

## **DEVELOPMENT OF SPORT SHOOTING IN BULGARIA FOR THE PERIOD - 1963-2013**

*(Research note)*

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### **Abstract**

*The Bulgarian Federation of Sport Shooting was founded in 1963. The organization and management of sport shooting was improved significantly. In 1964 at the Olympic Games in Tokyo, Japan, Velichko Velichkov won the silver medal - the first Olympic medal for Bulgaria in sport shooting. The Organization for Military Technical Preparation of the Population, later renamed as Organization for the Assistance of National Defense, contributed to the development of sport shooting. Three European Championships in sport shooting have been organized in Bulgaria – in 1985, 1992 and 1996. Bulgarian sport shooters have won 16 medals from Olympic Games, 36 from World Championships and 38 medals from World Cup finals, as well as hundreds of medals from European, Balkan and other international competitions and tournaments. In 2013 the sport activity license of the Bulgarian Sport Shooting Federation was withdrawn and the Bulgarian Shooting Union was established. However, the Union is not the legal successor to the former Federation.*

**Keywords:** *shooting, federation, club, medal, Olympic Games, competition*

In 1963 sport shooting entered a new stage of development in Bulgaria. At the end of the year sport shooting was transferred under the jurisdiction of the Council to the Bulgarian Union of Physical Education and Sport. The Constituent Assembly of delegates from the Republican Section of Sport Shooting was organized in Sofia on the 4-th of January 1964. The Assembly took a decision that sport shooting should finally be transferred from the Organization for the Assistance of National Defense to the Bulgarian Union of Physical Education and Sport as the new-founded Bulgarian Federation of Sport Shooting. Maxim Ayrianov was the first Chairman of the Federation and Milan Stoyanov (Милан Стоянов) was the first Secretary. Stoyan Popov (С) was the Head Coach of the team. Plenary membership of the Federation was established, the Board of Coaches and the Board of Judges were formed. Distinguished representatives of Bulgarian sport shooting attended the Assembly – Yordan Nenov, Dencho Denev, Ivan Lysichkov, Kostadin Polyakov, Georgy Stoyanov MD, Vladimir Konstantinov, Todor Kozlovsky, Georgy Keranov and others.

After the establishment of the Bulgarian Federation of Sport Shooting (BFSS), the organization and management of sport shooting was greatly improved. A scientific approach was introduced in the sport preparation of competitors from the national team, mainly using the experience of Soviet Union teams. Financing was improved, good quality weapons, ammunitions and equipment were provided. Full-time coaches were recruited for the clubs and for the national team. Competitors from the national team were offered full time positions in the national military and police forces. The complete sport

preparation of the national team was financially provided. Bulgarian sport shooters could participate in a bigger number of international competitions (Dotchevsky (Дочевски), 2014).

Improved conditions for the development of sport shooting soon brought fruitful results. At the Olympic Games in Tokyo, Japan in 1964, Velichko Velichkov won the silver medal in rifle shooting. This was the first Olympic medal in sport shooting for Bulgaria (Bardareva (Бърдарева), 2008)

After Velichko Velichkov's success in Tokyo, interest in sport shooting increased in Bulgaria. Greater financial support was provided for the development of the sport. In 1966 Dencho Denev won the silver medal in pistol shooting at the World Championship in Wiesbaden, Germany. In 1970 he won the silver medal again at the World Championship in the USA.

Women were also very successful in sport shooting after 1963. The excellent sport results of Yordanka Savova, Liliana Arabadjiiska and Ilka Yalamova in the late 1950s were defended at the European Championship in Bucharest, Romania in 1965. Anka Pelova, Ilka Yalamova and Yordanka Savova won the silver medal in the team competition of small bore rifle shooting, and Yordanka Savova was third in the individual ranking.

In 1967 Marat Nyiazhov - a well known Soviet specialist, arrived in Bulgaria to assist in the sport preparation of Bulgarian shooters for the Olympic Games in Mexico. For the first time Bulgarian sport shooting had to cover normative standards to gain the right of participation in the Olympic Games. Serious sport preparation was required from the National team shooters.

Our distinguished specialist in autogenic training MD Cholakov and a sport psychologist started work with the Bulgarian national team the same year. Bulgarian shooters achieved good results at the Olympic Games, but did not win any medals.

