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The Extreme Right Wing in Bulgaria

■ “The Extreme Right Wing” (also known as the “Far Right”) consists of parties and organizations, which ideologically share extreme forms of cultural conservatism, xenophobia and, not infrequently, racism. It is especially attached to the order imposed by a “strong hand” and professes a specific form of populism based on the opposition between the elite and the people.

■ The most visible part among the organizations of the Extreme Right Wing in Bulgaria today is the Attack Party (Ataka), which has been in existence since 2005. This party, alongside the extreme nationalist and socialist, the liberal, and all other kinds of globalist doctrines can be qualified as anti-national.

■ Since its emergence in 2005, the electorate of the Attack Party has significantly grown and in 2006 its leader, Volen Siderov, made it to the run-off of the presidential election. After 2009, however, the GERB Party (the incumbent governing party in this country) managed to attract a considerable number of the Attack Party supporters. As of today, the impact of the Attack Party remains confined within the limits of 6 to 7 percent of the national electorate.

■ In practice, the smaller extreme right-wing organizations do not take part in the national and local elections, but they are very active among certain youth circles and among football fans. The fact that they participate in the so-called “Loukov March” procession, which has been organized on an annual basis since 2008, indicates the possibility for their unification, but such an occurrence remains hardly likely to materialize in practice.

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There are extreme right-wing parties in modern Bulgaria, some of which have been in existence for almost twenty years now and which are quite similar to such parties in other European countries. What we usually mean under the label of "Extreme Right Wing" (also known as the "Far Right") is parties and organizations that are often ideologically characterized by:

- extreme forms of cultural conservatism (such as the failure to accept homosexual behavior and an attachment to the authority of family values);
- an organically conservative understanding of what society is, i.e. a society where each member is obliged to play a certain role that has "naturally" been prescribed to him/her;
- xenophobia (with a strong nationalist bias) frequently coupled with racism (be it anti-Semitism or other similar ideologies);
- a special attachment to order imposed by a "strong hand" that is also connected with the distrust of the majority of manifestations in which liberal individualism finds materialization today;
- a specific brand of populism based on the antagonism between the elite and the people, which often involves anti-capitalist rhetoric as well.

Quite frequently, these value-oriented traits are present together, but sometimes they can be found in various innovative combinations.

In terms of their organizational set-up, the political parties of the Extreme Right Wing often borrow from historical models, namely – the Fascist Party in Italy and the National Socialist Party in Germany between World Wars I and II. These organizations are personalist, where the decisive power is concentrated in the leader, but simultaneously, they can also be either elitist (closed within restricted social strata) or popular (presenting themselves as mass movements).

Currently, the Extreme Right Wing in Bulgaria is represented by a number of parties and organizations of various status and different origins. Its most visible part is the Attack Party, which has existed since 2005. However it went through several successive splits, which gave rise to new parties such as GORD (an acronym of its name in Bulgarian, which actually means Civic Association for Real Democracy), initiated and headed by the incumbent MEP Slavi Binnev, and the National Democratic Party, initiated and headed by Kapka Georgieva. Apart from these two, however, and long before their recent establishment, there have been a number of circles, such as those around the *Monitor* Daily and the patriotic *New Dawn* Weekly circle, as well as parties and unions, such as the Bulgarian National-Radical Party (BNRP), the New Dawn Party, the Bulgarian National Union (NBU), the Guard Union, the Union of Bulgarian National Legions (UBNL), alongside numerous organizations such as "Bulgarian Horde", "Hearth", the "Great Bulgaria People's Society of the Students", the various Tangrist groups (referring to the proto-Bulgarian pagan deity Tangra) such as the "Dulo" Society, "Warriors of Tangra", Bulgarian National Front, and many others. Although these are relatively small and separate organizations and circles, together and as a whole they represent a significant and active social stratum, which is especially visible today on different websites in the internet environment.

1. Historical Background

Bulgarian political history has generated extreme right-wing parties of both models – the elitist and the popular. In terms of impact, however, both fail to exceed the limits of a relatively restricted circle of like-minded supporters. Thus, a mass party of the fascist type proved incapable of developing in

Bulgaria before World War II, despite the strong influence of the Nazis in Germany and the Fascists in Italy.

The Bulgarian political life between the two World Wars was also well acquainted with the multiple varieties of elitist-populist and elitist-leaders' parties. One of the manifestations of these elitist formations was the People's Accord (1921-1923), which represented a peculiar party association of the opponents of the Bulgarian Agrarian People's Union and the communists and which after the 1923 coup d'état was renamed to Democratic Accord. Historian Velichko Georgiev qualifies the People's Accord from 1921 as "an elitist organization", which included top-ranking businessmen, university professors and top-brass officers from the Military Alliance and the Union of Reserve Officers who had no prior party affiliation (Georgiev 1989: 47). The ideological foundations of this new organization was "the defense of national interests", which was a particularly sensitive subject matter in the wake of the country's 1918 capitulation.

The People's Accord emerged in a situation when – having been strongly inspired by the success of Italian fascism – several organizations of this type were established, such as the Union of Warriors and the Bulgarian sections of the Italian Fascist Party (Georgiev 1989: 88-95). And even though the People's Accord differed from these initially established fascist and para-fascist organizations in Bulgaria, a number of its activists demonstrated their considerable interest in Italy's fascism. It was the Military Alliance that exerted a more substantial impact on the newly established People's Accord. The Military Alliance initially emerged as a conspiracy organization of army officers in a situation when – because of the demobilization of the Bulgarian Army – approximately 2,300 officers were released as soon as the Treaty of Neuilly-sur-

Seine was signed in 1919 (Georgiev 1989: 99). In fact, this clandestine organization of active duty and reserve officers had complete control over the army and its various divisions and detachments. The Military Alliance was built as an elitist organization based on rigid discipline (typical of all conspiracy organizations), which proclaimed its undivided loyalty to the monarchy and Tzar Boris III in person. Close relations were established between the People's Accord and the Military Alliance as both were rooted in the same social and political circles and shared the same understanding of politics.

On the whole, the People's Accord cooperated with other organizations of the elite, such as university and journalist circles, as well as cultural and educational organizations. Its elitist nature was enhanced after its merger with a nationalist organization called *Kubrat* Bulgarian People's Union. The People's Accord had strong positions among big business as well. In fact, the Economic Development Business Association (an association of 16 large-scale banks, insurance companies and manufacturing enterprises) issued the *Word* party newspaper (Georgiev 1989: 194). The coup d'état on June 9th 1923 turned the People's Accord into a governing formation (which had not become a formal party yet). This formation rapidly grew: from 15 committees in the country's districts before the coup, the organization had 42 committees after it (Georgiev 1989: 216). In 1923, the United People's Progressive Party (UPPP) actually merged with the People's Accord, thus making it possible for the latter to become a genuine political party, which was right-wing in terms of ideology, elitist in terms of social appeal, and a populist leader's formation in terms of organization and political appeal.

Immediately afterwards, all Bulgarian "parties of the public order" united in a

Democratic Accord – this time together with a portion of the Democratic Party (DP). In essence, this was a unification of all elitist political parties despite the fact that later on, in the 1930s, a split would occur, whereby the first leader of the Democratic Accord – Alexander Tzankov – would set up a new party. The newly established party under the name of “People’s Social Movement” was a small political formation of the elitist-leader’s type, which experienced the strong impact of German Nazism.

In its origin, Alexander Tzankov’s People’s Social Movement was an elitist-leader’s party because the models it copied were Nazi and fascist organizations, but at the beginning of the 1930s it turned into quite a mass organization, much like the party of the national-socialists in Germany. The People’s Social Movement was banned after 1934, but it did not set up any underground structures and most likely its members became part and parcel of the governmental consensus of non-party supporters. A similar fate awaited the Bulgarian National Legions, established after Hitler’s model, which during the 1940s even threatened the power of the monarchy, resulting in extremely cool relationships between them and the government.

With the end of World War II, a ban was put on all fascist and para-fascist organizations in Bulgaria, and their leaders were either put on trial and sentenced to long years of imprisonment, or were simply physically liquidated without trial and verdict altogether. A number of these leaders managed to survive the communist prisons and reprisals. After 1989, some of them (such as Illia Minnev, one of the leaders of the Bulgarian National Legions for instance) acquired the status of people repressed by the communist regime, which made it possible for them to integrate into the new democratic process as legitimate political actors.

2. Results from the Cleavages Generated by the Transition

The development of the Extreme Right Wing after 1989 in Bulgaria, much like such development in other post-communist countries as well, simultaneously results from revived and newly emerged social structural conflicts, which we call cleavages. We should differentiate, however, structural from imaginary cleavages: the latter are no less genuine than the former, but are of a different nature. By definition, structural cleavages result from a profound historical transformation of society (and we connect it with modernization), whereas imaginary cleavages have an instrumental value, because they are of an ideological nature. Structural cleavages are based on the notion that for society a political conflict is a structural conflict, but they replace axiology with ontology. On the basis of the opposition between the former communists and the anti-communists, which has been observed in all post-communist states, some analysts are inclined to ascribe a structural nature to this conflict, thus treating it is a cleavage.

The major oppositions in this imaginary cleavage, which truly structured the political life in the country at the beginning of the transition, were between the victims and the executioners, between the dictatorship and the people, between the communists and the rest of the population. The problem, however, was that the boundaries between the two poles of the opposition did not seem to be that solid and not infrequently it turned out that former communists had been victims of the regime, while among the victims of communist reprisals there were also people who were not necessarily democrats. At the same time, the opposition between former communists and anti-communists in some of the Eastern European countries rapidly faded out and, twenty years after 1989, in the whole of

this part of Europe, it no longer structures the political landscape.

