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Bulgarian Political Culture and Civic Participation

- Modern Bulgarian political culture has emerged in result of intricately interlaced and inherited beliefs, views, values, and practices, coupled with new and continuously mastered and internalized modes of political commitment and conduct.
- The prevailing political cultural in Bulgaria today is rather strongly marked by community conservatism, national dreams, person-centeredness, as well as distrust towards the political class as a whole.
- The activist culture in contemporary Bulgaria is limited, even marginal, divided into two opposing halves: civic activity and nationalist mobilization.
- The commitment of the trade unions remains superficial and professionalized. The trade unions themselves are in quite a weak position within the existing system of social dialog.
- The civic sector in today's Bulgaria is strongly dependent on external funding; it is lacking sufficient internal support. Activities promoting civic participation are very restricted. Such a civic participation does exist, but only in limited and dispersed sectors of society, whereby its manifestations are more of a sporadic nature.

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1. Introduction

Political participation has been subject to numerous studies over the past several decades. The issue has been formulated in different ways in the social sciences and initially it has been treated in terms of "civic duty", i.e. "the obligation to participate" as an element of the mandatory understanding of democracy, be it ancient or modern democracy. In their omnibus comparative study on civic culture, Gabriel Almond and Sydney Verba devote a whole chapter to "the obligation to participate" (Almond, Verba 1963). But in the process of reasoning on this issue, they actually found out that in modern democracies the commitment of citizens is, in fact, far too feeble, and their participation is too restricted. In his study on democracy, Robert Dahl ranked "effective participation" as the number one criterion for the existence of this particular political regime (Dahl 1999: 44). This, however, did not prevent him from finding out that modern democracies are actually based on precisely such a limited level of participation.

On the level of individuals, participation in politics and public life as a whole is based on beliefs and notions related to what politics is all about and what is the significance of individual participation therein. These beliefs and notions are simultaneously an inherited experience from previous generations (political culture), acquired experience and amassed knowledge making it possible for people to get oriented in political life (civic competence), and internalized political values, self-consciousness about what is important in public life, and also what is correct and what is incorrect (value hierarchies).

Political culture has been subject to research for only a relatively short period of time, i.e. this is a new concept, which has now become well established in social sciences. Political theory makes a distinction between two approaches to political phenomena, namely: the culture-oriented and the

reason-based approaches. The approach to political culture, which is viewed as a political explanatory theory, often contradicts the reason-based approach of rational choices, which views politics as a market where the participants make rational decisions based on their own judgments about the possible costs and benefits from making one or another choice. Political culture is looking for the sociological explanations of the political behavior of individuals and social groups rather, and these are explanations based on shared values and beliefs, including emotions and irrational motivations. In the opinion of Todor Tanev, this opposition can be explained with the "pre-adolescent age" of political science. This is the reason why he offers a synthetic approach to the notion in his large-scale research work entitled "Political Culture", in which political culture itself emerges as a result of a complicated cultural choice, whereby pure rationality is always complemented by cultural rationality (Tanev 2001: 18-19).

In essence, there are several political cultures coexisting in modern Bulgarian society in the way they have been defined by G. Almond and S. Verba, namely: traditional, restrained (i.e. inhibited, suppressed, or controlled), and civic (Almond, Verba 1998). But we are also capable of defining a dominant political culture, which is made up by the cultural models shared by the majority of the population. What has been inherited here merges with the new, as political culture is always in a process of renewal. And yet, the newly emerging cultural models, which nowadays are connected to a large extent with Bulgaria's EU membership, do not necessarily possess upsides only. In the same way, Europe has always been associated with positive values in the Bulgarian mass consciousness, but Europe is not the only source of positive changes. The gradual sinking-in of the realization that European societies are also marked by certain contradictory features is part and parcel of the ongoing process of the modernization, which

is currently taking place in Bulgarian political culture. It is connected with overcoming the belief that over there, “in the white countries” (as one can often hear or read), things are certainly better than they seem to be in this country, “over there” everything is better in comparison with the situation “over here”.

If we assume that there is a dominant political culture, which also coexists with more or less marginal and/or minority political cultures, then the major question should be: what is the nature of this political culture, what are the political values and habits that are imposed, disseminated, and have survived the test of time in today’s Bulgarian society. As a consequence of the above, here come some subsequent questions, such as those concerning the specific mechanisms, which maintain the dominant political culture, and the possibility for developing an enduring and prevailing civic political culture in Bulgaria.

Modern Bulgarian political culture is a mixture of inherited and newly acquired political values, habits, and practices. We cannot possibly explain everything with tradition, although in our daily discourse we often resort to justifications such as “the 500-year long Turkish domination” or “the 45-year long communist dictatorship”. Nowadays, the young people in Bulgaria who have no personal experience whatsoever of communism (let alone the “Turkish domination”) make up almost one third of the voters in the country. The new elements in Bulgarian political culture have come in result of the acquisition of a personal, modern-times experience, which is becoming increasingly more often a European experience, ensuing from our recent EU accession.

If we go back to the question raised above about the type of the prevailing political culture, which is being established in Bulgarian society nowadays, and ask ourselves whether this could be civic culture indeed, then it would be interesting to analyze those features of the modern political culture in Bulgaria that contradict the features of the genuine

civic culture. To outline these features would prove valuable only if they are subsequently made subject to critical reasoning and consideration, including the clarification of the social structures that support them.

2. Unique Features of Bulgarian Political Culture

Bulgarian political culture has been the subject matter of numerous analyses and research works carried out in various academic fields, namely: history, philosophy, historical anthropology, sociology, and political science. One segment of the texts devoted to this research subject is qualified as “national or people’s psychology”. What has always been at stake in this case is the danger of going into a field of apparent triviality, which claims to reconstruct Bulgarian political culture.

One of the recognized and respected authors who have researched “the Bulgarian national character” is Ivan Hadjiysky, who has produced reference texts on the “way of life and spiritual nature of the Bulgarian nation”. His approach is sociological and it makes it possible for us to reconstruct to a large extent an acceptable picture of the major value-oriented traits of modern society in Bulgaria after the Liberation from Turkish domination in 1878. Having in mind that in all of the preceding years national liberation struggles had been waged, it is in these first years of independent political development precisely that the principal elements of what we have to analyze as Bulgarian national political culture today were formed and disseminated. “Collectivism – individualism – selfishness: these are the three major periods in the ethical development of Bulgarians thus far. These periods are the offspring of different social epochs and their typical bearers are different social groups”, is what Ivan Hadjiysky wrote in the 1930s in his “Moral Philosophy of the New-time Bulgarians” (Hadjiysky, 1997: 134). These three major periods are personified

by the peasantry who happily lived together (collectivism), the petty craftsmen (individualism), and the then moral bias of his own contemporaries (selfishness). The moral trait of selfishness was the embodied feature of merchants and capitalists, both before and after the Liberation (Hadjiysky, 1997: 175).

A systematic attempt has been made to tell the history of Bulgarian society from the Liberation in 1878 up to the eve of World War II. It is a large-scale two-volume work entitled "Bulgarian Society. 1878-1939" and its author is Roumen Daskalov (Daskalov, 2005). At the same time, quite a number of studies concerning the next epoch of communist rule have now been published and one of the most monumental ones is the research work of Ivailo Znepolsky entitled "Bulgarian Communism. Socio-cultural Traits and Power Trajectory" (Znepolsky, 2008). As far as the period after 1989 is concerned, there are several large-scale studies, which make it possible to reconstruct the elements of Bulgarian political culture. More specifically, those worth mentioning are: the book of Plamen Georgiev "Bulgarian Political Culture" (Georgiev, 2000), the book of Evgenia Kalinova and Iskra Baeva "The Bulgarian Transitions. 1939-2002" (Kalinova, Baeva, 2001), and also several sociological and culture studies, such as the work of the team of researchers entitled "The Networks of the Transition. What Actually Happened in Bulgaria after 1989 (Chalukov et al., 2008), as well as the study published by Andrei Raichev and Kuncho Stoichev entitled "What Happened?" (Raichev, Stoichev 2008).

The careful examination of Roumen Daskalov's study makes it possible to identify several important characteristics of Bulgarian political society in the period between the Bulgarian Liberation and 1939. These characteristic features seem to have preserved their significance, carrying it beyond the end of this period, and so much so that one is even likely to identify them in contemporary society as well. These characteristic features seem to be

of a lasting nature, but they are by no means predetermined and fatal in any sense. On the contrary, they are also subject to change, especially as far as their structure and composition are concerned. What can be elicited from R. Daskalov's study are the following characteristics of Bulgarian political life:

- **Egalitarianism**, which is most generally connected with the rural roots of the post-liberation Bulgarian society.
- The **weak civil society**, which is manifested both in the strong dependence of the parties in power and the difficulty they experience to survive in opposition.
- **Political personification**, which leads to the identification of parties with their leaders, to strong party fragmentation, and to the short durability of party political life.
- **Political violence**, which was a phenomenon frequently resorted to and which has left traumatic imprints in the Bulgarian social memory.
- Prevalence of **personal regimes** as a variety of authoritarianism, whereby the major decisions in politics always depend on the supreme leader.
- The **special attitude to Russia**, be it friendly or hostile, which however is a part of the more general idea about the patron who protects Bulgaria.
- The strong emphasis put on **the subject of national unification**, manifested in the form of both the various national dreams (e.g. the yearning for Macedonia, Aegean Thracia, etc.) and the glorification of leaders connected with the national idea.

