-1949, 183QO/2, 1947 Annual report, 17 January 1948.

years were defined not by the obstacles they brought, but by the hope that those would be overcome and left behind as French diplomacy sailed toward new successes.

## B. 1948-1954: France and the Sovietisation of Bulgaria

The People's Sobranie passed and at once implemented laws transferring the entire ownership of the Bulgarian economy to the state in the last days of 1947 and the very first days of January 1948. These laws provided a framework for ad hoc compensation agreements with foreigners. But Bulgarian authorities declined to engage in negotiations and systematically denied owners and their proxies entry visas, therefore blocking every route to compensation.<sup>63</sup> As with all post-war nationalisations in Central Europe, this was unacceptable as no serious attempts at compensation were made.<sup>64</sup> Compensation is usually defined as the payment of a sum equivalent to the integral value of the lost property.<sup>65</sup> In practice, however, it refers to the payment of any sum. Contemporary standards of international law required payment of compensation amounting to the full value of taken property to be made promptly, and in sound currencies or assets.<sup>66</sup> These standards were products of laws and cases which had accumulated from the nineteenth century and were, therefore, liable to be rejected as ideologically unacceptable by the new Bulgarian regime.

Offers of compensation further broke with international standards in terms of amount and means of payment. Indeed, the nationalisation laws of Bulgaria, as well as those of Hungary and Romania, provided for compensation to be paid in bonds.<sup>67</sup> This made the final amount of compensation uncertain, given the dubious reliability of Central European states and their currencies.<sup>68</sup> Use of pre-war values and prices further distorted the taken assets' valuation.<sup>69</sup> Gutteridge notes that processes outlined in nationalisation laws were also unlikely to result in fair compensation, as they provided neither for independently staffed valuation commissions nor for a right to appeal their decisions. Full compensation was, moreover, absent from Bulgarian statutes. They provided for a system of payment decreasing according to the total

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<sup>63</sup> Joyce Gutteridge. 'Expropriation and Nationalisation in Hungary, Bulgaria and Roumania', *The International and comparative law quarterly* 1.1 (1952), 14-28.

<sup>64</sup> Alfred Drucker. 'The Nationalisation of United Nations Property in Europe', *Transactions of the Grotius Society*, 36, 1950, 75-114.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> AD, AT, 19QO/63, 9 March 1948, Nationalisations in Bulgaria.

<sup>67</sup> Gutteridge, 'Expropriation and Nationalisation in Hungary, Bulgaria and Roumania'.

<sup>68</sup> Drucker, 'The Nationalisation of United Nations Property in Europe'.

<sup>69</sup> Gutteridge, 'Expropriation and Nationalisation in Hungary, Bulgaria and Roumania'.

taken value. This was regarded as a discriminatory attempt at taxation described as ‘penal communism’.<sup>70</sup>

To quote Doman, ‘recognition of the right to compensation for expropriated property is in practice tied to the vehicle of political and economic forces and no longer dependent on purely juridical considerations’.<sup>71</sup> Bulgaria hence called for diplomatic attention in a narrow sense: to safeguard the interests of French corporations and citizens. The MAE’s legal service recognized international law’s powerlessness by insisting on the ‘political aspect’ of the situation. Restating the principle of full compensation, it grimly noted that Western Europe had ‘hitherto failed to influence what happens behind the iron curtain’. Notes were delivered to the Bulgarian government, to no avail.<sup>72</sup> Bereft of legal means, it fell upon the MAE to negotiate a settlement using any other available levers.<sup>73</sup> Had Bulgaria accepted to settle the issue of taken property on an accepted legal basis, this case would have remained of mostly juridical interest.

The upcoming expiration of the 1947 trade agreement gave an opportunity for tougher retaliation in June 1948. Barring clarification from the Bulgarian government, the legation refused all offers to open negotiations towards a renewal of the agreement. As a gesture of good will, the MAE agreed to extend the agreement for three months, with no change to its provisions. This was neither flattering nor injurious to Bulgaria and had the advantage of creating a period of doubt. Debt servicing and repayments stopped altogether after years of irregularity. Bondholders’ associations immediately began lobbying the MAE to decline all commercial offers until Bulgaria resumed the servicing of its obligations.<sup>74</sup> Little progress was achieved over the summer in both claims for compensations and debt service.