In 1967 "Drava" Pistol Tournament was organized for the first time between competitors of the CSKA shooting club and the shooting club of "Vassil Levsky" residential area, Sofia. From 1969 onwards it became an international tournament.

Since 1971 the pistol teams of the Armies of the Soviet Union, Hungary, Poland, the German Democratic Republic, Romania and Czechoslovakia participated in the tournament. It became an important international competition. In the following years famous athletes participated in it: Yozev Zanetski - twice Olympic Champion from Poland, Ladislav Halta - Olympic and World Champion from Czechoslovakia, Vladimir Stolipin, Olympic medallist Lyubcho Dyakov from Bulgaria etc. "Drava" Pistol Tournament was organized until the 1990s. Afterwards the Ministry of Defense, under whose patronage it was organized, lost interest in the event and it was suspended (Yordanov (Йорданов), 2013)

Vesselin Petkov won the bronze medal in the rapid pistol fire event at the World Championship in Phoenix, USA in 1970.

The first methodological handbook in sport shooting was published in 1971. It was written by the distinguished coach Stoyan Popov.

The Central Shooting Club was founded in 1971 as the training and methodology centre for sport shooting preparation to the Central Department of the Dimitrovsky Communist Youth Union. The Club activities included planning and management of training facilities, maintenance of shooting venues and premises, providing the necessary equipment, ammunitions and weapons for the shooting clubs of the Communist Youth Union and development of the sport shooting club system. The number of shooting clubs in Bulgaria was over 300 at the time. A Council of Coaches to the Club was created and the distinguished sport shooting coach Vesselin Yolov was elected Chairman. A Body of Judges was also founded with Dimitar Elitsin as Chairman (Kanchev & Dimitrov (Кънчев & Димитров), 1986r)

In 1972 the "Shooting bulletin" magazine was issued for the first time - a joint publication of the Bulgarian Federation of Sport Shooting and the Shooting Club to the Central School of the Socialist Youth Organization "Georgy Dimitrov" - Sofia. Its major aim is to inform the Bulgarian shooting clubs about the novelties in sport shooting, about results and records in national and international competitions and the positive experience of our leading shooters. The first editors of the magazine were as follows: Alexander Hrusanov, Maxim Ayrarianov, Stoyan Popov, Vesselin Yolov and Nikola Bobev. The magazine was issued until the early 1980s.

At the Olympic Games in Munich, Germany in 1972, Bulgarian shooters did not win any medals.

In 1973 "Rodina" Sport Multiple Events was intro-

duced, in which sport shooting was one of the leading events. It was addressed to all age groups, starting from pupils in the first grade and it was administered by the Bulgarian Union for Physical Culture and Sport, the Bulgarian Professional Unions, the Communist Youth Union and the Ministry of Education.

In 1974 the First International Tournament "Droujba" was organized at the newly built shooting centre in "Geo Milev" residential area, Sofia.

In the same year 1974, "Rodina" National Physical Training Multiple Events were introduced, where sport shooting was again a major sport. The National Multiple Events involved the entire population of both sexes, aged over 6, distributed in 11 age groups.

For the period 1974 - 1976, renowned Soviet specialists - Dachenko, Belokurov and Ratnikov shared their experience with Bulgarian coaches. In the 1970s the achievements of Bulgarian sport shooting were greater and more pronounced. There are many outstanding competitors of that period: - Velichko Velichkov, Marcel Koen, Georgy Keranov, Stoyan Popov, Ivan Lazarov, Dencho Denev, Lyubcho Dyakov, Ivan Mandov, Nonka Matova, Anka Pelova, Todor Kozlovsky, Emiliyan Vergov, Yordanka Savova, Liliana Arabadzyska, Ilka Yalamova, Vesselin Petkov and many others.

In August 1975 for the first time Bulgaria hosted the European Championship in Sport Shooting for Women and Junior Men with Small-bore Weapons. The Championship took place in Sofia at the shooting centre in "Geo Milev" residential area. New facilities were installed at the shooting centre for better performance - light signals for the change of targets, combined with telephone connection between the target line and the shooting line. Anka Pelova won the gold medal in the 3 x 20 small bore event, setting a new world record at the Championship.

At the Olympic Games in Montreal, Canada in 1976, Bulgaria did not win medals in sport shooting again.