In the conclusion of her comparative study entitled "Adaptation of Freedom", which focuses on the experience of Romania and Serbia, Diana Mishkova makes the following observation: "The most remarkable feature of all post-Ottoman Balkan societies in the 19th century – with the exception of Romania – is their relatively non-differentiated social profile" (Mishkova, 2001: 221). In the 1930s,

Ivan Hadjiysky also made a mention of this egalitarian culture, as actually did before him numerous observers of Bulgarian political life at the end of the 19th century (such as the Czech professor Konstantin Jireček or Pavel Milyukov, for instance).

To a large extent and for a long period of time, Bulgarian society remained rural and patriarchal, based upon the immediate equality and solidarity typical for the small community of the clan. The prevailing manners in the national-liberation movement, where the early political habits in the then young modern political society were formed, stemmed from the customs typical for the peasants and craftsmen who were the dominant part of the activists of this movement. According to Ivan Hadjiysky, these manners and their origins were also the deep foundations of the democratic traditions of the Bulgarian nation and this was the thesis he developed in his essay entitled "The Historical Roots of Our Democratic Traditions (Hadjiysky, 1997: 22-23). Plamen Georgiev takes a similar stance and goes on to make a detailed analysis of the dynamic development of Bulgarian national consciousness as an awareness of the interests of the entire community, which differ from both private corporate interests and the interests of the various professional guilds. In his opinion, egalitarianism in Bulgarian political culture is based on the dominant patriarchal culture, which was replaced in the course of the preparation for the 1876 April Uprising by a "typically Bulgarian culture of participating subjects", marked by their subjugation to and admiration for the charismatic leader (Georgiev, 2000: 96-103, 125). Quite similar is the thesis launched by Roumen Avramov in his study entitled "The Unrealized Conservative Manifesto of Bulgaria". Avramov reckons that the deeply rooted egalitarian and communal economic traditions in Bulgarian society nourished "the organic refusal to accept the principles of capitalist rationality" (Avramov, 1998: 744; Avramov 2001: 150). The latter

reasoning implies a second, non-democratic dimension of egalitarianism, which generates the readiness to accept authoritarian governance, as long as its embodiment manifests the features of an uncontested authority (such was the situation, for instance, at the time of the dictatorship established by Stefan Stambolov, but also during the governance of Alexander Samboliysky, and upon the acceptance of the authoritarian regime of May 19th 1934, or even afterwards, upon the imposition of the communist regime). The egalitarian attitudes are also connected with the fact that there was no landed aristocracy in Bulgaria – neither even of the "on site" type, which emerged in Serbia, nor of the hereditary type, as the situation observed in Romania. It is for this reason precisely that the "elitist conservative" party in Bulgaria has always been rather feeble, while the "populist conservative" party has enjoyed a fair amount of support.

The feeble civil society in Bulgaria has largely resulted from this late modernization, but it is also due to some of its peculiarities. For a number of reasons, the entities of the organized private sector (such as, for instance, the craftsmen guilds from the 19th century, or the trade unions and cooperatives between the two world wars in 20th century) were, on the whole, among the most vulnerable entities subject to political repressions. They were a fertile soil conducive to the emergence of a participation-based political culture. The defeat of the 1876 April Uprising, as Plamen Georgiev notes, dealt a blow on the culture of participation in Bulgarian society. Much in the same way, a blow was dealt on the network of cooperatives strongly dependent on parties, such as the Bulgarian Agrarian People's Union or the Bulgarian Communist Party, by the reprisals directed at the left-wing parties in the period between 1923 and 1925. This overall situation of a poorly organized private sector had a bearing upon the autonomy of the political parties themselves. In their greater majority and throughout the whole period before

the establishment of communist rule, these parties were devoid of strong roots and were poorly implanted in the tissue of Bulgarian society, hence they did not enjoy the stable support of certain public sectors. These parties, to a large extent, were groupings based on the principle of patron/clientele relations (Daskalov, 2005: 178). An exception to this situation are the so-called "ideological parties" (in the formulation coined by Roumen Daskalov), among which the author includes the agrarians, the social democrats, and the radical democrats, as well as some of the para-fascist parties, which emerged in the 1930s. The underlying problem all these parties shared was that because of the political development, the coup d'états, the political reprisals, and – ultimately – the total ban on the functioning of the parties in 1934, they all failed to perform their proper party building functions from an organizational point of view.

As soon as the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) established its monopoly position around 1947-1948, the multi-party system was liquidated and, in result, the attempt for involvement with party life vanished for a span of 45 years. Despite this general framework, whereby the organized private sector was completely "outlawed", during the 1960s, when a certain degree of liberalization was introduced, a sizeable, though strongly restricted, private sector began to develop, mostly in the form of subsistence farming, but also in the form of various production cooperatives. Some of these functioned as ancillary or outsourced food-processing or other manufacturing units and delivered supplies to the existing cooperative farms or even to various other state-owned enterprises. Historian Vladimir Miggeev sees this development, which further expanded on a larger scale in the 1980s, as an element of the process of "modernization and civilization" of society (Miggeev, 2006: 143).

After 1989, the actual reinstatement of the multi-party set-up took place on a "green field" or a "clean slate" rather, and the bor-

rowings from former parties were only superficial, as the previously amassed experience could not have been employed in practice. What was observed was the same continuing lack of proper "implantation" of these new parties as well, whereby a certain exception should be allowed here for the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), which was capable of availing itself from the organizational network of its predecessor – the BCP. Even today, the majority of the parties strongly depend on their stay in the corridors of power, they have no reliable public support, and run the risk of disappearing, if they fail to make it back to Parliament and remain out of office for a longer period of time. This fact is further reinforced by a process common to all European democracies, namely the crisis of the "old" parties, which by way of paradox concern the new parties in Central and Eastern Europe as well.

To a large degree, the parties in Bulgaria used to be strongly personalized – even the traditional party labels, used in journalist publications, stem from the names of the respective party leaders, e.g.: Karavelov's people, Tzankov's people, Stambolov's people, and later – Radoslavov's people, Tonchev's people, Dragiev's people, etc. Roumen Daskalov points out this personalization in the following way: "From an organizational point of view, for a long time the parties remained a grouping around a single leader, with local party nuclei formed around prominent local enthusiasts" (Daskalov, 2005: 162). This political tradition remained a lasting phenomenon in Bulgaria, and the time of communist rule, when the Party was identified with its "top leader", consolidated this model even further. The personalization of the parties before World War II brought about frequent party splits, which were generated by personal conflicts. Even parties of the ideological type, such as the Bulgarian Workers' Social Democratic Party (BWSDP) and the Bulgarian Agrarian People's Union (BAPU) fell apart into factions. After 1989, the personalized parties

were the prevailing majority, and in most of the cases their political longevity did not exceed the political life span of their leaders.

The frequent recourse to political violence has also exerted a lasting traumatizing impact on Bulgarian political culture. The use of political power for dealing with the political opponent or rival, even though such an opponent has been an ally quite shortly before, is a frequent occurrence in the country's political history. Taking different forms, such as coup d'états, political reprisals and assassinations, as well as political law-court trials, etc., the abuse of political power has been a constant companion to Bulgarian political history. This fact has brought about several lasting consequences for Bulgarian political culture. Firstly, it advocates political conformism, suggesting that the strength of those in power is insurmountable. Plamen Georgiev emphasizes that the defeat of the 1876 April Uprising dealt an irreparable blow on the emerging participatory civic culture in Bulgaria (Georgiev, 2000: 182). Later, at the time of Stambolov's governance, and even on a much larger scale in the period of 1923-1925, political repression aimed at destroying any thought or idea of an autonomous and opposition-minded civic participation. As for the time of communist rule, repression, which was especially intense during the first period of the establishment of this regime (between 1944 and 1950) and gradually subsided as far as its most visible and direct forms of its manifestation were concerned, aimed at suppressing any idea of opposition and resistance against the established order, as Ivailo Znepolsky writes in his monumental study entitled "Bulgarian Communism. Socio-cultural Characteristics and Power Trajectory" (Znepolsky, 2008: 71-72). Secondly, political violence creates a traumatic division in Bulgarian society – a division between executioners and victims, between the guilty and the not-guilty, and these are divisions that have always been part and parcel of the numerous dramatic periods in Bul-

garian history, such as those of 1887-1894, 1923-1925, 1941-1944. The manifestations of this division gained a particular prominence at the time of communist rule. These historical traumas in the collective consciousness of Bulgarians will prove to be of a lasting nature and despite the change of generations, they will continue to motivate people's behavior in terms of hatred or defiance, and the striving for revenge and retribution. A furious debate was held in 1990 between the two major political forces (the Bulgarian Socialist Party and the Union of Democratic Forces) about whose victims were more numerous and the bones of the predecessors of which party deserved more respect and veneration (Kalinova, Baeva 2001: 263). Up to the present day, the traumas in the collective consciousness have not ceased to be a powerful instrument for mobilization, although with the change of generations the significance of these memories has objectively started to decline.