Meanwhile, trade proceeded as per the 1947 agreement. Bulgaria received two cargo aeroplanes with a full set of spares in August 1948. A further sale of eight more planes was also under consideration. This delivery drew the attention of the American embassy in Paris, which notified the MAE by way of a letter to Hervé Alphand of its apprehension at the delivery of heavy equipment which could be employed for military purposes. As head of the Economic and Financial Affairs department since 1944, Alphand was closely involved in Bulgarian affairs.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Nicholas R. Doman. ‘Compensation for Nationalised Property in Post-War Europe’, *International law quarterly (London, England)* 3.3 (1950), 323-342.

<sup>72</sup> AD, AEF, ABBUL, 14QO/95, Note for the AT directorate, 10 February 1948.

<sup>73</sup> AD, AEF, ABBUL, 14QO/95, Nationalisations in Bulgaria, 14 February 1948.

<sup>74</sup> AD, AEF, ABBUL, 14QO/95, On Bulgarian debt, 18 September 1948.

<sup>75</sup> AD, AEF, ABBUL, Questions commerciales (hereafter 14QO/93), Delivery of planes to Bulgaria, 19 August 1948.

Alphand brought a recent sale of Rolls-Royce jet engines to the USSR as a precedent for supporting the export of aircrafts and associated spares. Given the parliamentary and public uproar in Britain following the Rolls-Royce sale, its use was somewhat hypocritical. Alphand could not have ignored it, as he stapled British press clippings denouncing the sale to the letter as support for his point. This polite carelessness in answering American concerns could not have been anything but deliberate.<sup>76</sup> This exchange clearly demonstrates the MAE's commitment to trade with Bulgaria and brook no interference in its commercial policies. This shows that the MAE likely did not entirely subscribe to the United States' preoccupation with security, nor to the view of international relations as the origin of such misgivings.

Bravery in rebuffing American intervention should, nonetheless, not be overstated. Deteriorating relations with Bulgaria precluded the possibility of any such transaction being repeated. This commitment to commerce was also upheld at the expense of profit. A May 1948 note from the French commercial attaché in Sofia to the MAE remarked that Bulgarian exports, except rose water and lead minerals, could easily be procured elsewhere at better prices. Of all imported items, tobacco, which the French monopoly regularly purchased in large quantity, was the least competitively priced. Yet the note recommended no changes to the import regime. Emphasis was instead put on the importance of outlets for French industry, and the hope, therefore, of an increase in exports to Bulgaria.<sup>77</sup>

In August 1948, the Bulgarian government denounced the *convention scolaire*, blatantly contradicting its recent offers to renew it, and ordered all foreign schools to be definitively closed. This was a bitter blow for the legation, which saw it as a signal of its waning clout and bargaining power. It had, indeed, shortly before notified the Bulgarian government of its willingness to adapt the schools and their curriculums to its requirements, hoping to spare them this fate.<sup>78</sup> Freed from possible retaliation, the MAE adopted a more vigorous course in claiming compensation.<sup>79</sup> In September 1948, the MAE instructed the legation to decline Bulgaria's commercial overtures before the issue of compensation was solved.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup>AD, AEF, ABBUL, 14QO/93, Delivery of planes to Bulgaria, 28 September 1948, 27 August 1948.

<sup>77</sup>AD, AEF, ABBUL, 14QO/93, Renewal of the commercial agreement and of the Franco-Bulgarian payment agreement, 7 May 1948.

<sup>78</sup>AD, 28CPCOM/244, 3 August 1948.

<sup>79</sup>AD, AT, 19QO/63, French property and interests in Bulgaria, 3 August 1948.

<sup>80</sup>AD, AEF, ABBUL, 14QO/92, Renewal of the commercial agreement and of the Franco-Bulgarian payment agreement, 7 May 1948.