In fact, it is the fading out of this opposition between communists and democrats precisely that has created the right conditions for the genuine boom of extreme right-wing formations (although we can certainly find an incongruent political mixture including – if we take the Bulgarian example – former members of extreme right-wing and nationalist pro-fascist formations or their successor organizations among today's democrats).

In terms of Bulgarian specifics, the origin of the extreme right-wing formations is two-fold. On one hand, their lineage is connected with the very beginning of the transition period, which was marked by the decision of the still governing communist party, made in December 1989, to restore the names of the Bulgarian ethnic Turks who had been forcefully renamed five years earlier. This step towards restoring justice elicited an excessively negative response on the part of certain circles within the communist party itself, and these were mainly people connected with the repressive name-changing campaign. It is within these circles precisely that the first extreme nationalist parties emerged. They were mostly anti-Turkish, and in their essence – extremely conservative and often connected with the Stalinist segments that had remained from the former communist party. This is the way in which the Public Committee for the Protection of National Interests was born (better known as OKZNI according to its Bulgarian abbreviation). Even several former dissidents (such as Roumen Vodenicharov, for instance), who were led by the same nationalist considerations, joined the new organization. At that time, other nationalist parties such as the Fatherland Labor Party and “Era 3” gravitated around the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) and later on they were joined by the *Thracia* Political Club and the Union of

Thracian Bulgarians, which raised claims to be indemnified by Turkey for the real estate of their Bulgarian predecessors confiscated by the Ottoman Empire after the Balkan Wars.

On the other hand, after 1990, together with the restoration of many of the old democratic parties, there was an ongoing process of restoring and establishing several extreme right-wing organizations and parties such as the Bulgarian Democratic Forum (BDF), which proclaimed itself to be the successor of the organization of the Bulgarian National Legions of the 1940s and was accepted as one of the 16 members of the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF). Other such organizations remained outside the UDF, namely: the Bulgarian Radical-Democratic Party (headed by Dr. Ivan Georgiev) and the Christian Democratic Party (headed by Priest Gelemenov), despite the fact that they also gravitated around the UDF. The two above-mentioned leaders were activists, who at the time of communism were subject to persecution for their nationalist beliefs and attempts to set up nationalist organizations.

On the whole, however, these “left-wing” and “right-wing” ultranationalists remained in a rather marginal position and were strongly dependent on the framework imposed on them by the BSP on the Left (i.e. the party which succeeded the former communist party) and by the UDF on the Right. These parties rarely ran elections with independent candidates of their own and enjoyed an almost negligible political impact.

But with the subsiding conflict between former communists and anti-communists, a broad vista opened for both populist centrist parties and populist radical (more frequently extremely right-wing) parties. Around 1999 – 2000, the first shoots of today's variety of ultranationalist extreme right-wing parties began to emerge. This was the time when the major phase of privatizing the huge property of the communist state was near-

ing completion, when the economic wealth was already redistributed. This gave rise to a new conflict – one between the winners and losers from the transition to a market economy. It did not matter so much whether the loser had actually lost something, what mattered was whether they saw themselves as losers. It is in this novel “loser” environment that new populist parties, among which extreme right-wing parties, found a fertile terrain to develop.

Post-communism is marked by a new conflict, which has become a structural one and is generating a new cleavage, i.e. the conflict between the national and the international. The stakes in this new conflict are put on the type of international order that is to be established and on what will happen to national states. In countries such as Bulgaria, which are both post-communist and peripheral, this conflict enhances the prejudices against the global economy, the fears of losing national identity, and of being smelted in the vast cauldron of globalization. These fears are additionally feeding the arguments of the extreme nationalists and populists who now can also throw in some anti-capitalist rhetoric, especially after the collapse of the historical enemy of capitalism – Soviet communism.

All these various extreme nationalists held several joint actions in 2001 – 2002 against the news broadcasts in the Turkish language by the Bulgarian National Television, against the Roma population who systematically failed to pay their electricity bills, against the closing down of the *Kozloduy* Nuclear Power Plant, etc., and in 2002 – when the government of National Movement Simeon II was in office – they made their first attempt at unification (Yordanov 2002). This provoked a sharp response in the public environment and the unification project was then abandoned.

During the 1990s, carried on the wave of the new-found freedom of speech, numerous texts were published in Bulgaria. Some of them belonged to Hitler and Mussolini, but new and modern texts definitely prevailed.

The publication of Benito Mussolini's book “The Teaching of Fascism” (multiple editions from 1989 and 1992) was accompanied by a lengthy introductory study signed by “*Julius August*”, which is a modern text glorifying fascism. This text for instance says: “For a sufficiently long time over the past four centuries, the Bulgarian people have been robbed by the Jews who had allied with the Turkish administration (...) and let us make it perfectly clear to them that we, as the majority of nations, do not want them any longer in Bulgaria, not because of any ethnic or racial prejudices (they have successfully been deluding the world in this way precisely), but because of reasons concerning persons practicing criminal conduct, such as profiteers, swindlers, conspirators and corruptors of nations” (p. 21 from the foreword of the quoted publication). Among the titles subject to mass circulation were the five books written by Nickola Nickolov (e.g. “The World Conspiracy”, “The Secret Minutes”, etc.), which developed and promoted the well-known theses about the “Jewish-Mason global conspiracy”.

In 1998-1999, journalist Volen Siderov, former Editor-in-Chief of the popular UDF Daily – “*Democracy*”, joined the journalist team of the “*Monitor*” Daily and immediately gained wide popularity with his ultranationalist and often blatantly racist articles. A little later he launched his personal broadcast under the title of “*Attack*” on the national cable “SKAT” TV, the spirit of which was also ultranationalist. At the beginning of the new millennium, Volen Siderov published a series of books (e.g. “The Boomerang of Evil”, “*Zharava*”

Publishing House, 2002, “Bulgaro-phobia”, “Boomerang BG” Publishing House, 2003, “The Power of Mammon”, “Boomerang BG” Publishing House, 2004), where the well-known theses about the “global conspiracy” of the “Jewish Masons” were developed anew, but this time with a view to the specific dimensions of Bulgarian history and society.

The gradual amassment of public image in the capacity of a major spokesperson of the extreme nationalists made it possible for Volen Siderov to run for the Sofia City Mayor’s seat, despite the fact that less than 2,000 voters cast their ballots for him.

On the eve of the 2005 general election, he became leader of the election coalition of 5 nationalist organizations (coming both from the right-wing and left-wing political space), which was registered under the name of “Attack” Coalition. The following political entities were part of this coalition:

- National Movement for the Salvation of the Fatherland (NMSF) headed by Illia Kirov (left-wing nationalist);
- Bulgarian National-Patriotic Party (BNPP) headed by Peter Manolov (poet and former anti-communist dissident);
- The Attack Party headed by Volen Siderov;
- New Dawn Party headed by Mincho Minchev (former ally of the BSP);
- Union of Patriotic Forces headed by Yordan Velichkov (left-wing nationalist), a member of which was Peter Beron – an emblematic figure from the first years of the country’s transition and former UDF Chairman (1990-1991).

This coalition – truly one of its kind – was the first alliance of nationalists, all of whom, however, have different genealogies and do not necessarily share the same beliefs. Soon after the 2005 general election, at which the Attack Party Coalition was returned to Parliament, the first split occurred within this

new organization. Peter Beron and a number of the “left-wing” nationalists began to gradually differentiate themselves from Volen Siderov, not least because of his spectacular anti-Semitic and racist speeches.

The “left-wing” nationalists were about to disperse by joining various small organizations. Others, such as Grigor Velev and Peter Beron for instance, were going to unsuccessfully push their luck by running for the Presidency; later on, in 2009, they went on to set up yet another nationalist party, the “*Whole Bulgaria*” Alliance of Bulgarian Nationalists (ABN), which claims to be the party of “modern constructive nationalism”. Grigor Velev (who is a university professor, and whose academic discipline is medical pathology) is also the author of numerous books on nationalism, such as “Bulgarian Nationalism and Its Future” (2009). He is the founder and long-standing editor of the “About the Bulgarian Nation” periodical.

The right-wing nationalists who remained outside the Attack Coalition also set up a number of small and very active parties, such as the Bulgarian National Union (BNU – the successor of an organization named “Right-Wing Democratic Movement”, which had been previously connected with Ivan Georgiev’s Bulgarian National Radical Party). The leader of the BNU – Boyan Rassate – set up this new organization in 2000, and later on became close to the Attack Coalition in 2003-2006, but subsequently parted with Volen Siderov and established the extreme-right “Guard” organization.

In 2012, the Attack Party itself went through a new internal conflict, which brought about a yet another split. As a result, two new small organizations emerged: one led by Kapka Georgieva, the ex-wife of Volen Siderov and former Editor-in-Chief of the *Attack* Daily, and the other – by the former Attack Party MP and incumbent MEP, Slavi Binnev.

3. Ideological Profile

"They are against the European Union in the way it looks today, and together with Jean-Marie Le Pen and Jorg Haider they are pleading for Europe of the nations. They are fighting against Bulgaria's accession to NATO and are qualifying the Pact as an "organization of bandits". They use an aggressive rhetoric with respect to minorities. They believe in the Zionist conspiracy, i.e. that the Jews rule the world through the banks, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, NATO, the CLUB OF ROME, the Bilderbergs, and – of course – Jewish bankers. According to Volen Siderov, the Jews and the Masons founded the USA, accomplished the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, the October Revolution, the advent of Hitler." (Yordanov 2002). Perhaps it is in this most synthetic way that the ideological concoction of the Extreme Right Wing in Bulgaria can be presented, which by no means, however, makes it unique.