Irrespective of the specific form of any given political regime, the prevalence of personal regimes is another stable feature of Bulgarian political history, which has had an impact on political culture. In the narrow sense, the notion of a personal regime is interpreted as a situation, whereby the monarch appoints and dismisses governments on his own, without taking into account the opinion and votes of the majority at the National Assembly (Daskalov, 2005: 167). The direct consequence of this practice, established at the end of the 19th century, is that it was the newly appointed government that was entrusted with the organization of the upcoming elections, so that it could come out victorious in the election contest. In a sense, general elections came to lose their significance in terms of civic participation in the overall political decision-making process, as the practice of personal regimes began to transform them into an ordinary popular opinion poll or referendum, the only purpose of which was to endorse the decision already made by the monarch.

The conviction that the most important decisions are made by the political leader, and that the will of the citizens is of no consequence, turned into a rigid stereotype in the way of thinking of the rank-and-file Bulgarians. This also gave rise to a skeptical attitude with respect to such a democratic procedure as elections are for instance, the underlying thinking being as follows: elections “are fabricated or engineered”, they are by no means a fair and level playing ground, but rather a referendum, the outcome of which is known well in advance. Personal regimes continue into the 20th century as well. Thus for instance, King Boris III inspired two anti-governmental coup d'états (in 1923 and 1934), and after 1935 he governed through Cabinets appointed by him.

After the establishment of communist rule, the institutional system, despite the official rhetoric about collective leadership, was based on the personal regime of the “first party and state leader”, on the will and willingness of whom all the important decisions depended. The practice of personal regimes encourages political conformism, as well as the conviction that the only way of changing anything in politics is when you manage to influence the very center of state power. After 1989, the practice of personal regimes was removed, but political culture has nonetheless preserved lasting and persistent residues connected with it. The most widely spread conviction is that the President, and/or the Prime Minister, possess all the power in the country and they are truly capable of changing things in a radical way only by virtue of their personal willpower. The paradox is that even today, 20 years after the beginning of the country's transition to democracy, the preferred names for identifying streets and squares are precisely those of the authoritarian political leaders in Bulgarian history.

Russia has proved to be an exceedingly influential factor at the beginning of the existence of the modern Bulgarian state with its

constant interference in the internal affairs of the country and substantial impact on its position on the international scene (Daskalov, 2005: 184-185). The Bulgarian political forces were divided mainly along the axis of Russophiles and Russophobes. During World War II, although Bulgaria was an ally of the Third Reich, its government refused to send even symbolically any military unit to the Eastern Front with the justification that the ordinary Bulgarians massively shared good feelings for Russia. During the Cold War, Bulgaria was thought to be the most loyal ally of the Soviet Union and this is an image that is lingering even today among the European elites. Even after 1989, the relations with Russia have been subject to poignant political debates and have invariably been an important part of Bulgarian politics. Without going into details on the issue about the reasons and substantiation for the Russophile (and Russophobe) attitudes in Bulgaria, they are nonetheless a substantial part of Bulgarian political culture.

Last but not least, the dreams of “national unification” are also a major characteristic of Bulgarian political culture. Immediately after the Liberation and especially after the Berlin Congress, the program for a “San-Stefano Bulgaria” seemed to be the realization of a national ideal dating back to the national liberation movement. Subsequently, the subject of national unification, which envisages mainly Macedonia and Aegean Thracia, turned into an important ingredient of Bulgarian politics. Even today, after numerous long and stormy historical developments, this idea is capable of mobilizing the political passions and expectations of some part of Bulgarian society. Regardless of the fact that nowadays we cannot register any wide circulation of the belief that “Macedonia is Bulgarian”, and given the conviction of the majority of Bulgarians that the independent Republic of Macedonia has the right to exist, “the Macedonian topic” continues to be a soft spot for them and has an overall impact on the susceptibili-

ties of Bulgarian society, at least as far as the refusal to accept most of the Macedonian interpretations of Balkan history is concerned. What should be fleetingly mentioned in this connection is the recently published book of Peter-Emil Mittev, Antonina Zhelyazkova, and Goran Stoykovsky under the title of "Macedonia at a Crossroad" (Mittev, Zhelyazkova, Stoykovsky 2009), which provoked strong reverberations in the national press.

3. Going into Politics and Political Commitment

Political culture has different manifestations. It also exists in the form of more or less stable mental schemes and convictions, but can be manifested, too, in the form of stereotypes (habits and deeply rooted practices) underlying the individual civic commitment. The modes of this commitment also differ, but the attitude to the currently active political parties seems to be particularly interesting. Although the average number of people, previously or currently involved in some form of membership in a political organization, hardly exceeds more than six or seven percent of the adult population, the motivation for their doing so is an undoubted indication of the attitudes, habits, and beliefs concerning politics, which a society shares on a wider scale.

By the end of the 19th century, no stable party organizations whatsoever existed in Bulgaria. In their essence, parties were patron/clientele groups, matching the following description made by Pavel Milyukov at the beginning of the 20th century: "The strength of party bosses lies exclusively in the fact that a headquarters of fanatically devoted political activists had to be actually set up around each such boss in the center, forming at the same time a group of partisan "friends" in the province, who more or less had a strong impact on a given locality. Whenever one of these parties happened to "come to power", the instruments and means of its influence

grew exponentially and a much larger circle of clients began to "stick" to the narrow circle of friends..." (Milyukov 1905: 122-123). Not less critical about the parties of that time is Dimo Kazassov who calls them "partnerships for the exploitation of power". Roumen Daskalov refers to Kazasov's description and goes on to qualify the parties as "coteries or cliques without any essential differences" (Daskalov 2005: 159). Roumen Daskalov offers an interesting matrix as a tool to qualify and differentiate the political parties existing by the end of the 19th century. The criteria are four, namely: 1. attitude to the royal court (manifested by loyal subjects, i.e. a reserved attitude); 2. attitude to the great powers (Russophiles, Germanophiles, or Antantophiles); 3. priority social circles (conservative, bourgeois-progressive, or radical); and 4. general political conduct (aggressive, hesitant, or passive).

Roumen Daskalov gives an overall organizations characteristic of the parties throughout the first period of the existence of the modern Bulgarian state, namely: person-oriented groups formed around a single leader, with local nuclei set up by prominent local party partisans. He quotes a text written by the Radical Party activist Stoyan Kosturkov in 1910, which describes the parties in the following way: "... several higher-ups in the city, and usually one in the province, this is the party or – more correctly – its standing membership". Another activist of the Radical Party, Todor Vlaikov, describes the process of politicization upon the establishment of Stambolov's dictatorship like this: "... the parties increase their membership by attracting "more sociable, knowledgeable and brave people" who would subsequently form their village "nuclei". Upon coming into office, each party seeks to incorporate the new "discontented or disgruntled people" (Daskalov 2005: 162-163).

During World War I, the party system in Bulgaria underwent a crisis, which – in the very least – was prompted by the fact that

almost a million men were mobilized and conscripted, and the martial law introduced at that time strongly restricted political activities. After the war, the parties found it hard to recover. The right-wing parties (e.g. the People's Party and the Progressive Liberal Party) plunged into a particularly deep crisis after the Balkan Wars, and so did the liberals (who governed the country at the time of World War I). The left-wing parties – agrarians, communists (1919), and social democrats, on the other hand, were the first to overcome the crisis and rapidly recovered from it.

The historical parties in Bulgaria vary on numerous counts, and literature abounds of different approaches to the typological systematization of political parties at large. For instance, they can be differentiated from the standpoint of their shared values (as well as on the basis of their economic and cultural outlook) according to the generally accepted left/right scale, although it is not always of an overall validity. They can also be differentiated from an ideological point of view and classified respectively as socialist, liberal, and conservative parties. Yet again, they can be regarded as parties of the status quo and revolutionary parties. In his reference work on political parties, the French political scientist Morris Duverger, who has done seminal work in party politics, introduces a functional classification of parties, which has now become truly classical, and divides them into mass parties and cadre parties. He introduces other classification criteria as well, according to the way in which parties emerge: either as internal parliamentary parties (set up in result of members of parliament regroupings), or external parties (emerging in result of a social movement outside Parliament) (Duverger: 1992: 36).

We can also elaborate a party typology from the point of view of two other criteria connected with the characteristic features of the Bulgarian institutional and cultural complex. On one hand, according to their public appeal, parties in Bulgaria are differentiated

into elitist parties (the focus of which is on the educated and well-to-do elite), class-professional parties (oriented mainly to the working class or the peasantry), and universal people's parties (or catch-all parties, which focus their appeal on all social strata, appealing to the country's population at large).