Bulgaria refused to settle issues resulting from nationalisation with the MAE. The MAE then turned to the private route to negotiate a compensation settlement and the restarting of debt service. Maurice Israel, an executive of the tobacco monopoly, who had overseen its operations in Bulgaria before the war, was dispatched to Sofia in December 1948. Although not employed or mandated by the MAE, he was granted a service passport. Moreover, the MAE helped Israel in obtaining powers of attorney from injured French nationals and corporations. It instructed the Sofia legation to assist him throughout his mission in Bulgaria. This effectively prevented Bulgaria from denying him entry and gave an official nature to his mission. The mission ended in March 1949. Israel's report denounced 'constant dilatory manoeuvres' on the Bulgarian side. Nonetheless, he recommended, in agreement with the legation, that trade talks be restarted to put the Bulgarians in a better disposition.<sup>81</sup> An arrangement for debt servicing and payments was reached with bondholders in December 1948. It was briefly seen as a harbinger of the swift settlement of compensation issues. None of the scheduled payments were ever made.<sup>82</sup> In December 1948, the Bulgarian Communist Party's Fifth Congress denounced West European culture as decadent, adding to anxieties as to the *Alliance's* and *Institut's* survival.<sup>83</sup>

The 1949 Kostov trials further dismayed the legation. A possible successor to Georgi Dimitrov, Traicho Kostov, who had been the most senior communist in Bulgaria before Dimitrov's return from Moscow, was indeed its favourite among Bulgarian leaders.<sup>84</sup> The governor of the bank of Bulgaria and the finance minister also fell to these purges. Both were regular and well-regarded contacts of the legation. The trials hindered efforts to obtain compensation. The legation had to familiarize itself with new officials, chosen for their political reliability rather than competence.<sup>85</sup>

The legation sent a reminder of its claims to the Bulgarian government in late 1949. This summary renewed the condition that property and debt issues were to be settled before any trade talks could be considered.<sup>86</sup> Yet, the Bulgarian government multiplied offers to negotiate a commercial agreement in 1950, none mentioning compensation. The French Minister in Sofia suggested that a trade agreement should be considered, even if Bulgaria hardly cooperated on debt and compensation issues. As on previous occasions, he backed this break with current

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<sup>81</sup> AD, AEF, ABBUL, 14QO/95, Mission of Mr. Israel in Bulgaria, 7 October 1948.

<sup>82</sup> AD, AEF, ABBUL, 14QO/95, Franco-Bulgarian commercial, payment and financial agreement, 4 August 1955.

<sup>83</sup> Paraskevov, 'Conflict and Necessity: British-Bulgarian Relations, 1944-56', p.257.

<sup>84</sup> Stankova, *Bulgaria in British Foreign Policy, 1943-1949*, p.83.

<sup>85</sup> AD, 1949-1955 (hereafter SZEU1949-1955) Relations bilatérales franco-bulgares (hereafter 183QO/77), On the recent Kostov trials, 28 January 1950.

<sup>86</sup>AD, 19QO/63, Note for the direction of the AT, 30 January 1950.

policy by invoking the higher likelihood of compensation while satisfying Bulgarian commercial appetites. Moreover, in his view, an agreement could shield the *Institut* and *Alliance* from closure.<sup>87</sup>

Nevertheless, the shutting down of both the *Alliance Française* and the *Institut* in late 1950 completed the dismantlement of cultural and educative institutions.<sup>88</sup> Bulgaria, once again, proposed a trade agreement on the day this was announced, which the legation rejected as a clumsy diversion.<sup>89</sup> Henceforth, the *sine qua non* condition for further French involvement in Bulgaria was payment of a satisfactory indemnification for property, financial, and debt issues. No dissenting opinions were registered, either from the legation or in Paris. Complete frustration of the MAE's ambitions brought it into its most uncompromising position yet. Its readiness to forego trade with Bulgaria as a retaliation shows that it now gave a higher value to compensation than to remote chances of maintaining its *présence* in Stalinized Bulgaria.

The legation found its only solace by comparing its position with those of the British and American representations. Unlike its English-speaking counterparts, the French legation was always spared declarations of staff *persona non grata* and other vexations.<sup>90</sup> Attacks against France in the Bulgarian press became sparser from December 1950, bringing the legation to the conclusion that Bulgaria was adopting a friendlier posture. The attendance of Bulgarian officials and their attitudes at the legation's events also augured better relations.<sup>91</sup> The readiness with which the legation took note of these signals attests to its continuing interest for the country.