The ideological doctrine professed by the Attack Party is probably the most frequently quoted and most deeply analyzed doctrine. Volen Siderov's texts contain the entire amalgam of ideas typical for the Extreme Right Wing. His latest book connected with the 2011 presidential election is entitled "Foundations of Bulgarism". The lengthy text, spanning 112 pages (filled with photographs, maps and schemes), develops the major ideas of Bulgarian nationalism: ethical defense of nationalism, substantiation of the thesis about the ancient origins of the Bulgarians who are one of the oldest autochthonic peoples and civilizations in Europe, and dismissal of socialist, liberal, and any other globalist doctrines as being anti-national.

There are several major topics in the ideological profile of the Extreme Right Wing and they are as follows: the guilty minorities, the

unity of the nation and the strong state, and harmful foreign powers.

3.1. *The Minorities Turned into Scapegoats*

Most often, the enumerated topics get mixed up in order to produce a specific ideological amalgam, which is then developed within the framework of a specific public discourse.

Minorities, in the Bulgarian case – ethnic and cultural (or sexual), have always been wrongly accused of being "eternally guilty" by extreme right-wing parties. Traditionally, these are the Jews. The article quoted from the "*Theme*" magazine contains the following statements of Illia Illiev, a journalist from the "*Monitor*" Daily circle: "Ever since Loukanov's government came to office, the Jews in Bulgaria have been taking possession of key posts in Bulgaria's governance at an increasing rate. Five ministers from the incumbent Cabinet have Jewish roots. Two of the Chairpersons of the parliamentary represented parties are also of Jewish descent. Not a single thoroughbred Bulgarian for at least two generations back can be shown to the people! It is a similar situation with the collective leaderships of these parties as well." (Yordanov 2002). Besides, the official program of the Bulgarian National Radical Party begins like this: "Since ancient times the Jews have been striving to assert themselves as a dominant race in the world by means of Judaism in terms of religion and Zionism in terms of militant nationalism (<http://burgas.bnrp.info/>). The program of "Warriors of Tangra" declares: "Two nations on Earth have a national deity of their own: the Jews have put themselves under the power of IHWH, a God thirsty for human blood; whereas we, Bulgarians, have our own Unlocked Heaven, our own Shining Tangra."

(www.voininatangra.org/modules/xfsection/article.php?articleid=286)

Alongside the Jews, the Turkish and Roma people have also been a target subject to disqualification by the proponents of the Extreme Right Wing. And if the Turks are mentioned mostly from the standpoint of the “500 years of Turkish Yoke”, the Roma population is the target of xenophobia. Over and over again, Volen Siderov has developed the thesis about the “Gypsy proliferation” as a threat for Bulgaria. In an interview for the “Attack” Daily Siderov said: “Exactly 10 years ago I wrote an article for the “Monitor” Daily entitled “Is the Gypsy Proliferation Overtaking Bulgaria?” I do not think that there is anything offensive in the phrase “Gypsy proliferation”, because what we mean here is the growing numbers of this population which refuses to integrate within Bulgarian society and lives quite encapsulated instead”. (see more at: http://www.vestnikataka.com/?module=displaystory&story_id=61184&format=print&edition_id=1054). What the Bulgarian National Union (BNU) demonstrates for its part is merely total disregard for this issue but in the following way: “We are not interested in the Gypsies. For us they cannot be Bulgarians, because by God’s will they were born Gypsies, not Bulgarians. (bg.bgns.net/content/view/18/62/) This is a total dismissal – the Roma people are “absolutely alien”, not only do they “refuse to integrate”, but are so alien that “they are of no consequence for us”.

There are sharp statements addressed at other minorities as well, such as the homosexual community. In 2005, Volen Siderov provoked a row with his very first parliamentary speech where he declared: “At long last, the Bulgarians will receive their genuine representation at the National Assembly. In Parliament now there will not be only homosexuals, Gypsies, Turks, foreigners, Jews, and whatever others; here there will be nothing else but Bulgarians!” (www.bghelsinki.org/bg/publikacii/obektiv/bulgarski-helzinski-komitet/2005-11/grazhdani-sreshtu-omrazata/)

The extreme nationalists are consistent in their homophobia: thus for instance, activists of the “Guard” organization or supporters of the VMRO Party, which is considered to be far more moderate, regularly attack the marchers participating in the gay-parades organized in the capital city Sofia.

3.2. The Unity of the Nation and the Strong State

Extreme right-wingers have always pointed out what is the special meaning that the unity of the nation has for them, as well as the special meaning of what they qualify as “national pride”. In Volen Siderov’s opinion, the fundamental national pride of Bulgarians is their “ancient origins”, but subject to national pride is the Kozloduy Nuclear Power Plant as well, and these are “sacred things” that should be safeguarded. He understands the nation as a “natural community” (Siderov 2011: 6) where each one has a place exactly designated for him/her – and all these are theses well known ever since the time of Mussolini.

In its credo (i.e. its main programmatic text), the BNU determines itself as follows: “The Bulgarian National Union is not an ordinary organization. The BNU is an Order, in which – upon joining it – every member pledges to be faithful to the Motherland, irreconcilable to the enemies of Bulgaria, maintaining at the same time good comradeship relations with his/her brothers-in-arms” (bg.bgns.net/content/view/12/26/). This text seems to be borrowed from older models from the 1930s. As for the Bulgarian National Legions, the claim made in the organization’s programmatic text reads as follows: “Communists, socialists, left-wing agrarians, leaders of parties of a covert anti-state orientation, and militant groups are dividing the nation into hostile camps, this draining its strength” (www.fo-

rum.bg-nacionalisti.org/index.php?PHPSESSID=c6e39588a3c2ac5283fe5ac59bc425cc&ac ...)

The unity of the people (and because it is the people that make up the nation, the two notions are synonymous) is the paramount consideration and all who divide it are enemies of the people. This rhetoric is traditional; only the specific examples are new. This rhetoric goes together with the demand for a hierarchy-based order, strong leadership, and submission. The Bulgarian National Legions organization is quite explicit in this respect. "Not only under the authoritarian, but also under the democratic system, society needs leaders. This is a psychological need for man. Hitler, Mussolini, Kemal Atatürk, Lenin, etc., became aware of this human specificity and turned it into a principle. Even when two people get together, one of them leads, the other follows and obeys." (bg-legioner-grigorov.narod.ru/history/vodachi/). Any comment would be completely unnecessary here; what is amazing is rather the fact that the above quoted text has been posted on the indicated website quite recently.

Another text of the BNU, which strongly resembles a propaganda brochure from the time of Mussolini, defines the objective of the organization in the following way: "What in fact is your objective? It is to create a modern state, in which Bulgarians can live well – a state of cleanliness, order, piece and quiet." (bg.bgns.net/content/view/18/62/). The text continues with an explicit opinion about democracy: "What we have seen thus far from democracy is only dirt, criminality, unemployment, retirees searching the dustbins, exploitation, narcotic drugs, corruption, prostitution, rights for the minorities, affluent rounded-up politicians, unfulfilled promises, etc. This is not our ideal of a state! Might that be yours? Democracy has been exhausted and its time has gone."

3.3. The Foreign Powers

The extreme right-wing parties in Bulgaria can be distinguished by their foreign political profile as well. All of them uphold nationalist stances on all subject matters where domestic and foreign interests can be set against one another, e.g.: the demand of many European states for the closure of the *Kozloduy* NPP as a precondition for Bulgaria's accession to the EU, the participation of Bulgaria in the international peacekeeping missions in Afghanistan and Iraq, the country's NATO membership as a new foreign political dependence, etc. The idea which the majority of the extreme right-wing circles share has been expressed in a document of the Bulgarian National Legions, namely: "The international covert and overt forces cause our national spirit to hesitate and are preparing our ultimate slavery." (more on the subject see at: www.forum.bg-nacionalisti.org/index.php?PHPSESSID=c6e39588a3c2ac5283fe5ac59bc425cc&ac...)

The most important subject matter concerning the foreign political identity of the extreme right-wing nationalists is Turkey, especially in connection with its potential membership in the European Union. The political parties in Bulgaria are divided in two with respect to the EU accession of Turkey. The BSP, NMSII (currently NMSP), and the MRF – members of the governing tri-partite coalition in the 2005-2009 period, upheld an official position, which is positive and simultaneously cautious as regards the reserves of other European states. "Bulgaria is interested in Turkey's development in the direction of the EU, involving the adoption of rules, standards, and EU values, as it is our neighbor and a large country we border on. At the same time, its EU membership cannot happen without compromises. What I mean is that before acceding to the EU, Turkey must have convinced all European countries that it fully subscribes to the EU rules and is capable of integrating with the European economy

completely and without whatever cataclysms" (Kalfin 2007). At that time, the leader of the GERB Party, Boiko Borissov, also made a positive statement on the issue, namely: "GERB's attitude to Turkey is the same as we have with respect to Serbia, Croatia, Macedonia... Each country which has duly met the EU criteria, will be welcomed by the EU member states". The UDF also declared its support for the EU membership of Turkey, thus differing from Ivan Kostov's party – Democrats for Strong Bulgaria (DSB). Analyst Dimiter Avramov, who is close to UDF circles, explicitly stated in his blog: "Turkey was Bulgaria's loyal political ally and gave support to our accession to NATO at a time when this was a strategic choice of extreme importance for the country's national security. ... This is the reason why Bulgaria has to lend support to Turkey's integration with the EU rather than hamper it!" It was only the Attack Party and DSB that maintained a clear stance against Turkey's EU membership, though pointing out different arguments, which is what actually matters. In Bulgaria, much like the other EU member states, the division between proponents and opponents of Turkey's accession does not coincide completely with the division between the left-wing and right-wing political formations.