According to the first criterion, the People's Party or the Radical Democratic Party fall into the first group, communists and agrarians fall into the second, and the third group encompasses the liberals and the democrats. We can assume, of course, that these types are ideal, that parties actually have numerous distinctions, which this typology fails to take into account, and that in different historical periods parties can change their appeal.

The second criterion is connected with the principles of internal party organization and the role of the leader, i.e. with the way in which parties describe and present themselves to society at large. Parties are small societies themselves, they are systemic formations, which are subject not only to the provisions of their statutes, but also to a system of rules and standards, connecting in a single whole the requirements for recruiting new members, for loyalty, and for their functioning. Thus, we can differentiate parties, which base their activity on the public merits and social mission of their members (e.g. aristocratic parties, parties of the "called-upon"), parties, which consider themselves to be people's representatives, and present themselves as entities expressing the national strivings (populist and people's parties), and – finally – parties, which are clearly oriented towards the loyalty to their leaders (person-oriented parties).

I am fully aware of the extent to which the notions, describing party types according to this criterion, are loaded with meanings that could encumber the understanding of their use in this particular context. In Bulgaria, there were no aristocratic parties in the generally accepted meaning of the word, because of the lack of hereditary aris-

tocracy and above all – of landed aristocracy, as a result of the Ottoman invasion. Within this context, aristocratic are the parties based on the idea about the calling of those social sectors, which either by virtue of legacy, inheritance, and merits have managed to rise above the masses and this fact entrusts them with a special social mission. These parties did not think of themselves as mass parties, but rather as relatively small entities, which were organizing an enlightened knowledgeable caste carrying out the mission of a collective leader of the nation (e.g. the Conservative Party). As far as the qualification of “popular” is concerned, this word today is loaded with markedly negative connotations, but according to many researchers, this negativity is product of recent years only. Throughout the entire 20th century, especially in its first half, populism had a different meaning and, in the majority of cases, it carried positive connotations, such as an orientation towards the nation and the people who were considered to be excluded from politics altogether. At that time, “populist” was even considered to be synonymous with “democratic”. Historically, “populism” is a notion connected with specific but also 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 ideas in Russia of the same period, and also the folkisch ideology of German Romanticism in the 19th century. During the 20th century, populism also has numerous manifestations, such as agrarianism in Europe between the two world wars and – according to some authors – the populist phraseology of the Fascists in Italy and the Nazis in Germany, as well as the Peronist ideology in Argentina after World War II. As for the modern manifestations of populism, many authors include here the leftist policy of Hugo Chaves in Venezuela, the right-wing and far-right populism in Europe (e.g. Jörg Haider in Austria, Jean-Marie Le Pen in France, or Volen Siderov in Bulgaria) (Todrov 2007: 85-86). The person-

oriented (leader's) parties, for their part, are typical for Bulgarian political life especially after the 1878 Liberation when public opinion identified most of the parties with the names of their leaders, e.g. Stambolovists, Radoslavists, Tonchevists, Dragievists, etc.

These two criteria make it possible for us to construct a historical typology of Bulgarian parties within a single matrix, and consequently – to arrive at the typology of the various modes of party commitment. There are two criteria here and they are: the **social appeal** (elitist, class-professional, and nationwide or catch-all), and the type of **internal party organization** (missionary, populist, and person-oriented).

Obviously, this classification is only provisional. It does not take into consideration the historical dynamic development of party roles and identities, as well as the variety of other features of the parties. Bulgarian history seems to lack examples of leader's parties of the class-professional profile. To a certain extent, the BCP could be qualified as such a party at the time of Stalinism (“the personality cult”), but its function during communism is highly specific and cannot be compared with party functions in a pluralist or multi-party system. Party typology makes it possible for us to classify party commitment into several historical categories. The mechanism of participation in these six (actually five) ideal party types is different.

The major motive for the elitist-aristocratic parties is the self-consciousness that the very fact of their belonging to the elite (cultural, intellectual, economic) assigns a certain mission to the individual. The party activity commitment here is aristocratic and closely connected with the awareness of both social duty and mission, which a natural aristocracy feels. The elitist-aristocratic parties have a similar motivation, but here it is determined by the consciousness that the political elite is the emanation of the nation, they believe that their roots are in the people, and this is the reason

why they are the natural leader of these people. The elitist-leader's parties motivate their commitment with the leader in the following way: he/she is the concentration of both the party will and the big project party members pursue, where loyalty to the leader is the underlying factor of paramount importance.

For the class-professional parties, participation is motivated by a certain class-related or professional interest, which the individual pursues prompted by the meaning he/she finds therein. Thus for instance, the Bulgarian Workers' Social Democratic Party (narrow socialists) (BWSDP – n.s.) is a party of the intelligentsia, which stands for the class interest of workers. The populist class-professional parties (mostly the communists and the agrarians) motivate their participation both with their belonging to a certain class or profession and with the self-consciousness of the elite, which makes them believe that they are the emanation of the class or the profession and that they precisely are its most determined part.

For nation-wide parties, the appeal is directed to the entire population, which in precise terms means that it is directed to no one in particular. To a much greater extent they are inclined to embrace the populist ideology, and yet we can distinguish here three sub-categories. The nation-wide aristocratic parties motivate their participation with the self-consciousness that they are a national elite open to all ("honest and progressive", or "concerned for the nation") people. As for the democratic-populist parties, participation and the involvement with their activity is motivated with the consciousness of fulfilling a mission, which, however, is of a nation-wide significance and is open to all categories of people within the nation. The nation-wide populist parties present themselves as "parties of the entire population" (e.g. Stephan Stambolov's "Undivided Bulgaria"), which are the emanation of the whole nation. Usually, these are the parties, which are most frequently qualified as populist parties. The

same refers to the nation-wide person-oriented parties where the leader is the emanation of the nation – not only the expression of its limited and "natural" elite, but of the entire nation precisely. The motivation for participation here is the self-consciousness of being elected by the leader, as well as the self-identification with this leader namely.

In his study entitled "The Party System in Bulgaria", Georgi Karasimeonov has developed the argument that unlike some other communist countries, such as Poland and Hungary, where the monopoly on power practiced by the communist party began to disintegrate as early as the onset of communism, the BCP monopoly on power in Bulgaria started to disintegrate as late as the beginning of the post-communist transition, i.e. with the resignation of the party leader Todor Zhivkov on November 10th 1989 (Karasimeonov 2006: 23-24), despite the existence of illegal by nature dissident organizations, which cropped up in the period between 1988 and 1989. The transformation of the Bulgarian one-party system inherited from communism (in essence it was a one-party system, although an official agrarian party existed as well) happened within several months only, which gave birth to the new party pluralism. According to their origins, the new entities of this party pluralism can be classified into four categories as follows:

- **a successor party**: an essentially new party, transformed on the basis of the BCP, which is capable of co-existing in a multi-party political environment;
- **parties based on the dissident movements and clubs**, which have either emerged from the cradle of the BCP, or have been structured outside it, such as: the Green Party, the Alternative Socialist Party, the Alternative Socialist Movement – independents, the Federation of the Clubs for Openness and Restructuring, the Federation of Independent Students' Societies, etc.;
- **reinstated old parties**, such as the "Nickola Petkov" Bulgarian Agrarian Peo-

ple’s Union, the Bulgarian Social Democratic Party, the Radical Democratic Party, the Democratic Party;

- **newly emerged parties**, which often make recourse to “imported” labels in order to demonstrate the novel possibilities for political commitment. They are a multicolored conglomerate of small organizations bearing a variety of label-names, such as: “liberal”, “democratic”, “national”, “fatherland”, “independent”, “republican”, “Christian”, etc., and even a party of the paradoxically striking name of “Non-party Affiliated Citizens for Democracy”.

This new type of political commitment, actually only a newly-practised type, encompasses a number of varied modes of actual practices. On one hand, here we see people who used to be members of the Communist Party at the time of communism who got committed once again, and on the other hand, there are people of no party affiliation who also got involved. And on a yet another hand, former communists or non-party-affiliates who nonetheless were involved in dissident organizations continued their involvement in politics and so did people who had preserved the memory of their pre-1946 political commitments. Many people, especially former BCP members, got completely disengaged from any party activity whatsoever.

As early as the very beginning of the post-communist transition, a survey held by the Center for the Study of Democracy (CSD) in August 1991 indicates that nearly 7 percent of the respondents self-determined themselves as active participants in the party they chose to be members of, and almost 13 percent said that they supported the events and activities of their chosen party. The share of passive supporters was 38 percent, and another 43 percent said they were not interested in participating in political life altogether. The major share (more than 60 percent) among the active participants in party life were supporters of the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), whereas only a quarter of all the respondents were supporters of the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF). This shows that the BSP was still relying on a broad membership inherited from the old Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP), whereas the UDF enjoyed a smaller number of formal members, but a much larger group of supporters. After the year 2000, the “traditional” parties of the transition – the BSP and the UDF – seem to be losing members, although this concerns the UDF to a larger extent, especially having in mind the split of the Party in 2004, while – on the contrary – another party of the transition, namely the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF) has been enlarging its membership.