Trade never entirely stopped, given that private clearing agreements remained legal and were systematically accepted when compliant with currency control. By 1951, those agreements had grown to the point of undermining the MAE's position, as Bulgaria was able to bypass the compensation condition. The MAE was unwilling to stop granting export licenses, probably dissuaded by the consequences, both international and domestic, of a *de facto* French trade embargo.<sup>92</sup> Bulgaria partially submitted to French conditions in May 1953 by agreeing to open negotiations on compensation but required that this be discussed simultaneously with trade.

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<sup>87</sup> AD, AEF, ABBUL, 14QO/95, 25 March 1950.

<sup>88</sup> AD, SZEU 1949-1955, 183QO/77, Alliance Française of Sofia, 29 September 1950.

<sup>89</sup> AD, AEF, ABBUL, 14QO/93, 11 August 1950.

<sup>90</sup> AD, SZEU 1949-1955, 183QO/77, Bulgarian attitude towards France, 15 November 1949.

<sup>91</sup> AD, SZEU 1949-1955, 183QO/77, On relations with Bulgaria, 15 December 1950.

<sup>92</sup> AD, AEF, ABBUL, 14QO/93, Commercial exchanges with Bulgaria, 30 October 1951.



Given that the MAE still conditioned the opening of trade talks to the payment of compensation, this offer was declined.<sup>93</sup>

### C. 1954-1960: Acclimatation of French policy to the Cold War

Bulgaria agreed to settle all property and debt issues prior to the signing of a trade agreement in December 1953.<sup>94</sup> The MAE compromised by accepting that trade talks would be held simultaneously. By March 1954, a new trade agreement had been initialled, but left unsigned as a settlement for compensation had not been agreed upon. It was finally reached in July 1955, enacting the trade agreement.<sup>95</sup> French attempts to raise the sums offered by Bulgaria for compensation caused this delay. This was partly achieved, as the Bulgarians rose compensation payments from thirty million to a billion and a half francs. This figure was still, however, far from French demands.<sup>96</sup> The compensation agreement was ratified four years later, in order not to create a precedent potentially interfering with other unresolved disputes. As owners received much less than the value of the lost property, the MAE feared it would allow other countries to cap compensation. Preferring some compensation to none, French negotiators avowedly accepted a reasonably unsatisfactory offer.<sup>97</sup> Injured French individuals and corporations began to receive compensation from 1960.<sup>98</sup>

The trade agreement provided for a slight trade surplus in favour of Bulgaria. Bulgarian payments were to be financed out of a deduction on this surplus, therefore formally tying trade to compensation. Despite reliance of payments on a fluctuating variable, it was adopted lest further delay allow Bulgaria to avoid payment of compensation altogether, as the USSR had done in the 1930s. Some French negotiators considered the rate of deduction too low, with full payment of compensation expected in ten to fifteen years. A negotiator was careful to note that dragging out attempts to extract higher compensations from Bulgaria would cause a 'rupture on financial issues implying the abandonment of the trade agreement'. Exports, especially with increased Bulgarian demand for industrial equipment and manufactured

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<sup>93</sup> AD, AEF, ABBUL, 14QO/95, 27 May 1952.

<sup>94</sup> AD, AEF, ABBUL, 14QO/93, 29 December 1953.

<sup>95</sup> AD, AEF, ABBUL, 14QO/92, Franco-Bulgarian commerce, payment and financial agreement, 4 August 1955.

<sup>96</sup> AD, AEF, ABBUL, 14QO/92, Letter of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Conseil d'Etat, 9 September 1959. See Irina Grigorova, 'Les créances financières françaises en Bulgarie et leur règlement au milieu des années 50 du XXe siècle', *Revue Bulgare d'Histoire*, 1-2, (2007), 36-66 for complete details of the settlement.

<sup>159</sup> AD, AEF, ABBUL, 14QO/92, Commercial agreement and financial settlement, 6 May 1955.