In the rhetoric of the Extreme Right Wing, one of the frequently emerging arguments against Turkey's EU membership is that Turkey is not a European country – not so much from a geographical point of view, but in terms of its culture. The reason for this opposition is "Turkey's incapacity to become a tenant in the well arranged Christian home on the Old Continent". This is what Stefan Solakov wrote several years ago in the *Attack Daily* (Solakov 2007). This thesis has been supported most vehemently by extreme nationalists in Europe and it reappeared in the address of the French nationalist leader Jean-Marie Le Pen during his visit to Sofia in 2007.

The argument that Turkey is not a European country is based not so much on the geographical realities (10 percent of its territory is in Europe, the rest is in Asia), but rather on the understanding about the incompatibility between "Europe's Christian roots" and the prevailing Moslem religion in Turkey. It is this aspect of "cultural incompatibility" that has most frequently been pointed out. Because in this argument Europe is seen mostly as a Christian community or – at best – as a community sharing "Christian values". The opponents of Turkey's EU accession often indicate that Turkey is a Moslem country, member of the Islamic Conference Organization and this is the reason why its place is not in Europe, as the continent is predominantly Christian. Dimiter Stoyanov, who is an MEP elected on the party slate of the Attack Party, declared in front of the participants in an anti-Turkish demonstration in Brussels on October 3^d 2007 that it was unnatural for a society built upon Christian values to unite with a Moslem state, which on top of that is located outside the boundaries of Europe (Shkodrova 2005).

This anti-Turkish line in the conduct of the Extreme Right Wing in Bulgaria has been constantly maintained to the present day. In May 2011, activists of the Attack Party organized an assault on worshippers in the only mosque (built in the 16th century) in Sofia. This was only a part of the numerous protest actions organized by the extreme right-wing proponents in Bulgaria against the Bulgarian Turks and Moslems in general over the past several years.

4. The Extreme Right Wing in Action

4.1. The "Katounitza" Case

In September 2011, in the village of Katounitza – near the town of Plovdiv, a genuine clash on a mass scale burst out between Bulgarians and Roma people living in this vil-

lage. The occasion that prompted the fight was the death of 19 year-old Anguel Petrov, run down by a minivan, in which rode men close to Kiril Rashkov – a notorious “Gypsy Baron” and rich businessman, who resided in the same village. The Bulgarian villagers rose up in rebellion – they began to destroy Rashkov’s property and one of the houses in his courtyard we set on fire (www.vesti.bg/index.phtml?tid=40&oid=4145691). Later on the protesting people were joined by fans of the Plovdiv football team and the act of vengeance continued.

What is impressive in this action is the fact that the authorities failed to prevent the fighters from taking the law into their own hands and even seemed to encourage them. The problem here is that Kiril Rashkov is a man who has repeatedly abused the law and who for a long time has lived unpunished; the excessive violence of the villagers, however, was motivated by the fact that he is a Gypsy.

The audience of the video recordings of this event were amazed to see the policemen standing aside and simply watching the violent outburst of people throwing stones and incendiary devices, mainly Molotov cocktails, at the houses of Tzar Kiro (as Kiril Rashkov is nick-named). They saw how the competent authorities reacted to the mobilization of football fans (among whom they could see people with Nazi tattoos who were unequivocally expressing their attitude to the Roma and Turkish people). The village of Katounitza is located at a distance of 20 kilometers from Plovdiv – the access road to the village is either through the village of Yagodovo or directly from the main highway between Plovdiv and Sadovo – these are the two entry points, which did not seem to have been blocked by the police after it became clear that the football fans were getting mobilized through the social networks “to restore justice”. Questions also arise concern-

ing the arrest and confinement of Tzar Kiro. The arrest as a measure of police protection is comprehensible, but what remains incomprehensible is why the authorities had been protecting this family until that time – obviously in exchange for certain services, such as Roma votes at election time for instance.

This outburst of the rage of citizens against rampant lawlessness and against the freedom of a handful of criminally battered “fat cats” and “well-dressed businessmen” to abuse the laws, to evade taxation, to live outside the rule of law, seems to have crossed beyond some important limit. On the other hand, there is a yet another element in this civic reaction. In the video-recordings we can see a multitude of football fans, skin-heads, nationalists, and rather disoriented teenagers who have gone out to join not a peaceful rally, but – on the contrary – have gathered to address overt threats of physical retribution against the Roma people. The Attack Party circulated a brochure entitled “The Criminality of Gypsies – a Threat to the State”. This is a collection of short texts, which are dated without indicating the source. All the titles have a similar ring to them: “Gypsies Robbed...”, “Gypsies Killed...”, etc. The collection ends with an article written by Volen Siderov back in 2000 and reprinted from the “*Monitor*” Daily, the title of which reads “Is the Gypsy Proliferation Taking over Bulgaria?”, followed by a new article of his, which accuses all Bulgarian governments thus far of having “opened up a political umbrella over the crimes of the Roma population”.

In a number of cases and even irrespective of the intentions which the initiators initially had, the peaceful marches organized in many towns of the country after the Katounitza events rapidly became “tainted” by “anti-Roma rhetoric and by participants with manifest racist attitudes.

4.2. The Case of the Sofia City Mosque

With the aim of provocation, representatives of the Attack Party have numerous times brought loudspeakers sounding the toll of church bells and Christian hymns close to the Sofia Mosque called "Banya Bashi".

However, on May 20th 2011, before Friday prayer, in close proximity to the fence of the mosque, a group of Attack Party supporters organized a protest rally against the external loudspeakers of the mosque, used to invite worshippers to prayer. The Attack Party zealots began to address the Moslems with offensive words. The name-calling escalated into physical clashes when the Moslems responded to the attack. The police intervened and arrested a few people.

The first and major reason for such a type of stunning actions was the fact that the Attack Party and its leader were looking for ways and means to reverse the declining trend of their electoral support, which came as a result of the policy the party had been pursuing over the past several years – from a stance of full support for the incumbent GERB government to a situation of a self-effaced political identity. Actually, the above incident provided Volen Siderov with plausible grounds to announce that his party was going out in opposition.

In fact, the observers from the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee who monitor the situation with human rights in Bulgaria have also registered other incidents connected with attacks on Moslems and desecration of mosques, motivated by far-right arguments and the deployment of Nazi symbols in the towns of Silistra, Plovdiv, Pleven, Blagoevgrad, Pazardjik, etc. (http://www.bghelsinki.org/media/uploads/annual_reports/2011.pdf). What has been observed in the course of similar actions directed against Moslems is that among the injured there are foreigners as well, who often turn out to be immigrants. In some of the

cases, the protesting attackers raised a racist and xenophobic slogan that has now become notorious, namely: "Gypsies – in the soap cauldron, Turks – under the knife!"

Human rights defenders have also recorded extreme right-wing aggression directed at representatives of other religious confessions, such as assaults on "Jehovah's Witnesses" and missionaries of the Protestant Church.

In a number of cases, fans of various football clubs throughout the country have got involved in such attacks. This is an indication that these football clubs have been turning of late into centers for dissemination of racist and xenophobic ideologies.

4.3. The 2011 Gay Parade

Another target subject to extreme right-wing attacks are homosexuals. For the past five years, an annual "Sofia Pride" Parade has been held. These are marches in defense of the equal rights of the LGTB community (i.e. the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people). The number of participants in these parades often exceeds a thousand.

It is habitual for the nationalist organizations to try to organize counter-parades, but in the last two years the authorities have managed to avoid any clashes as this happened back in 2008, when a large group of extreme right-wing nationalists attacked the parade and even threw a Molotov cocktail at the participants.

In 2011, however, the "Sofia Pride" Parade gained the support of a number of diplomatic missions, Bulgarian and international organizations, public figures, and the media. With his support for the event, Georgi Kadiev, municipal councilor and BSP candidate for the seat of Sofia City Mayor, set an unprecedented example.

In his public addresses, Volen Siderov himself usually treats the parade as a provocation. In his opinion, these parades make an

irritating and absolutely unnecessary demonstration. (<http://news.myvidin.com/about-38054.html>) In June 2011, the *Attack Daily* published an article by Milko Nickolov, which qualified the parade as “a provocative action against Christian morality and the state sovereignty of the Republic of Bulgaria...” According to author Milko Nickolov, “...by virtue of imposing such perverse points of view, the authorities should also permit parades of pedophiles, sodomites, bestiality practitioners, terrorists who murder people (and they have monuments erected in this country), and all such sorts of monsters, fiends, and destroyers of the Bulgarian statehood.” (<http://www.arhiv.vestnikataka.bg/archive.php?broi=1643&text=&fromDate=&toDate=&newsID=95771>). This stance equates the people of the LGTB community with the most repulsive categories of criminals. The stance of the Attack Party, however, finds support in many circles of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church.

4.4. The So-called “Loukov March” Procession

The most crowded manifestation of the extreme right-wing nationalist formations is the so-called annual “Loukov March” – an event organized in February every year, ever since 2003, in the capital city, Sofia. The event is defined as “a memorial torch-lights procession in honor of General Christo Loukov”. The principal organizer of the event is the Bulgarian National Union, but other organizations with names such as “National Resistance”, “Blood and Honor”, etc., are also involved with it.