Party Membership in 2009 and Percentage of Voters

<i>Party</i>	<i>2009</i>	<i>% of the electorate</i>
BSP	190 000	2,8
MRF	93 000	1,4
The „LEADER” Party	40 000	0,6
Order, Legality and Justice Party (OLJ)	35 000	0,5
National Movement for Stability and Progress (NMSP)	26 000	0,4
Democrats for Strong Bulgaria	23 000	0,3
GERB – Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria	22 000	0,3
IMRO	20 000	0,3
UDF	10 000	0,1
The “Attack” Party	6 000	0,1
Total:	465 000	6,9

Source: the „Troud” Daily, March 26th, 2009, page 17

The coincidence of the numbers obtained in 1991 and 2009 respectively is amazing, even if we make an allowance for the fact that party headquarters usually mark up the data they submit. Around 7 percent of all voters during the Bulgarian transition have been closely involved in the activities of the political parties. The paradox is that the iridescence of the new party palette in Bulgaria and other post-communist countries has shaped up in conditions, in connection with which a number of researchers in the Western world formulated the thesis about the crisis of the traditional political parties in the 1980s.

The party differentiation in post-communist Bulgaria has already been widely analyzed. There are also explanatory paradigms concerning the process of party formation. Herbert Kitschelt regards this process as a successive transition through three stages of party organization: a) around a charismatic leader; b) through a clientele/patronage organization; and finally c) the establishment of a programmatic party. To a large extent, Kitschelt sees the success of the political transition as a chance for establishing party differentiation between the programmatic parties (in terms of an ideal model, inasmuch as empirically each party is the symbiosis of charismatic traits, clientele relationships, and programmatic orientation). This process is also a process of transition from a non-stabilized to stabilized type of democracy, which – from the point view of the parties – means a high degree of party distinctiveness and more or less subdued manifestation of their peculiarities. On the contrary, at the onset of this process, the parties lack distinctiveness: they are poorly distinguishable and insufficiently differentiated in programmatic terms, but nonetheless they have well manifested characteristic traits, mainly as far as their genealogy is concerned. This is the reason why they badly need legitimacy in the political environment at the onset of their existence. (Kitschelt 1995). Michael Waller pays attention to the fact that

the new parties have no clear role. That is why they need some symbolic identification with universally acknowledged models, such as the identification with the European model for Bulgaria. In this way, the newly established (transformed or reinstated) political parties in Bulgaria managed to legitimize themselves through the European model (they actually turn out to be the product of this model), introducing at the same time the European model (they turn out to be its factor) in Bulgarian political life (Waller 1994). According to Georgi Karasimeonov, there are two major factors underlying the party differentiation in Bulgaria in the post-1989 period, namely: historical roots and self-identification. In his opinion, what is characteristic about the new parties is their self-identification, these parties are “label parties”, because “they themselves have determined their ideological and value orientations, as well as their place in the political environment, having neither any political experience and practice, nor any clearly declared voter preferences behind themselves (Karasimeonov 2006: 132).

The reasons for the party differentiation in Bulgaria at the beginning of the transition process to democracy are mostly internal. And yet, “the European idea” played an important role in this process. The activity of the political parties in the first years of the Bulgarian transition process had a considerable impact on party differentiation. The newly established parties were inclined to accept the ideological and programmatic messages of those western political parties, which had expressed the willingness to help them. This assistance was expressed in terms of material support, and – first and foremost – in terms of European legitimacy. It is precisely because of this fact that the work of those international experts, who were frequently sent over to help the political parties in their preparation for the first free elections in the country, in the elaboration of their first political programs, and their political advertising campaigns, can be claimed to

have been decisive for the image of the influential parties, especially those belonging to the circle of the then anti-communist opposition. Nonetheless, however, even the BSP, the successor of the communist party, was under the strong impact of the messages coming from the western parties (mostly the social democratic parties).

3.1. Typology of Party Memberships

A total of 130 parties (political labels) are recorded to have run the general elections held between 1990 and 2005, out of which 85 made their presence only once. The remaining 45 labels are recorded to have run two or more general elections, and out of them 20 parties made their presence at three or more general elections. Out of all contemporary parties (party labels), only 3 have taken part in all the 6 general elections, namely: the BSP, the UDF, and the MRF. Very few labels have been preserved over the 20 year-long Bulgarian transition, let alone the fact that their underlying realities have also changed a lot. The newly established parties date back to the period between 2003 and 2005 when the GERB Party, the "Attack" Party, and the Order, Legality, and Justice Party were set up, alongside the numerous other parties established on nationalists basis by former military personnel, as well as parties set up by several local business groups.

This means that nowadays party loyalty or the durability of party preferences is not the prevailing element of the dominant political culture. Loyalty does exist, but it seems to be rather marginal.

According to the Political Parties Act of 2005, the least number of founders of a party cannot fall below 500. (The 2008 amendments to this Act require a minimum of 1000 founders.) Even the most superficial calculation indicates that what this provision means is that at least 65 000 citizens have participated in the establishment of a party. To their ranks we should also add the founders of the

newly established parties, such as the "Attack" Party, the GERB Party, the "Leader" Party, and the Order, Legality, and Justice Party (OLJ, the Bulgarian abbreviation of which is RZS). Some of them, of course, might have been founders of more than one party. Other citizens may have joined the membership of a given party at a later stage. A portion of the party members may have remained in this capacity in the party books and registers only, while others have been more or less active members of this party. Some of the founders and the newly accepted members maybe continue to be party members to the present day, while other have either dropped out or have left the party altogether (be it voluntarily or not), and in such a case they now may have either no party affiliation whatsoever or may have joined other parties.

It is almost impossible to make an estimate of the number of citizens who have changed their parties in their capacity of their official members throughout the entire period of the post-communist transition. The former BCP members should be excluded from this category as some of them re-registered in the BSP in 1990, others remained without any party affiliation, and yet others joined other political parties. This movement cannot be qualified as "change of party label", inasmuch as the BCP itself was not a party in the classical sense of the word, but turned into the basis for the establishment of an essentially new party – the BSP. It is also difficult to make an assessment to what an extent the parties themselves – when they change their labels or merge with other political entities – retain their political identity and to what an extent their members uncritically go along with these modifications and changes.

In 2005, in compliance with the Political Parties Act, the National Audit Office received the reports of 105 parties, while in 2006 the number of these reports was 106. In this connection, the website Obshestvo.net (i.e. Society.net) wrote as follows: "Con-

trary to the widely circulated information about the existence of more than 400 parties in Bulgaria, in 2008 the National Audit Office has received the official reports of 165 political organizations (two of which have merged). Subsequently, Obshestvo.net carried out its own investigations about the number of parties, which have registered an active presence on the Internet. As it turned out, only 28 out of all the currently registered parties have a web site of their own, which has regularly been renewed over the past half a year. Actually, 15 parliamentary parties and 13 parties outside Parliament were present on the Internet on-line. If we add to these the two newly established parties in 2009, i.e. the United People's Party and the Bulgarian New Democracy Party, the ratio becomes 17 to 13... The majority of citizens believe that the parties receive subsidies! It is the parliamentary represented parties only that receive government subsidies, as well as those, which managed to go over the 1 percent electoral threshold at the last general election. Currently, government subsidies are provided to the parties organized in 6 parliamentary factions plus to another two parties outside Parliament, namely: the New Time and EuroRoma. In other words, the number of government subsidies currently is 8 altogether."¹

By 2009, the number of the active political parties was around 20. Most of these parties enjoy a solid history and a certain amount of organizational stability. It should be reminded here that there were 5 general elections held between 1990 and 2005; the number of parties, which ran at least 3 out of 5 of them, is also 20. Still, these are different parties not only from the point of view of their ideological and international identification, but from the standpoint of their inception and functioning as well. On one hand, these are mass political parties, the

members of which manifest a strong self-identification with their organization, such as the BSP and the UDF for instance – the two major political formations of the Bulgarian transition. There are people among their members who never gave up on them from the very day of their inception to the present day. On the other hand, in their essence, these two parties are “civic parties”, where the individual self-identification is with the organization, not with the leader, who – as recent history indicates – can be replaced quite often, but this by no means brings about the disappearance of the organization itself. The general typology of these two organizations, however, does not remove the substantial ideological and political differences between them.

Parties marked by a strong self-identification with their organization are also the MRF (set up in 1990) and the “Attack” Party (set up in 2005). What is common between these two parties from the viewpoint of their functioning is that the self-identification of their members with the organization is accompanied by the enormous role of the leader who is inseparable from his party. Similar motivations among the party membership can be seen in the DSB party, which by its origin is an essentially civic party, but where the self-identification with the leader is particularly strong. From a functional point of view, this type of parties can be qualified as civic-leader's parties, but – again – this fact does not remove the considerable ideological and political differences existing between them.