<sup>98</sup> Grigorova, 'Les créances financières françaises en Bulgarie et leur règlement au milieu des années 50 du XXe siècle'.

goods, were deemed worthy of such a sacrifice. Private clearing also seemed to have become less tolerated, increasing the need for a bilateral agreement.<sup>99</sup>

The rekindling of trade between Bulgaria and other Western countries also spurred French willingness to compromise. Belgium, Switzerland, and, more menacingly, West Germany, had signed trade agreements with Bulgaria by 1951.<sup>100</sup> In September 1955, the United Kingdom signed both a trade and compensation agreement.<sup>101</sup> Exports from Western Europe to the satellite states also almost doubled between 1950 and 1955, albeit from a very low level.<sup>102</sup> A delegation from the German Federal Republic visited Sofia in 1957. Although Bonn entrusted the French legation in Sofia with consular powers, it gave no prior notice of this visit. The simultaneous presence of an East German delegation during this West German visit caused some apprehensive speculation on the effects of reunification.<sup>103</sup>

Payment of compensation by earmarking a share of Bulgarian export profits required close monitoring of bilateral trade for a decade. The annual volume of trade was proportional to the paid amounts, hence quotas and their fulfilment had direct domestic consequences. Bulgaria did not always honour its import commitments, thus disrupting payments and the underlying currency arrangements between the two central banks. Trade, as before, was also used to pursue cultural ambitions. The MAE hailed the tripling of the Bulgarian books and journals quota in the trade agreement for 1958, as it meant that more Bulgarians would be exposed to French culture.<sup>104</sup> This success had, however, incomparably smaller effects than previous interwar cultural undertakings. Bulgaria, moreover, often failed to fulfil those commitments which introduced French publications, in other words western propaganda, in the country. Trade agreements were renewed yearly until 1960. As relations normalised, triennial agreements superseded yearly ones.<sup>105</sup>

Keen to display its socialist achievements, Bulgaria repeatedly insisted on exporting heavy industrial equipment to France. French trade delegations in Bulgaria reacted tepidly, given that they were themselves attempting to export such goods. Moreover, they had no use for what they described in an unusual breach of style as ‘tinpot junk’ (*pacotille*). Due to its low price

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<sup>99</sup> AD, AEF, ABBUL, 14QO/92, Financial agreement with Bulgaria, 6 May 1955.

<sup>100</sup> AD, AEF, ABBUL, Relations économiques avec d’autres pays (14QO/94), 12 March 1951.

<sup>101</sup> Paraskevov, ‘Conflict and Necessity: British–Bulgarian Relations, 1944–56’, p.256–257.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> AD, AEF, ABBUL, 14QO/94, Visit of a West German trade delegation in Bulgaria, 12 June 1957.

<sup>104</sup> AD, AEF, ABBUL, 14QO/92, Signature in Sofia of a protocol on Franco-Bulgarian exchanges, 3 July 1958.

<sup>105</sup> AD, Série Z Europe 1956–1960 (hereafter SZEU 1956–1960), Relations économiques avec la France (hereafter 183QO/116), Franco-Bulgarian, trade agreement 10 March 1960.

and quality, this ‘junk’ ultimately found its way to France’s African colonies.<sup>106</sup> All bilateral trade agreements covered both France and its overseas possessions (this was necessary because the mainland and its territories had different import rules and tariffs), enabling this solution. This failed to attract either criticism or ideological qualms from Bulgarians. Bulgaria had become adept, like France, at reconciling prestige and profits, or lack thereof, in trade.

Relations, therefore, reached a new form of normality along settlement of claims and the wider *détente* of the second half of the 1950s. As the French side had renounced all its claims per the compensation agreement, no controversial issues remained. Features of this normality also included a return of ambitions of influence. Strivings to compete with other exporters to Bulgaria signalled a return to traditional French foreign policy in Bulgaria. Mentions of culture became sparser and somewhat perfunctory as censorship prevented any substantial gains in influence by these means.<sup>107</sup>

## Conclusion

French foreign policy towards Bulgaria from 1944 to 1960 is defined by its persistent adherence to the aims of influence defined by its pre-war variant. This was most visible from 1944 to 1948. The legation used culture, economics, and politics to retain its position in Bulgaria. It was, moreover, willing to compromise by accepting delays on debt payment or compensation for taken property. That this attempt disregarded the growing signs of communist domination illustrates French diplomacy’s commitment to this policy. The pursuit of long-term objectives, such as precipitating the demise of communism or seeking to achieve cultural influence over future leaders, warranted short-term accommodations with a regime it disliked.