General Christo Loukov (1888-1943) participated in World War I, was Minister of War (1935-1938), and founded the Union of Bulgarian National Legions during World War II – an organization strongly impacted by Nazi models. In 1943, he was assassinated by a militant task force of the prohibited Communist Party. General Loukov has be-

come a symbol for today’s numerous extreme right-wing and nationalist organizations. The February memorial procession is held under torch-lights and many of the participants are clad in uniforms and wear various symbols, which are reminiscent of the Nazi heritage. Of late, the usual number of participants has been between 800 and 1,000, but in 2012, the Bulgarian mourners were joined by participants from foreign countries such as Germany, Russia, Belgium, and Romania (<http://www.lukovmarsh.info/>).

The “Loukov March” procession has provoked harsh reactions by human rights defenders and intellectual circles. In an open letter to the Sofia City Mayor, the Chairman of the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, Krassimir Kanev, qualifies this event as “direct instigation to violence and discrimination of ethnic and sexual minorities” and as “a hatred-inculcating event” (<http://www.bghelsinki.org/bg/novini/bg/single/otvoreno-pismo-na-bhk-dojordanka-fandkova/>). The youth association of the Sofia City organization of the BSP has also sharply condemned the fact that the “Loukov March” is openly held, because it usually becomes an arena for manifesting racist and xenophobic acts and attitudes on the part of both Bulgarian and foreign organizations (<http://www.duma.bg/duma/node/26707>). The participants in the procession have also been qualified as “nationalist and racist groups” by the Organization Against Neo—Nazism, Racism, and Xenophobia with the abbreviation “HORA”, which means “people” in Bulgarian) stopnazi-bg.blogspot.com/2011/02/2011.html).

Although this march still remains limited in terms of participation, the very fact that it is being held provokes numerous reactions and protests. At the same time, this event is an occasion for a joint action of the otherwise divided extreme right-wing nationalist organizations, which often fight one another.

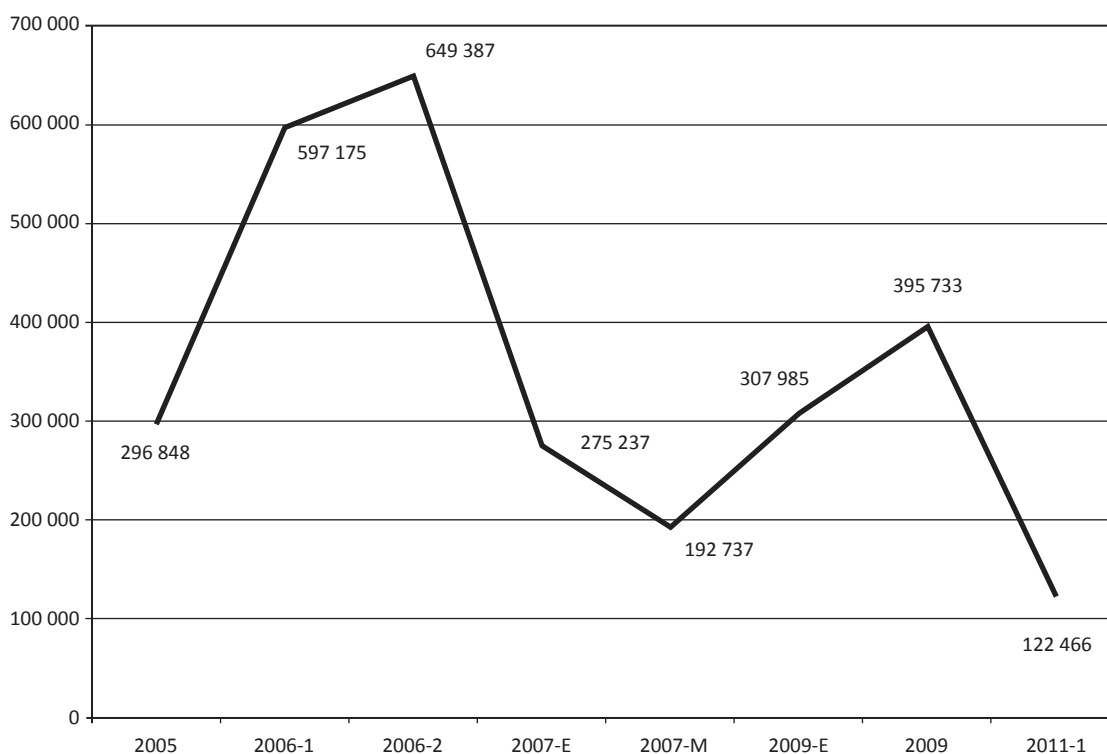
5. Electoral Impact

Initially, after its emergence in 2005, the Attack Party significantly increased the number of its voters. This trend remained visible until 2009, but afterwards the GERB Party attracted a considerable number of Attack Party supporters.

A follow-up of all national elections which the Attack Party has run (general, presidential – the run-offs included, local, and elections for Members of the European Parliament) reveals an initial strong mobilization (2005-2006), connected with the novelty of the party and the high expectations it had raised, followed

by a reversal to the initial electoral result at the MEP election in 2007. Then again there was a new mobilization (2007-2009), when the Attack Party acted as an opposition to the tri-partite coalition of the BSP, NMSII, and the MRF, which took the party to a new electoral peak, but it was still well below its electoral achievement at the 2006 presidential election. After 2009, the full support which the Attack party lent to the GERB government, seems to have diminished the party status and effaced its image, which led to the low result scored by its presidential candidate, Volen Siderov, in the 2011 presidential election.

Graph 1: Votes received by the Attack Party candidates at the general elections (2005, 2009), the presidential elections (2006, 2011), the local elections (2007), and the MEP elections (2007, 2009).



5.1. General Elections

When in 2005 the Attack Party was returned to Parliament with a sufficient number of votes (296,848) and formed a parliamentary faction of its own, observers began to speak about an extreme right-wing wave. What in-

terested the researchers most, however, was the question where these new voters were coming from.

In principle, these voters had emerged as a result of the crisis and restructuring of the UDF (with the split of Stefan Sofiansky's

party and Ivan Kostov's leaving the UDF) on one hand, and the differentiation of the NMSII voters who were very dissimilar and of whom only some proved to have a more durable self-identification with this Movement, on the other. What is also important here was the split within NMSII itself and the separation of the new formation called Bulgarian New Democracy in December 2007. The split within the Attack Party parliamentary faction almost right after its formation was symptomatic as well, because it was indicative of the incongruence of this new party.

The 2005 general election revealed three significant novelties:

- A considerable decline in electoral turnout was registered yet again.
- The political space was fractioned and for the first time seven political formations were returned to Parliament.
- An extreme right-wing party (the Attack Party) made it to Parliament for the first time ever.

The political outcome of this election showed the lack of a distinct political majority, since not a single party managed to gain full parliamentary majority. After tortuous negotiations a tri-partite coalition of the BSP, NMSII, and the MRF was formed. In 2005, the previous party of the governing majority – NMSII – lost more than 1.2 million voters, indicating the excessive incongruence of its electorate, which had previously made it possible for it to win the 2001 general election.

The MRF was the biggest winner in 2005 – the Movement succeeded in mobilizing an additional 120,000 voters in comparison with 2001, which was a great achievement, bearing in mind the circumstance that although the MRF was part and parcel of the previous governing coalition, it was not – as is usually the case – adversely impacted by this fact.

In 2005, taken together, the parties of the Right Wing – the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) and Democrats for Strong Bulgaria (DSB) – marked a decline yet again: jointly, they lost 130,000 voters in comparison with 2001.

At the same time, the newly-established Attack Party marked its emergence with an electorate of almost 300,000 people, which is a sizeable proportion not only of the voter turnout (8.14 percent), but also of the national electorate (4.42 percent). There may be various reasons for the rapid structuring of such an anti-systemic party, but the most significant of them in 2005 were probably the following:

- The disappointment of broad social strata with the economic and social results from the country's transition to a market economy, which the country had attained to the detriment of people's social expectations. As a whole, these were people who considered themselves to be the "the big losers" from the transition, despite the much higher expectations they had cherished about its promised outcome.
- The marginalization of the Roma people and the significant rise of the crime rate within their community, which gave rise to anti-Roma discourse and attitudes among certain parts of society.
- The crisis of confidence in the political parties at large, and the increasing suspicions, which the broad public was beginning to entertain, that parties were no longer associations set up to uphold a given social and political cause, but rather private groupings pursuing certain business ends.

The most important question is where the Attack Party voters were coming from. There are several different hypotheses about the political history of these voters, especially if all post-1990 elections are carefully taken into consideration.

- Some of these voters might have come from among the ranks of the disillusioned BSP and UDF voters who had begun to feel this way as early as 1991-1994 and who had ever since refused to vote altogether, but in whom the discontent with the transition had continued to pile up. The distinction between these two 1990 groups of disillusioned "red" and "blue" voters lies in the fact that they identified a different culprit for their discontent. The Attack Party offered them an equally acceptable culprit – the new oligarchs who could have come both from the ranks of the "red" nomenclature and the newly-rich "blue" activists. In comparison with 1990, the total number of lost BSP and UDF voters stood at 1.3 million in 1991.
- Some of these voters might have originated from among the electorate of the Alliance of Democratic Forces (ADF) who were bitterly disappointed after 1997. What they expected was a decisive "break with communism", but then they were disappointed with the new capitalist reality, which proved incapable of giving fair chances to each and everyone in this country. In 2001, the ADF lost 1.3 million voters in comparison with their number back in 1997.
- Some of these voters might have been more recently disappointed people who felt disillusioned with NMSII in 2005 (when this party lost 1.2 million voters in comparison with 2001) and who had decided to radically shift their vote, as they were assessing their life achievements more or less as a failure.