The Organization for Military Technical Preparation of the Population, created in 1977 with Resolution № 71 of the Council of Ministers, had an important role for the development of our sport. It was established on the basis of the already existent system for basic military training to the Dimitrovsky Communist Youth Union and it followed the traditions of the Voluntary Organization for Defense Assistance and of the Public Union for Sport and Technical Innovations. Sport shooting preparation was among the basic activities of the organization. Its club activity was well developed, a lot of specialized literature was published which was extremely useful and important for coaches, competitors and specialists in sport shooting. Here are some of the publications: "Handbook for studying the weapons and ammunitions in the basic military preparation of the population", "Program for the preparation of specialists in sport and military shooting in the organizations and shooting clubs", "Program in shooting preparation", "Methodology handbook for specialists and judges in sport shooting", "Program in mass shooting preparation", "A manual and methodology in shooting preparation", "Articles in sport shooting"

– part one, two and three, „Psychology of sport shooting” and many others.

In 1982 the Organization for Military Technical Preparation of the Population was renamed to the Organization for the Assistance of National Defense to the Council of Ministers. It realized even greater activity in sport preparation – shooting clubs were established in schools and enterprises in the bigger villages and towns. Full time coaches and instructors were employed, shooting centres were built, weapons, ammunitions and equipment were provided, shooting competitions were organized. Those actions facilitated the quality selection of talented competitors in sport shooting and played an important role for the successful development of the sport in the future (Achkanov & Atanasov (Ачкаканов & Атанасов), 1987)

In 1980 General from the Reserve Kiril Markov was elected Chairman of the Bulgarian Federation in Sport Shooting. Bulgarian sport shooting owes a lot to him for providing high quality modern weapons, bullets and pellets for the national teams and the clubs. Ivan Kalapyshev was Secretary to the Federation at the time. He took this position in 1972.

Serious work in the clubs and in the national team finally brought its fruit. In 1980 at the Olympic Games in Moscow - the USSR, Bulgarian sport shooting had two bronze medallists. These were Petar Zapryanov - in rifle shooting and Lyubcho Dyalkov – in pistol shooting (Kozlov (Козлов), 1985)

Bulgaria was among the countries which did not participate at the Olympic Games in Los Angeles, the USA in 1984, because of the boycott proclaimed then by the socialist countries.

In 1985 Yordan Nenov was elected Secretary to the Federation. Nenov was International Judge in sport shooting - one of our most renowned specialists in international sport.

The European Championship in Pneumatic Weapons for juniors and senior men and women was organized in Varna in 1985.

A number of national competitions were organized in Bulgaria at the time, their hosts being the sport clubs of the CSKA- Sofia, „Levsky”- Sofia, „Academic”- Sofia, „Osvobozhdenie “- Plovdiv, „Samarsko zname” – Stara Zagora, „Arbitus” – Razgrad, „Botev” – Vratza, „Svetkavitsa” – Targovishte, „Spartak” – Varna, „Dunav” –Russe, „Dorostol” – Sylistra, „Tundza” – Yambol etc

At the Olympic Games in Seoul -Korea in 1988, sport shooting won two more medals: Tanyo Kiriakov – gold medal in pistol shooting and Vessela Lecheva – silver medal in rifle shooting (Bardareva & Ivanov (Бърдарева & Иванов),1998).

In 1990 Lyubomir Mirevsky was elected Chairman of the Sport Shooting Federation and Plamen Dotchevsky was the new Secretary. They remained on these posts until 2000, including the Olympic Games in Sydney, Australia. This was the most successful period in the history of sport shooting in Bulgaria. The Bulgarian

national team won 9 medals in sport shooting at the Olympic Games.

In 1992, with a Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria, the departmental sport clubs were closed down. That included the Army Sport Club CSKA „Septemvrysko Zname” Sofia, the Army Sport Club „Trakia” - Plovdiv and the National Fleet Sport Union „Cherno More” Varna. A successful model of sport preparation, which had proved its efficiency and which was very important for the development of Bulgarian sport, was lightly crossed out. These unfortunate circumstances placed Bulgarian sport shooting in a difficult situation from then onwards (Yordanov (Йорданов), 2010)

Nevertheless, at the Olympic Games in Barcelona, Spain in 1992, Bulgarian sport shooters won 3 Olympic medals: Nonka Matova – silver medal in rifle shooting; Vessela Lecheva - silver medal in rifle shooting and Maria Grozeva – bronze medal in pistol shooting. There were 30 clubs - members of the Bulgarian Sport Shooting Federation at the time.