Wholesale nationalization of the economy in 1948 opened a second period. The MAE could have merely sought compensation outside of the law, but within its spirit. French diplomacy was not oblivious to its historic efforts and implemented the policies it deemed most likely to satisfy its objectives. Protecting its influence was thus as important as securing compensation. By dismantling the schools, *Alliance*, and *Institute*, Bulgaria redrew the balance of French interests. Bereft of any reason to compromise from 1949, the MAE refused all offers to discuss a commercial agreement. Compensation was henceforth prerequisite to any form of bilateral

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<sup>106</sup> AD, SZEU 1956-1960, 183QO/116, On Franco-Bulgarian trade, 14 October 1957.

<sup>107</sup> AD, SZEU 1956-1960, Relations politiques avec la France (183QO/123), National Assembly Delegation in Bulgaria, 29 October 1957.

engagement. This precluded any further interactions with Bulgaria, as these accords were the usual prelude to further involvement.

Relations between France and Bulgaria ultimately recovered aspects of their previous normality after the latter agreed to settle French claims for compensations in May 1953. Rivalries for trade between France and other nations reappeared, incidentally with its erstwhile German foe. Given the small scope afforded by censorship, cultural policies were reduced to symbolic proportions, likely having more effect in the MAE in Paris than in Bulgaria.

A negative answer to the question ‘were French attempts to retain influence in Bulgaria between 1944 and 1960 successful?’ cannot be accepted. Despite inauspicious beginnings, French foreign policy managed to preserve the commercial part of its influence system in Bulgaria. This commercial policy even thrived, as France was Bulgaria’s third most important trading partner in 1958.<sup>108</sup> The sovietisation of Bulgaria, however, prevents this dissertation’s answer from being more than a qualified ‘yes’, as French influence was still greatly reduced by this process, its main victim being cultural policy. Cultural instruments suffered most, as they were intrinsically incompatible with communism as practiced in the satellites. The United States severed relations with Bulgaria between 1950 and 1960. The United Kingdom kept a minimal presence only on intelligence-gathering grounds.<sup>109</sup> This comparison further reduces qualifications to French success in Bulgaria.

As for historiography, the problem lies not so much with the Cold War as to the extent of its use. Treating the Cold War as a period, not as an all-encompassing process, acknowledges its importance while leaving enough space for other trends. This reframing also opens new avenues. Shorn of the traditional elites which considered it a model, France’s cultural influence in Bulgaria proved too shallow to survive. Ironically, by all but eradicating the French alternative, communists cleared the way for the triumph of their capitalist nemesis, the United States. French diplomacy sought to convince rather than compel by relying not on interest, but on shared culture. The almost individual level on which it operated precluded its replication in an age of massification, where political power and the highest civil service were no longer the preserve of elites. This process of massification predated the onset of the Cold War, showing that it was not a unique period or event, but one which would gain from being brought into the fold of historical scholarship.

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<sup>108</sup> Grigorova, ‘Les créances financières françaises en Bulgarie et leur règlement au milieu des années 50 du XXe siècle’, p.22.

<sup>109</sup> Stankova, *Bulgaria in British Foreign Policy*, pp.198-200.

One must concede a certain admiration for the likes of Georges Hateau and JE Paris. Having fought during the Second World War, they did not relent when faced with the equally threatening Soviet onslaught on Central Eastern Europe. While their commitment rested largely on patriotism, it would be perverse to deny that some of this self-interest manifested itself as disinterested efforts to promote trade, culture, and political moderation. French diplomats genuinely attempted to participate in the development of these countries, not as ill-shaped provinces to be robbed and used as forward bases, but as viable polities. It would also be dishonest to deride them for their optimism. Rather, they were undaunted by challenge.

This article has laid a foundation for further research by tracing continuities and using an interdisciplinary approach encompassing politics, culture, and trade. This is only normal, as French diplomats likewise integrated these elements in a cohesive whole. This article's findings lend credence to recent reappraisals such as that of Soutou. For Soutou, France only participated distantly in the Cold War, and at all times sought to preserve a classical order in Europe, defined by peaceful competition and exchange.<sup>110</sup> This perfectly sums up French policy towards Bulgaria.

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<sup>110</sup> Soutou, *La Guerre Froide De La France: 1941-1990.*

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