The leader's parties, where the self-identification of their membership is mainly with the leader, underwent significant development in post-communist Bulgaria. This type of parties have existed for a long time now and the mentioning of the Bulgarian Business Bloc, set up in the 1990s and subsequently transformed into George Ganchev's block, is sufficient in this respect. After 2001, howev-

¹ <http://www.obshtestvo.net/content/view/1055/4/>

er, two other parties emerged in this category. First came NMSII (National Movement Simeon II), which subsequently transformed its name to National Movement for Stability and Progress (NMSP), thus replacing the name of the leader, i.e. the former Bulgarian monarch Simeon II, with “stability and progress”). The second party to emerge as a leader’s party was the GERB Party, in which the party leader, Boiko Borissov, is the symbol of the party itself. Somewhat similar is the Bulgarian Social Democracy Party (which has recently changed its name to “Bulgarian Social Democracy – EuroLeft”), which is strongly identified with its leader – Alexander Tomov.

A fourth type of parties from those included in the list above (i.e. parties enjoying a certain amount of stability) are small organizations of “missionaries”, or in other words parties set up by citizens united by a cause, which remains important for them, even though few people share it. Such small parties have existed from the very onset of Bulgarian transition and they have managed to raise both membership and voters who remain more or less loyal to them. Most frequently, these are organizations with a certain “mission”, such as “moderate nationalism” of the “Granite” Union of National Dignity (leader of which is Roumen Leonidov), or the Communist Party of Bulgaria ((leader of which is Alexander Paunov).

In addition, a fifth type of parties can be distinguished, including parties, which have emerged mainly on the basis of splits and have existed for a long time in the capacity of “associate” or “rider” parties, i.e. they always participate in coalitions with a big-size party acting in the capacity of their “carrier”, as such large parties are eager to enlarge their coalitions. The self-identification of such associate or rider parties is both civic and leader-oriented, but it is also marked by the long-standing cooperation with the bigger party. As parties of this type we can qualify the Movement for Social Humanism

or the Social Democrats Political Movement, but other parties, such as the New Time and the United Labor Party are also subject to this qualification. With time, parties like these acquire the behavior of “addition parties”; they are always open to setting up a coalition and do not insist on possessing a political profile of their own. The membership in such parties is most frequently motivated by the personal or family history of their individual members, and as far as the member self-identification is concerned, it is connected with the “carrier” party as well.

There is a sixth group of “label parties”, the existence of which is maintained precisely because of the symbolic value of their label, while in fact they have ceased for a long time now to produce specific causes and consequently to attract specific categories of citizens for their implementation. In practice, such parties have frozen their activity and are ready to enter any coalition, or are even inclined to “sell” their label directly. According to the “Plovdiv-online” website, “wealthy businessmen connected with the gas and petrol business are showing interest to the Democratic Party”.² At the time of local elections, however, similar information circulates about different other parties, such as the agrarian parties, for instance. In this case, to be a member of such a party is only worth it, if the “label party” gains the prospect of being elected either in the local or the central authorities in the country.

The voter self-identification with the parties is not especially high. Thus for instance, at an opinion poll held in 1999, 60 percent of the respondents directly avoided answering the question whether they felt close to any particular party. This self-identification diminishes in the younger generations, which feel reserves with respect to all the parties in the country.

² <http://www.plovdiv-online.com/balgariya/> (Alexander Pramatarsky is selling the Democratic Party) aleksandar-pramatarski-prodawa-demokraticheska-partiya.html

Consolidation of Democracy Survey, 1999

<i>How close do you feel to any of the parties?</i>	%
Very close	7,4
Close	24,5
Not very close	8,1
No answer	60,1

Source: BBSS "Gallup International"

This overall picture of the declining attractiveness of parties, especially as far as the young generations are concerned, does not preclude the opposite phenomenon, namely the process of party commitment and involvement mostly with the new political formations. The type of this militant attitude to a large extent repeats the 1989 models, but – paradoxically – inherits the model of the classical communist militantism. Obviously, the latter is on the decline in result of the very process of a post-communist transition (S. Devaux 2005: 42). This model of communist commitment, which is part and parcel of the political culture heritage of the post-1989 generations can be utilized in terms of the experience amassed, but now amassed under new conditions and in novel organizations. The new political parties accept much of the culture typical for the organization of the communist party, although in terms of their principles and ideologies they remain quite different.

3.2. Participation in Civic Organizations and Movements

The involvement with various public organizations and political parties (militantism) is inherent in each modern society. In Bulgaria, the first ever such practices developed at the time of the National Revival, mostly during the 19th century. At that time, the most widespread and popular form of civic organization in the country was the Chitalishte (a reading room, which transcended its literal meaning and grew into an institution of education,

enlightenment and culture). According to a study of this epoch made by R. Gavrilova and I. Elenkov, the number of Chitalishta at that time was 130. Together with them, during the 1860s and the 1870s, a variety of other civic societies cropped up, mostly students' and women's clubs and societies, but according to the authors of the study, the patriarchal ideology remained dominant in these organizations (Gavrilova, Elenkov 1998: 16, 27). Despite the large number of these civic organizations, they failed to create a sufficiently dense network of forms of civic commitment or a sufficiently intensive "social capital", which could make it possible to establish a durable and effective form of democracy. The 1934 coup d'état marked the onset of a lengthy period, in which the existing civic organizations were both strongly centralized and dependent on the state.

The communist authorities turned upside down the entire civic sector in the country and totally restructured it, especially after 1951 (Gavrilova, Elenkov 1988: 91). Although after 1956 in particular, the regime underwent some changes, the centralized system of control over all civic initiatives remained intact. In fact, during the rule of communism there was quite a well developed network of organizations relying on civic participation and initiative, but they existed as "official" organizations, closely connected with the party in power. Nonetheless, these organizations created room for individual initiatives and – most importantly – for civic voluntary practices and this experience precisely was appropriately put into practice after 1989 for the reconstruction of civic activities.

In a collective research on the forms of political commitment in the period of post-communist transition, Sandrine Devaux studies the social inertia of the institutions of the old regime after 1989, which has a bearing upon the forms of political commitment. Her hypothesis is that socialist societies are differentiated rather than monolithic, and that

coercion did not dominate all public spheres. The individuals accept and go through the post-communist transformations in a different way. Frequently, the newly established associations are in some way a reconversion of the old ones. This is the reason why the development of associated life after 1989 cannot by itself be an indicator of the social change or transformations taking place (Delvaux 2005: 82-83). The experience amassed before 1989 is capitalized now, because it can be useful under the new conditions as well. In this way, the year 1989 is a crucial one, but change is not so radical, at least not in all the dimensions of public life, the practices of militantism included.

The political profession in the true sense of the word emerged with the establishment of representative government. It was precisely at that time that a category of people emerged determined to devote themselves to politics as a profession. There are two broad concepts about representative governance from the point of view of the representatives in question. According to the first one – the universal concept – the elected representatives cater for the common interest only, not for the interest of the specific public group, which has elected them to office. According to the other one – the pluralist concept – the elected individuals represent society, but they do not represent each individual part of the public. The latter concept refers to John Stuart Mill, but also envisages our times and the modern concept of communitarism. Its essence is that each individual assigned or elected to a governmental office is a representative and in a certain sense has a dual function:

- he or she is a trustee (manager) when acting in the capacity of an individual and an expert;
- he or she is an agent (representative) when paying attention to the reactions of his/her voters (Lagroye 2003: 201-202).

These two roles are played by the political actors simultaneously, often they are undivid-

ed, but different circumstances and situations (for instance, what is the audience in front of which he/she is performing a given act) lead to the domination of one or the other aspect of this duality. Politics as a profession consists of this precisely: the maintenance of the delicate balance between these two roles.

Militantism is the environment, in which the political professionals – i.e. the individuals who have chosen politics as their professional field – are normally selected. In his lecture entitled “The Profession and Vocation of the Politician” (1919), Max Weber points out that there are two ways of making politics: “either to live ‘for’ politics”, or “to live ‘on’ politics”. But this distinction, according to Weber, is not absolute, on the contrary, “each serious person who has devoted himself or herself to a cause, lives simultaneously for and on it” (Weber 1993: 74-75). Max Weber shows how modernity is marked by the emergence of professional politicians, who have separated themselves from the civil servants in order to base their activity on „ira et studio”, i.e. on passion and conviction, precisely because they are in a state of a constant struggle (Weber 1993: 85). It is Weber again who gives the idea of elaborating a typology of politicians from the viewpoint of the ethos they profess in politics, i.e. politicians who share the ethic of responsibility, and politicians who share the ethic of conviction, pointing out that the latter are poor politicians in the final account (Weber 1993: 110-111). The referral to Machiavelli here is a necessary one: politics is not about turning one’s back to personal moral beliefs or convictions, but rather about subjugating them to a responsibility, which transcends the individual, a responsibility for the others. This does not mean that there are no “politicians of conviction”, whom we often qualify as “fanatics” or “obsessed by the idea”. On the individual level, however, what we most frequently encounter is the legitimation of conviction through responsibility, which is something like being convinced in the legitimacy of duty.