All of the above were people who had had political expectations at all or the majority of the post-1990 national elections. They had voted, and been disappointed, disappointments and even embitterment

were piling up and amounting to the desire for revenge, thus bringing about the determination "to punish all the culprits". At a closer glance, this indicates that the Attack Party seemed to have scored gains on three different terrains: a portion of the voters disappointed with NMSII, some of the voters of the small parties, and a portion of the 2001 "vote absentees" who, for their part, were mostly previously disillusioned ADF voters. The Attack Party failed to make any gains on the 2001 BSP terrain and, if among the electorate of the new party there were voters who could be qualified as "red", most likely these were BSP voters back in 1994 who had subsequently felt disillusioned and had never returned to their previous vote. Such voters might have "drifted" in electoral terms to NMSI in 2001 but, having felt disappointed once again, in 2005, they cast their votes for the Attack Party (Todorov 2010: 420-421).

An empirical study held in 2007 on the Attack Party electorate by the Political Science Department of the New Bulgaria University under the supervision of Evgenia Ivanova indicates that this electorate encompasses three main categories of voters, which the researchers have dubbed in the following way: 1. "biographical communists" (feeling hatred for today's socialists on account of "their treachery"); 2. "biographical nationalists"; 3. "ordinary middle-class people". The study also quotes a survey held in 2005 by the MBMD Pollster Agency on the political origins of the Attack Party voters, which indicates that the major influx of voters comes from the small parties and the 2001 vote absentees. The MBMD survey also shows that some of the voter inflow comes from NMSII, while the drift from the ADF or the BSP seems exceedingly restricted (Ivanova 2007: 9-12).

Table 1. Potential Vote Transfer between the 2001 and 2005 General Elections (exit poll held by BBSS "Gallup International")

Votes coming from	Votes cast for	BSP	NMSII	DSB	Attack	MRF	ADF
ADF		3.09	7.94	60.83	10.67	2.35	72.83
BSP		68.91	3.48	1.04	9.10	3.68	1.32
NMSII		12.60	67.87	9.04	31.69	5.96	7.92
MRF		0.66	0.67	1.27	0.21	68.43	0.38
Another party		2.27	2.21	13.67	22.80	2.35	3.30
Previous vote absentees		9.05	14.38	10.31	21.03	14.05	10.47

The July 2009 general election revealed a somewhat unexpected re-politicization of Bulgarian society. Above all, this election was characterized by an unusually high voter turn-out (61 percent), despite the summer season and the MEP elections, which had taken place just a month before. Observers thought that two successive national elections within the span of a month would rather demobilize voters, but this forecast failed to materialize. The high level of voter mobilization benefited mostly the winners from the GERB Party: instead of the expected average of 1.1 million voters casting their ballots for them, their party slates received the support of almost 1.7 million citizens.

The political mobilization manifested itself in the high level of nationalist mobilization as well, namely in the almost mirror-like increase of the electorates of both – the Attack Party and the MRF. Thus for instance, in comparison with 2005, the Attack Party increased the number of its voters by almost 99,000 voters and reached a level of 395,418 votes altogether. At the same time, the number of MRF voters exceeded 610,000, which was an electoral peak in the entire history of this Movement.

The registered broad re-mobilization in 2009 was only relative, however. In comparison with 2005, the 2009 electoral turn-out

was higher by 570,000 voters, but nonetheless this figure falls well short of the overall voter turn-out in 2001. And yet, it is worth noting the indicative fact that in 1997 – when the ADF won at an early general election, and in 2005 – when the BSP scored a relative victory at a regular general election, the level of voter turn-out in comparison with the preceding elections was lower, whereas in 2001 – when NMSII was victorious, and in 2009 – when the GERB Party won the general election, what was observed was an electoral re-mobilization. This makes it possible for us to compare the two parties: the "tsarist" party and the "General's" party, whereby some observers regard them as two manifestations of modern political populism (Malinov 2007: 81; Karasimeonov 2008: 9-10; Smilov 2008: 27). For the time being, we can point out the finding that the re-mobilization after 2000 was connected with the emergence of new parties on the political arena, qualified – *inter alia* – as populist parties as well. On the other hand, electoral demobilization is observed to be connected with the fact that the general elections were won by "traditional" parties, which are civic formations by nature. And irrespective of the fact that such traditional parties opt to employ populist discourse, they cannot be qualified as populist parties.

The electoral mobilization in favor of the Attack Party is of the same order – it is a part of the large-scale populist wave observed in the post-2000 period. But under the Bulgarian conditions this mobilization is connected with another one – the mobilization of the electorate of the party of Bulgarian Turks and Moslems, i.e. the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF).

The full support lent to the new GERB governance by the Attack Party after 2009, which on the whole lasted until 2011, brought about internal differences among the extreme right-wing nationalists. Some of them chose to differentiate themselves from Volen Siderov and formed new parties. This weakened the electoral support for the Attack Party, given the fact that GERB and predominantly its leader, Boiko Borissov, had taken over many of the major theses Volen Siderov used to state, managing at the same time to present them in a much more acceptable way to Bulgaria's European partners. The voter withdrawal from the Attack Party acquired substantial dimensions after the internal split of the party in the period following the 2011 presidential election, in which Volen Siderov failed with an exceedingly low result.

5.2. Presidential Elections

The significance of the Attack Party as a new factor in the political life of Bulgaria was consolidated at the 2006 presidential election. This election, however, was much more important in terms of the development of the political mobilization in the country. On one hand, this election crowned a previous tendency, but on the other, it simultaneously contained new elements, which had the potential of determining the future development of the political processes in Bulgaria.

In the first leg of the election, Volen Siderov – the candidate of the Attack Party – unexpectedly came to rank second. He received 597,175 votes or 21.5 percent of the ballots cast on the background of a relatively low voter turn-out, as only 44 percent of the electorate went to the polls. What has to be added to this first-leg outcome, however, was about 40,000 ballots cast for the presidential running mates Peter Beron and Grigor Velez – nationalist candidates previously related to the Attack Party. Thus, the overall nationalist vote at this presidential election amounted to about 640,000 votes or almost 10 percent of the overall number of voters in the country, which makes up a remarkable result, especially bearing in mind that the electorate of these presidential candidates consists of voters who are easy to mobilize. At the run-off, Volen Siderov received 649,387 votes, which indicates that he had managed to mobilize the maximum threshold of the ultra-nationalist vote in Bulgaria at that time (i.e. 24 percent of the entire voter turn-out).

An exit poll held by the "Alpha Research" Agency indicates that the probable party structure of the voters who had cast their ballots for Georgi Parvanov includes – apart from the expected votes of BSP and MRF supporters (on the basis of the 2005 general election) – almost 200,000 votes cast by UDF and DSB supporters, as well as almost 400,000 votes cast by NMSII supporters.

Especially interesting is the profile of presidential candidate Volen Siderov, leader of the Attack Party. The "Alpha Research" Agency survey quoted above indicates that the majority of his voters came from within the circles of the Attack Party, which is hardly surprising, but votes for him were cast by supporters of all remaining parties with the exclusion of the MRF.

Table 2. Party Composition of the Votes in favor of Volen Siderov in 2006 (an “Alpha Research” Agency Survey)

Out of the 2005 voters.	First leg of the 2006 presidential election		Run-off	
	%	Votes	%	Votes
Attack Party	90	260,000	94	280,000
UDF	13	35,000	48	90,000
DSB	12	25,000	46	70,000
NMSII	26	180,000	35	180,000
BSP	8	90,000	4	30,000
		590,000		650,000

What is impressive here is the fact that the Attack Party leader received significant support from at least 160 – 180 thousand 2005 NMSII voters. The absence of an independent candidate nominated by the National Movement, the lack of a categorical stance on the part of the NMSII leadership, but mostly the disparate nature of the NMSII electorate, where voters professing different values co-exist, are the likely reason for their choice. In fact, in the 2006 presidential election NMSII was electorally split: at the run-off 400 thousand voted for Parvanov, 180 thousand – in favor of Siderov, and the remaining 140 thousand abstained from voting altogether.

The reaction of the UDF and DSB voters was similar: at the run-off, they were almost equally divided between the two presidential candidates. Half of them had remained entrapped in the now obsolete understanding about the need for an unremitting opposition to the “communists”, and that was the reason why they gave support to Siderov as an opponent of Parvanov. This lack of a democratic reflex and the understanding that both candidates were equally unacceptable (as Ivan Kostov himself said back then) brought about the division of the electorate of these two democratic parties. The other half, however, manifested a genuine democratic reflex and voted against Siderov, obviously consid-

ering him to be the “greater evil” (thus for instance, Maria Kapon, a Democratic Party MP, unequivocally differentiated herself from the stance of her right-wing colleagues and declared that she would vote against Siderov). And yet, the major influx of votes in support of Volen Siderov at the run-off most probably came from within UDF and DSB circles, whereas on the contrary, some former BSP voters, who had voted for Siderov in the first leg of the election, were most likely scared by the fact that he made it to the run-off and this time decided to vote for Parvanov.

Analyzing the electoral support for the Attack Party, some researchers launched the hypothesis that the bulk of its voters had come from within the circles of former BSP supporters and this is the reason why they identify the Attack as an extreme left-wing party. The Attack Party itself determined itself as an extreme right-wing party when the MEPs elected on its party slate sided with Le Pen’s MEPs and those of the rest of the far-right parties at the European Parliament.¹ On the other hand, among Attack’s voters there really are former BSP supporters, although

¹ A new parliamentary faction of far-right-wing parties was set up at the European Parliament under the name of “Identity, Tradition, and Sovereignty”. At the time of its establishment it had 20 MEPs, among whom was the Bulgarian MEP Dimitar Srtoyanov from the Attack Party. European Institute, Europe.bg, <http://www.europe.bg/htmls/page.php?id=7032&category=5>.

they are not from the 2001-2005 period, but most probably from the pre-1994-1995 period, who had then upheld nationalist ideas (the circles around the Public Committee for the Protection of National Interests – better known as OKZNI) or had professed some kind of Stalinism and attachment to order and the strong hand. At any rate, the attitude to Volen Siderov turned into a litmus test for sharing or defying the values defended by the modern liberal democracy.