In 1992 the European Junior Championship in sport shooting with small-bore weapons was held in Sofia. The organization of the Championship was excellent and the Bulgarian team was very successful.

At the Olympic Games in Atlanta, USA in 1996 Bulgarian sport shooters achieved their greatest Olympic victory – 4 medals: Diana Yorgova - silver medal in pistol shooting, Emil Milev - silver medal in rapid fire pistol shooting, Maria Grozeva bronze medal in pistol shooting, Tanyo Kiryakov – bronze medal in pistol shooting.

In 1996 Bulgaria was nominated for the second time to organize the European Junior Championship in sport shooting with small-bore weapons. It was held in Sofia at the shooting range of the CSKA in Pancharievo, which was specially reconstructed for the event. The organization of the competition was highly estimated by the European Sport Shooting Confederation. Bulgaria also hosted several Balkan championships in this period

At the Olympic Games in Sydney, Australia in 2000 the Bulgarian national team in sport shooting won 2 gold medals - Maria Grozeva - pistol shooting and Tanyo Kiryakov – pistol shooting.

In 2000 Vassil Bozhkov was elected President of the Bulgarian Federation.

At the Olympic Games in Athens – Greece in 2004 Maria Grozeva won two medals in pistol shooting – gold and bronze.

At the Olympic Games in Beijing – China in 2008 Bulgarian shooters did not win any medals.

In 2009 Kamen Shishmanov was elected President of the Bulgarian Federation.

At the Olympic Games in London – the UK in 2012 Bulgarian shooters did not win any medals again.

In 2013 the sport activity license of the Bulgarian Sport Shooting Federation was withdrawn. A new organization was established – the Bulgarian Shooting Union with Maria Grozeva as President. However, the

Union is not a successor to the former Federation.

Over the years Bulgarian sport shooting has been most successful internationally. For the period 1986 – 2013, Bulgaria won 73 gold medals, 67 silver medals and 54 bronze medals from World Cup Tournaments. For the period 1988 - 2008, Bulgaria won 11 gold medals, 14 silver medals and 13 bronze medals from World Cup Finals. For the period 1958 - 1998, Bulgaria won 13 gold medals, 12 silver medals and 11 bronze medals from World Championships.

Hundreds of medals have been won from European and Balkan Championships, and from international tournaments and bilateral competitions.

Many people contributed to the success of Bulgarian sport shooting with their effort and expertise. Of course, the most important are the competitors, who won the huge number of medals from competitions of various ranks. Still, their success could not be possible without the army of coaches and specialists, who worked in the clubs and the national teams. Together with the people already noted above, we have to mention the head coaches of the national teams - associate prof. Ivan Atchkakanov, D.Sc., Marsel Koen, Stefan Tzonev, Ivan Ivanov, Nikolay Lechev, Georgy Slivov, the doctor of the national teams - MD Balyo Balev, the longtime gunsmith - Dimitar Spasov, coaches - Hristo Kiryakov, Vassil Gardev, Ivan Parlatanov, Atanas Chitanov, Tzolo Angelov, Marin Nedkov, Ivan Kehayov, Emil Dushanov, Elisaveta Doseva, Lyubcho Nikolov, Valentin Andreev, Enyo Vasev, Georgy Sharov, Vesselin Yolov, Ivanka Yolova, Dimitar Yordanov, Stefan Kovachev, Hristo Hristov, Emilia Topalova, Stoyan Popov, Marin Ruskov, Vladimir Konstantinov, Kostadin Polyakov, Stefan Stefanov, Dimitar Terziev and many others. We also have to mark the tribute of longtime members of commissions to the International Shooting Union and International Sport Shooting Referees - Yordan Nenov, Alexander Hrusanov and Plamen Dotchevsky, as well as, International Sport Shooting Referees - Nikola Bobev, Valo Dimitrov, Liliana Abadjiiska and others.

We also have to note the work of the Department of Sport Shooting to the National Sport Academy „Vassil Levsky”, Sofia and the Head of Department – long-

standing lecturer - associate professor Ivan Atchkakanov, D.Sc.

Sport shooting is a popular sport in Bulgaria. Our great achievements at international competitions of various ranking, our good traditions and specialists are a guarantee for its development and popularity in the future.

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