One can hardly see pure types of professional politicians in Bulgarian political life (and the question is whether one could ever find such a phenomenon in other political communities, for that matter). The predominant type of a politician in the first years of independent political existence is the “demagogue”, who relies on a network of party “bosses” (in the sense implied by Weber), which is actually the system of a small party headquarters around the party leader, assisted by local notables, who are capable of ensuring votes. Often, this structure is initially founded on personal loyalties, but it is subsequently replaced by a system of personal interests in the distribution of the political spoil in the form of various paid governmental posts. This is the time of the coterie-parties where loyalty to convictions always comes second. The emergence of the “ideological parties” in political life introduces the techniques of persuasion and the mass mobilization in the name of the lofty goal – a new society, a new state. Along with them comes the new politician – the convinced missionary, for whom the goal justifies the means. However, this also creates a periphery of convinced supporters capable of depriving themselves in the name of the chosen cause. This is how militantism emerges – as a conscious commitment to a political or civic organization in the name of a certain goal defined in terms of duty and conviction simultaneously.

At the beginning of the transition to democracy in Bulgaria, one of the most visible forms of militantism was the activity carried out within **the trade unions** of the hired workers and employees. In the new situation, this activity could only be based on two relatively opposite traditions. On one hand, this was the transformation of the Bulgarian Trade Unions from an essentially official, state-directed, and mandatory organization into a genuine confederation of free trade unions, the objective of which is to stand up

for certain collective rights and corporate interests. On the other hand, this was the experience of the “Podkrepa” Independent Trade Union, which emerged as an illegal organization, but the essence of which was to act as a political entity set up to protect human rights. “Podkrepa”, however, gradually withdrew from any direct involvement with politics in order to go deeper into trade union activities. In both cases, the transformation was painful and difficult at the same time. With the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria (CITUB) the problem ensued from the lack of protest experience within the organization, as well as the lack of experience to represent workers’ interests, especially in the emerging private sector where the trade unions have a feeble presence even to date. The “Podkrepa” Confederation of Labor expanded its trade-union presence, but initially this expansion also covered the state-owned enterprises where it could rely on the opposition experience it had gained thus far. In the private sector, however, its presence remained relatively weak. The major thrust of trade union activities over the larger part of the transition consisted in upholding the corporate interests of the employed in the large-size state-owned enterprises, which soon slipped into a crisis, drastically cut their output, and after a succession of rather unsuccessful privatization deals were closed down in the majority of cases. In this way, the trade union activity was directed mainly at exerting pressure for the preservation of now non-protectable jobs or – at the worst – at lending support to the demands for repaying old and overdue debts to the workers. To some degree, these circumstances placed the trade unions in a situation of lagging behind events, as they were mostly active in the large-scale losing enterprises, while they had little experience in the other – smaller but more active – enterprises.

The trade unions remained stronger in the sector of public services, mainly among the mass categories of civil servants – those

employed in education and transportation. It is there that they were able to mobilize civic participation and to uphold their very right to existence. On the other hand, however, the strikes organized in these sectors were of an apparently political nature, because the other party to the conflict was a certain ministry, i.e. the country's government. In this way, very frequently trade union activities bore a political mark, whereby public opinion lost its ability to differentiate between inherent trade union activities and party-political activities. Out of sheer habit, during the first half of the transition process, public opinion was convinced that with its activity the CI-TUB continued to be closer to the BSP, while "Podkrepa" was thought to be closer to the UDF. This is an indication of the hardships the trade unions were experiencing in the process of emerging from under the shadow of the political parties.

After the year 2000, especially with the advancing process of privatization, the trade unions made the effort to manifest their greater independence from the political class. This act, however, was not necessarily expressed in any increase of their civic activity; on the contrary, what actually happened was rather just the opposite. The reason why is that the trade unions themselves seemed to have overcome their indifference to the opportunities opened up by privatization and they themselves got involved with it. These two trade-union organizations, which by nature are destined to be workers' and employee's unions, found themselves in an ambiguous situation when they themselves were beginning to turn into owners and employers. The overall consequence observed in result was, in essence, the rise of civic disengagement from trade union activity, alongside the professionalization of the trade unions themselves, where there was a clearly growing distinction between the few trade union activists (mainly from among the trade union apparatus) and the rank-and-file trade union members. Even trade-union

membership was increasingly growing into a mere formality. This is one of the many reasons underlying the relatively low trade-union civic mobilization, especially under the current conditions of prevailing private ownership in the industrial and service sectors.

The post-communist situation was marked by the establishment and activity of numerous new *non-governmental organizations* (NGOs) not only in Bulgaria. They were set up to different objectives and had different structures, but nonetheless public opinion very rapidly began to identify them with civic society. At the beginning of the transition period, the involvement of citizens with the NGOs was based on enthusiasm and their willingness to participate. Gradually, however, not least because of the difficulty to fund their activities, the NGOs were restricted within a relatively small area of civic society and turned into small businesses rather, which were elaborating and implementing various, mostly international, projects. The dependence of the NGOs in post-communist Bulgaria on foreign funding (public or private) gradually turned these organizations into intermediaries between foreign donors and internal users, and the activities they were performing turned into a specific profession, which consisted in writing projects and making reports according to a fixed set of standards.

The declining amount of foreign funding, which began to be felt very clearly after the country's accession to the European Union, and has also been connected with the financial and economic crisis of late, brought about the sizeable decline in the number of the actively functioning NGOs. According to estimates made over the last several years, their number has dropped from about 5000 to 1500³. In other words, the active civic sector has little support within the Bulgarian society itself, receives insufficient assistance from internal donors, and, on the whole,

³ See <http://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2011/02/28/>

encompasses few citizens in various public initiatives. Many of the NGOs act either as think-tanks, consultancies, and PR agencies, or as mere sub-contractors to foreign projects. There was a widespread practice in the past for ministers and members of parliament to set up a clientele network of NGOs dependent on them, the purpose of which was to appropriate funds from various projects with the protection of their patrons. This was the reason why the existence of the numerous NGOs brought little energy to civic activity. Consequently, public opinion is inclined to consider them as small private businesses and finds it difficult to connect them with activities serving legitimate public interests.

Of late, some specific studies have revealed another, more dangerous tendency. The "Dnevnik" daily claims the following: "... in October 2010, a report of the Center for the Study of Democracy (CSD) warned that representatives of the serious organized crime are entering the civic sector by means of sports clubs and in the form of lobbyist organizations and pseudo-analytical centers". It is indicative that many of the public projects, which the government assigns to NGOs, are awarded to various sports organizations, which actually serve as nothing but a cover for a large variety of groupings from the shadow business in the country⁴.

These findings about the essential weakness of the civic sector, which has frequently been represented by pseudo-civic organizations, does not mean by far that such a sector is totally missing in today's Bulgaria. On the contrary, there are sectors in society – rather dispersed and smallish groups at the time being – which are capable of mobilizing and organizing themselves around worthy public causes. In 2009, movements of the civic type emerged. They were formed around specific causes, such as: an amendment to the Forests Act (with the demand to prevent the ex-

change of forest zones, which subsequently are granted permission for real estate development), or the demand for codifying a new statute of the students' towns in the big cities in the country (in order to prevent their uncontrolled real estate development to various purposes). This new militantism demonstrated the capability for affecting political decisions and the capacity for rapid mobilization, despite the lack of sufficient experience. It is possible for this new militantism to outline a new model for party commitment as well (e.g. in the newly established Green Party). The problem is that these mobilizations remain without any lasting organizational consequences – they disappear together with the solution (or the inability to find a solution) to the problem, which initially brought about such a mobilization. This may prove to be a positive phenomenon, because such movements are frequently organized with the assistance of the new social nets on the Internet and are capable of being "awakened" on specific occasions.

4. Modern Bulgarian Political Culture Facing the Test of Europe

The inheritance, which the political culture in Bulgaria carried from the past, clashed with the country's dramatic transition to democracy. Several are the major elements of the big change in Bulgarian political culture. Above all, this is the experience amassed from the collapse of the communist system: this event has been incredible and huge in its dimensions for several generations now. Many Bulgarians have experienced this collapse as a personal drama, regardless of the feelings – triumphant enthusiasm or fear – which it inspires. Among the most essential aspects of the collapse of the old system is the total shake-up of the governmental institutions as a whole. The Bulgarian citizens are now witnessing a weak state, disregarded, inefficient, feeble, and incapable of imposing its author-

⁴ See <http://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2011/02/28/>

ity on organized crime and the private “crime syndicates”. This reality sharply conflicts with the long established image of an omnipresent and strong communist state, imposing an order obligatory for all and possessing the strength to guarantee it. These post-1989 generations had to adapt to the new market reality and to search, choose, and constantly calculate (something they had been spared from in the pre-transition times).

The new generations, which were getting socialized after 1989, do not make comparisons like these, for them things are the way they are. These generations are immersed in a different reality where wealth brings power, strength is an instrument for attaining personal goals, and it is the market, not the state, that is omnipresent. The new generations are market-oriented, consumer-minded, and appreciate highly paid work. They are also the generations of the new Internet practices, which have been penetrating Bulgarian society increasingly deeper since the mid 1990s. Internet creates different conditions for communication, gathering information, and interaction, which were totally unknown to the generations preceding them.