In 2011 Volen Siderov withdrew his two-year-long support for the GERB government and ran the presidential election in the capacity of a competitor of the governing majority. But in the first leg of the election he received merely 122,466 votes (3.6 percent of the voter turn-out, thus ranking fourth out of a total of 21 presidential candidates). To his result, however, we can add another 92,286 votes cast for Pavel Chernev and Stefan Solakov, who until recently were closely connected with the Attack Party, plus the 33,236 votes cast for Krassimir Karakachanov – the presidential candidate of the VMRO, a right-wing nationalist party (although it has consistently been distancing itself from the Attack Party). Thus in reality, the circles of the extreme right-wing nationalism mustered the support of 220 – 260 thousand voters in 2011. The decline in comparison with 2005 is obvious. The reason why is that the GERB Party had managed to attract a portion of these voters. But nonetheless, the overall presence of extreme nationalism in this country remains significantly large.

5.3. Elections for Members of the European Parliament

In the first elections for Members of the European Parliament in 2007, the Attack Party received 275,237 votes, which once again shows a substantial level of mobilization (14.2 percent of all ballots cast), given the very low

level of the overall voter turn-out. Very like the situation in other European Union states, it is the anti-systemic and extremist parties that manage to mobilize themselves best. The MEP election outcome made it possible for the Attack Party to return 3 MEPs to the European Parliament, who joined the subsequently disintegrated parliamentary faction of the extreme right-wing supporters of national sovereignty.

In fact, the first MEP elections in the former socialist countries held in 2004 were mostly won by parties which can be qualified as Euro-skeptic and populist, although this Euro-skepticism is of a varied nature and we cannot apply such a qualification without appropriate reservations with respect to each individual party.

In Bulgaria, it was the GERB Party and the Attack Party that won the majority of seats at the MEP elections, despite the fact that there are significant differences between them. The GERB Party ran elections for the first time in 2007 as quite a new party. But it was clear that the majority of people readily identified it with its then informal leader, Boiko Borissov. In the course of the MEP election campaign, this party was rather critical with respect to the functioning of the European Union, and this criticism can be qualified as moderately skeptical. At the same time, observers qualify this party as populist. Nonetheless, it is very different from the Attack Party, not least because its political discourse is more moderate and it lacks race qualifications, but also because it received international support on the part of the European People's Party (EPP) and this is something the Attack Party cannot possibly achieve.

In the 2007 MEP elections, the Attack Party managed to mobilize its supporters very well indeed, despite the fact that the level of mobilization was not as high as that attained in the 2006 presidential election. It was clear

that the people it mobilized belonged to the group of those who considered themselves to be on the losing side during the country's transition, and now they were connecting their disappointments with the EU.

But Euro-skepticism is dissimilar. It can be found in the form of blatantly extreme right-wing populism (such as populism in Poland), it can also be a democratic type of Euro-skepticism (such as in the Czech Republic, for instance), or moderate and even liberal patriotism (such as the variety characteristic for Estonia and Latvia). In 2004, in some of the Eastern European countries, the Euro-skeptic parties even failed to be returned to the European Parliament (the case with Slovenia and Hungary). Once again, in this respect Bulgaria is somewhere in the middle – its Euro-skeptic parties did moderately well in their first MEP election.

Two years later, in the regular MEP election, the Attack Party continued to progress with a total of 308,052 voters, but this time it won only two MEP seats. One of these MEPs – Dimitar Stoyanov (step son of Volen Siderov) – became notorious as early as 2006 in the capacity of an election observer, when he made an outrageous comment about the Hungarian MEP Livia Járóka on account of her Roma origin. On the whole, the presence of MEP Dimitar Stoyanov at the European Parliament is marked by anti-Roma statements, which provoked several protest reactions among the rest of the MEPs.

The second MEP election in Bulgaria in 2009 was marked by the sign of the country's internal political problems. This circumstance was further enhanced by the fact that the regular general election was scheduled just a month after the MEP election. What the outcome of the 2009 MEP election in Bulgaria revealed was that the country was undergoing a simultaneous fragmentation and stabilization of its political space.

Paradoxically, the majority of the Bulgarian parties won MEP seats at this election. This was also due to the higher-than-expected voter turn-out: 34.43 percent in comparison with the 28.96 percent in 2007. As expected, the GERB Party registered the highest electoral growth, gaining almost 208,000 additional voters, followed by NMSP (the renamed NMSII) with an electoral growth of 84,000 and the BSP – with 62,000. The Attack Party and the Blue Coalition (set up by the UDF and DSB) gained about 30,000 new voters each in comparison with their 2007 electorates. Among the parties which lost voters at this election, was the MRF with 28,000 votes fewer.

On the background of the rest of the parties, it is only the Attack Party that makes an exception with its considerable increase of voter support in comparison with the local elections (from 193,000 to 307,000 votes), which is something that can be expected for a Euro-skeptic party. The voters have given it their support in the MEP election as a sign of protest vis-à-vis European policies, but they are rather more restrained when national or local governance is concerned. Nevertheless, at this MEP election the Attack Party remained close to the level of electoral support it enjoyed back in the 2005 general election (297,000 votes).

5.4. Local Elections

In the 2007 local elections, the Attack Party consolidated its position by entering the local authorities, although on the level of smaller mayordoms, having won only 5 mayor's seats altogether. This is very far from the expectations based on the results from the 2005 general election and the 2006 presidential election. This time the Attack Party failed to mobilize even its voters from the MEP election, held just a few months earlier, and only 70 percent of its electorate of that time gave support to its candidates for municipal councilors. The party won 269 municipal councilor

seats but succeeded in nominating candidates of its own in only 97 of the municipalities (out of a total number of 264 municipalities in the country). The overall number of votes it received for its municipal councilor candidates was merely 192,737, and this is an outcome much lower than the party's performance at all previous elections. This means that two years after its emergence, the party had failed to root itself sufficiently strongly throughout the country and had mainly remained a party of the bigger towns and certain local regions.

In the 2011 local elections, the withdrawal from the Attack Party became very visible – the party managed to win no more than 50 municipal councilors altogether. This outcome, together with the failure in the presidential election held at the same time, gave rise to sharp criticism addressed to the leader, Volen Siderov, and provoked a yet another split of the party after it was left by Dimitar Stoyanov as well. Many observers think that the disintegration processes within the Attack Party have become irreversible now and the party is hardly likely to make it to the Bulgarian Parliament in the next regular general election scheduled to take place in 2013. The latest opinion poll surveys held by various pollster agencies indicate that the Attack Party lacks the potential to overcome the 4 percent electoral threshold and its electoral impact remains within the limits of 1 to 2 percent of the overall country's electorate.²

6. Extreme Right-Wing Populism

This entire palette of new political organizations, which, despite their historical predecessors, were structured in the post-2000 period, professes a whole complex of ideas that can be qualified with the notion of "radical populism". However, there is a risk here of mixing

up different notions, which will make it difficult to identify the Extreme Right Wing in Bulgaria as "radically populist". Because populism is a notion connected with specific but world-wide phenomena, such as: the Populist Party in the USA from the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, the Populist Movement in Russia of the same period, but also the People's Ideology (*völkische Ideologie*) of the 19th century German Romanticism. In the 20th century, populism also had multiple manifestations, such as the Agrarianism in Europe between the two World Wars. However, the populist phraseology of the fascists in Italy and the Nazis in Germany are also included here by some of the researchers, alongside Peronism in Argentina after World War II. But what merits special mention are the modern manifestations of populism and what many researchers include here are: the leftist policy of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, the right-wing or far-right populism in Europe (Jörg Haider in Austria, Le Pen in France, or Siderov in Bulgaria).

The theoretical question is: to what extent can we discover a common framework or a common structure behind these so disparate phenomena in terms of both their origins and historical circumstances, which would make it possible for us to define the notion of populism? On the whole, populism underlines the supremacy of the will of the people "above any other principle, above the principles of the traditional institutions, and above the will of whichever social stratum", coupled with the willingness to establish a direct connection between the people and the governing elite without the mediation of institutions (Ivanova 1994). "Populism often presumes (propagandizes and demands) extreme forms of democracy and provides convenient tools for legitimizing political stances, actions, and techniques through 'the people'. Populism launches the ideal goal of establishing direct contact with

² Data of the "Mediana" Pollster Agency from May 2012; BBSS "Gallup International" from March 2012, and the "Alpha Research" Agency from February 2012 published in Dnes.bg.

the people's masses through various forms of direct democracy. Populism determines itself as an attempt to guarantee justice at times of transition, when habitual relationships are put to the test and people have the feeling that events are slipping through their fingers."

In a text devoted to populism, Emil Assemirov (Assemirov 2007) underlines: "In most general terms, each one who attempts to destroy the consensus established among the elites and to start talking from the premises of the 'low people's masses' gets stigmatized as a populist... It is traditionally accepted that parties in their capacity of bearers of collective ideologies are subscribed to be the bearers of populist messages and rhetoric. Political practice in many countries, however, shows that such bearers can also be, and often are, even the parties preaching ideologies of the individual representation. One of the serious reasons underlying this fact is that populism works with anti-elitist attitudes and a rhetoric based on the understanding about the organic national community – i.e. people and state must be something that is a whole to begin with." The author qualifies populism through its anti-elitist rhetoric, which challenges the consensus among the elites and on these grounds is seen as a genetically left-wing phenomenon. On the other hand, however, this is a strategy readily used by right-wing parties as well, whenever they resort to mobilizing the rapid support of the people.

This new type of populism can be seen in the organization and emergence of the Attack Party on the political scene.

But the populism of the Extreme Right Wing in Bulgaria has a specificity, which makes us distinguish it from the other also populist and nationalist doctrines (traditionally qualified as "left-wing" nationalism). This specificity is rooted in the lurking or often blatantly frank racist rhetoric and the dismissal of differences (as far as homosexuals are concerned, for instance).

It sounds paradoxical, but populism turns out to be a phenomenon of modern democracy and not of the non-democratic regimes where it is a mere substitute for democracy. In his academic lecture in front of the New Bulgarian University (NBU) audience, the French political scientist Pascal Perrineau made the following analysis of the foundations of modern populism: "In 1930, in a remarkable way Sigmund Freud showed how 'the uneasiness in culture'³ underlay the unleashing of deadly ideologies in Europe... This psychological explanation should be reinforced by a sociological explanation, which is rooted in the deep disquiet and uneasiness of our modernity. This uneasiness is simultaneously of an economic, socio-cultural, and political nature... And finally, here comes the last element of the crisis of our modernity, on which the dynamic of extreme right-wing organizations feeds, namely democratic uneasiness. In his brilliant political history of the region, Marcel Gauchet has proven how 'the disenchantment with the world'⁴ affects not only the religious sphere, but also totally affects all representative systems, by taking stock of the development of collective concepts and ideas, and – consequently – of political ideologies... This uneasiness seems to reach its culmination in the political systems where political conflict has lost its meaning, where the Left Wing and the Right Wing sometimes create the impression that in substance they have reached agreement, where the major political formations distribute among themselves the remnants of power in a quasi-institutional consensus... When citizens tell themselves: 'Society is changing, but the distribution

³ Perrineau refers to Freud S., *Le malaise dans la culture*, Paris, Coll. Quadrige, PUF, 1995 (first published in German in 1930 as *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* ("The Uneasiness in Culture"): Wien, Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag, 1930).

⁴ This is a reference to Gauchet M., *Le désenchantement du monde, Une histoire politique de la religion* ("The Disenchantment with the World, A Political History of the Religion"), Paris, NRF, Gallimard, 1985.

system of power and the elite remains unchangeable', the populists and their similar 'anti-' counterparts remain the only genuine opponents." (Perrineau 2003).

I permitted myself to include this long quotation by P. Perrineau, because – in my opinion – he has provided a clear and comprehensible diagnosis of the problem underlying the modern extreme right-wing populism. This is a populism defying any democratic consensus, a populism seeking an alternative "at any cost", which can represent the frustrations piling up in democratic societies. This is a populism which grows and proliferates in a situation when the old left-wing projects are in a crisis and because of that the old extreme left-wing strategies are in a crisis as well. It is also indicative that the manifestations of extreme right-wing populism are much more vehement and anti-democratic in the new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe than they are in Western Europe. In this connection Perrineau makes the following clarification: "Although the Extreme Right Wing from Central and Eastern Europe is very often structured and organized in a worse way than it is in Western Europe, it is ideologically 'firmer' and more openly anti-democratic; at the same time it is also an expression of a multilateral crisis in the democratic process: a transition from authoritarian regimes to democratic regimes, a transition of socialist economies to capitalist market economies, and a transition from industrialization to post-industrialization. This opens up prospects for the development of the Extreme Right, but its political space is relatively restricted because of the fact that the ideological orientations of a large number of political activists from these countries do contain nationalism, while historical fascism is strongly discredited there."⁵ (Perrineau 2003).

Daniel Smilov, in his text prepared for the Dnevnik Daily, also writes about the phenomenon of the new populism as an expression of the crisis of the liberal (modern, representative) democracy: "At a first glance, it is strange that right now, when many countries of the region have passed their maturity test with their accession to NATO and the European Union, a populist wave has surged in them, the major sign of which is the mistrust of liberal democracy and its major values: tolerance to others and the minorities, the defense of individual rights, the priority of the market principles in the economy." (Smilov 2006).

Undoubtedly, however, the crisis of representative democracy has deeper reasons. On one hand, as Perrineau points out, these are the political reasons. The more important among them are:

- egoistic individualism, which makes citizens withdraw from the classical forms of collective action;
- the weakening of the old division between the left-wing and the right-wing proponents, which for a long time has served as a political orientation and the basis for political debate;
- the weakening of social polarity in modern Western societies, the enhanced positions of a middle class, which is becoming a majority even in the category of hired labor;
- the disintegration of the old connections between political parties and territorial communities as a result of globalization and urbanization. (Perrineau, Rouban 2007: 25)

The economic and social reasons are significant as well. Among them are the effects of globalization, which considerably constrict the capacity of national governments to cope with the problems of their own political societies, provoking at the same time the mass suspicion that ultimately, things are decided "secretly" and somewhere "outside". In turn, the latter circumstance brings about a new

⁵ Here Perrineau refers to the article of Michael Minkenberg, "The radical right in post-socialist Central and Eastern Europe: comparative observations and interpretations", *East European Politics and Societies*, vol. 16, n 2, spring 2002, p. 335-362.

profound division between the better educated plus those open to Europe and globalization, on one hand, and the less educated, facing mostly the national and often suspicious of everything that is “foreign”, on the other.

And last but not least, of significance are the cultural reasons, among which is the crisis of the great messiah ideologies, such as those connected with Marxism, the disintegration of the communist bloc and, alongside it, the enhanced disappointment with the great projects and the distancing of broad social strata from politics altogether. At times, this latter fact is transformed into a phenomenon, which Pippa Norris calls “cognitive mobilization”, i.e. a politicization which fails to accept the classical forms of commitment to political parties and movements.⁶ (see Perrineau, Rouban 2007: 30-31).

If we accept that populism, as well as demagoguery, both accompany every regime of representative democracy, we should not be surprised then by the fact that populism is gaining momentum nowadays. But, on the other hand, today's populism challenges major principles of modern democracy, employing to this end democratic procedures and practices (such as general elections, freedom of speech, etc.). And this is the political paradox of our present day.

The problem is that today's populist movements are dangerous for democracy, not because they resort to the subject matter about direct democracy (this is not their main demand), but because they resort to nationalist mobilization based on the distrust with regard to foreigners and even on the dismissal of foreigners. Today's populism is predominantly national-populism. Its sources are much more nationalistic, and because of this they are also radically conservative and extremely right-wing, rather than people's (i.e. belonging

to last century's brand of populism). Modern populist movements do not merely challenge a particular political status quo: they are anti-systemic in the sense that they defy the reasons of the pluralistic democracy itself, availing themselves at the same time of its opportunities.

Many contemporary researchers of the problem are interested in the connections linking populism, nationalism, and patriotism. In his now popular book “Democracy and Populism” John Lukacs maintains: “The phenomenon of populism, unlike old-fashioned patriotism, is inseparable from the myth about the people. Populism is people-oriented, while patriotism is not. One can be a patriot and cosmopolitan (in terms of culture undoubtedly). But inevitably, a populist is some kind of a nationalist. Patriotism is less racist than populism. A patriot would not exclude a person of different nationality from the community in which they live together and whom he/she has known for many years; a populist, however, would always be suspicious of a person who does not belong to his tribe. The patriot is not necessarily conservative; he/she can even be a liberal – though not an abstract one, but always a liberal of a certain type. In the 20th century, a nationalist could hardly be a liberal.” (Lukacs 2005: 69).

Zhivko Georgiev gives another interpretation of populism in Bulgaria. “What enhances the attractiveness of the Attack Party's political “market” is the declining attractiveness of the other parties. The “Right Wing” is currently in crisis, the BSP is moving to the Right, while the left-wing flank is virtually depopulated... A huge niche has been left unpopulated and, should you be ambitious, you would prove to be very stupid, if you do not “put” your ideas in it. Siderov is offering a political product, for which he has drawn a lot on nationalist European populism. Here has come certain know-how – both European and Russian. Slavophil, Orthodox, and anti-Se-

⁶ This is a referral to Norris P. *Critical Citizen*, Global Support for Democratic Governance. Oxford University Press, 1999.

mitic (of the Russian xenophobic style) ideas have been brought over here, which we now discover in the ideology of the Attack Party. Something has been taken from Le Pen and other Eastern European populists. It is thus that Volen Siderov has created a convertible populist-nationalist and xenophobic cocktail." (Georgiev 2005). There is no doubt here that national-populism is being qualified as an extremely right-wing strategy.

Extreme right-wing populism, such as national-populism, in its essence is the revenge given by the oligarchic elements of modern representative governments to the democratic elements. This is the reason why the possible solution – which by no means can be called exhaustive, of course – is the development of an increasingly large number of forms of both direct democracy and civic participation meant to curb the omnipotence of political elites.

In its essence, the Extreme Right Wing in Bulgaria is excessively nationalist, and is frequently both racist and xenophobic as well. On the whole, despite the high results attained by the Attack Party in the post-2005 national elections, it remains limited in terms of electoral impact and would hardly be able to exceed a threshold of 6 or 7 percent of the overall national electorate in the foreseeable future. A contributing factor is also the scattered nature of its supporters among various smaller organizations, which not infrequently fight one another.

Despite this fact, however, the potential for mass protest movements in today's Bulgaria remains relatively high. The question is whether these movements will be subject to mobilization by means of the themes and ideas which are traditional for the extreme right-wing organizations, or – on the contrary – they will prove capable of differentiating themselves from such themes and ideas. The risk remains, although its magnitude is not that high.

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