All this has altered the attitude to politics as well. The radical change in the direction of establishing a democratic system has strongly politicized society today, the stakes are truly very high and this divides and polarizes opinions. Many people are mastering new practices of protest and public pressure, of lobbying and publicly upholding their personal opinions, of persuading and convincing others, and of holding poignant arguments with opponents. The practices of making political choices are being mastered as well. These practices are preceded by the orientation in the political environment, the search for and sieving through information, the critical reading of the press. Irrespective of the differences in their understanding of politics, everyone shares the lofty national political objective – Bulgaria’s accession to the European Union.

In a sense, up to 2000 – 2001, the political process was filled with various causes, and even after this period there was at least one big cause, namely the country’s EU membership. But after January 1st 2007, the big political causes seemed to have disappeared from the public debate. From a programmatic point of view, the different parties looked strikingly similar, and the broad public opinion no longer felt enthusiastically attracted to politics. Even on the contrary, the attitude to politics became not simply reserved, it also revealed certain hostility, and to top it all this attitude became instrumental and regarded politics as a kind of lucrative business. The promotion of market values and the persuasion that everything is a commodity, political programs included, were also conducive to the adoption of this widespread attitude.

One of the relatively new and rather broadly disseminated perceptions of politics of late, which treats politics as a “political market”, also encourages such an attitude on the part of the public towards political activity at large. In this way, Bulgarian culture has started to acquire new experience and new values, which conspicuously contradict the prescribed democratic republicanism, which requires from citizens to display an active attitude, commitment, and participation in the common deed (*res publica*).

An increasing number of characteristic features, which in their nature oppose the typical traits of classical civic culture, as defined by Almond and Verba, are being disseminated in modern Bulgarian political culture. The attempt to define these new characteristic features of modern Bulgarian culture comes as a result of the observation of both the political debate and the conduct of citizens over the past year or two.

Ranking first is a strikingly lasting feature of the modern political culture in Bulgaria, such as Manicheism is. What is meant here, of course, is by no means a referral to professing the third century A.D. religion of Mani.

What the notion of Manicheism refers here to is an essential understanding of the world, society, and politics as fundamentally divided into two halves: a good one and a bad one. This understanding of politics refutes the justifications of any other point of view (qualifying it as “bad”), and thus becomes a denial of the very notion of “otherness” (because frequently it is the other one precisely that is the bad guy or the bad thing for that matter). I was able to identify such an understanding of politics at a debate held among politicians at the New Bulgarian University, who had to answer the question whether they could name one or two positive things about their political rival. It turned out that the majority of these politicians were incapable of formulating anything favorable about their opponents, apparently qualifying them as enemies, who did not deserve any place whatsoever on the political terrain. Such an understanding of politics has brought to the extreme one of Carl Schmidt’s concepts of politics as a differentiation between friends and enemies when one forgets that conflicts occur within a single public or social whole, the preservation of which is the condition *sine qua non* for the existence of politics itself (Schmidt 2008: 21-22).

Modern Bulgarian political culture is markedly “machist”. It is based on the widespread belief in the ability of a single “strong hand” to punish the “bad guys” and begin to dispense justice. This is much in line with the preceding paragraph on the Manichean outlook in the modern political culture of Bulgaria where the thesis about “retribution” as a motive for political action is employed quite often. Public opinion frequently sees effective policy in terms of “punishing the bad guys”, as well as their respective removal and replacement by “the good guys”. It is to this purpose that we fairly often imagine the political leader as “a strong man”, bearer of “virility”, determination, and willpower, who does not step back, but firmly pursues his beliefs, who neither bends, nor yields, but at the

same time is virtuous, honest, intelligent, and knowledgeable. Public opinion often hastens to condemn the lack of “virility” in politicians and the manifestation of “women’s traits in them”, which are invariably qualified as acquiescence and an inclination to make concessions. The popular appeal of figures who irradiate such “virility” in modern Bulgarian politics is very high and is accompanied – if not nourished – by certain elements of the popular folk-pop culture, which places the emphasis on the roles of the active, strong man, and the weak woman in waiting.

An essential feature of modern Bulgarian political culture is the overvaluation of political power. The popular conviction is that power gives unlimited possibilities, that when you are in office, you can do anything, and vice versa – nothing can be done, if you are out of office. This is the frequent justification heard from parties in opposition, for instance. But this overvaluation also comes in result of the attitude to power seen by many as the spoils of looting, which must be taken in order to be distributed and used in the respective way. The huge value attributed to political power (which is mostly seen in terms of control over public institutions) belittles the independent civic initiative, the opportunity to attain important public goals outside the institutions and even without them. In fact, this is to a certain extent the manifestation of the deeply internalized etatism, i.e. a particularly strong confidence in the state or the government. This means that even when people are critical to the latter and consider that “it has failed”, they invariably imagine that it is the government (or the state) that must ultimately see to absolutely everything. Even when someone gets killed in a drunken row, or a drunken driver hits someone on the road, public opinion blames the government and its insufficient concern for the order and security in the country, precisely because people imagine that the state or the government is omnipotent and omnipresent.

Political culture in modern Bulgaria is also marked by an inferiority complex. It is manifested in the anxious rambling between the megalomania for national grandeur (“the Bulgarians are the most intelligent nation”, “we have the best young mathematicians”, “we have been the mightiest state in the Balkans”, “we are the successors of the most ancient European culture”, etc.) and the constant self-pity that we are the worst-off nation on the European continent. Even when we assess our own problems, we lose any sense of proportion, e.g.: our corruption is invariably the most rampant, “Bulgaria is a Third World country”, etc.

Today's political culture in Bulgaria is also marked by widespread civil irresponsibility in striking proportions. This is the other name of civic disengagement and is frequently the opposite side of the political irresponsibility of the elites. This characteristic feature is manifested in the systematic demands for resignations – something that was sufficiently well substantiated at the onset of the transition to democracy, because the then expectations were for a total replacement of the old elite. Today, however, the pressure of protests follows the same logic: instead of demanding that institutions and civil servants should properly do their jobs and insisting that civil society should exert constant pressure and control over governmental institutions, out of habit, people demand resignations. A resignation may be qualified as taking personal responsibility, but it may also mean the disengagement from the problem, which brought about the demand for such a resignation. Another frequent occurrence connected with the previous finding is the habit of bringing specific problems to irresolvable conflicts, for instance: a specific traffic accident provoked by a driver's irresponsibility is developed into a global picture about governmental politics in various walks of life. This certainly is not a specific Bulgarian trait, but what is important is that such an

approach prevents us from finding solutions to concrete problems. This peculiarity, however, goes hand in hand with a deep mistrust for politicians, a distrust of their willingness and capacity to solve common problems. In the guises of an audience, society watches indifferently what is going on and frequently enjoys the failures of the country's governance, as if they do not concern us all.

Civil irresponsibility goes hand in hand with civic cynicism as well. Observations show that citizens are frequently inclined to practice what they find reproachable in politicians. Attitudes here nourish the populist discourse, which opposes “the people” to “those in power”, no matter who is in office at the particular moment. As though when you are a part of “the people”, you are justified to say whatever you want, and when you land in office, you become “just like them”, i.e. corrupt, hypocritical, and selfish. Talking about “those at the helm” in the public environment as if they were some foreign body separate from us, does not belong to our legitimate choice, it presupposes at the same time an idealized image of “the people”, which is composed of extremely conscientious, active, responsible, and reasonable individuals. This understanding makes it possible for almost every citizen to take the role of a “spokesperson of the people” when he/she talks with a politician, regardless of the fact that this same people is an aggregate of individuals sharing different ideas and beliefs about the world and politics.

Last but not least, modern Bulgarian political culture is also marked by deep community conservatism. It has a variety of manifestations, but one of the most significant ones is the unwillingness of a large part of today's Bulgarian society to imagine Bulgaria as a modern state. A recent example to this effect is the official ceremony devoted to the celebration of the 24th of May – the Day of Slavic script and culture. The ceremony began with church remembrance singing, followed by a funeral march played by a military orchestra

upon the laying of the wreaths, and this resembled much more a traditional memorial service than the joyous modern celebration of a great day. We think of Bulgaria mainly in terms of its “ancient treasures”: the Thracian gold, Khan Asparuch, the orthodox icons, and the traditional business of extracting rose oil. Modern Bulgaria is absent from the images we have of our Motherland, the entire 20th century is practically non-existent.

All these sufficiently widespread popular aspects of modern Bulgarian political culture have come in result of the historical development, but they have also increasingly been coming as the result of the current interactions in society among the elites, the public opinion, and the mass media. The dominant features of modern Bulgarian political culture do not go beyond the comfort zone of the public opinion: what the public sees is that the representatives of the governing majority are the only ones deserving to carry the blame and fails to accept that they are currently representatives of this very public precisely. This is namely the reason why the public opinion also needs some proper upbringing with respect to civic morality and culture. For their part, politicians try to outstrip one another in their contest of radical speak, because this is the inevitable condition for their being properly heard by the audience. At the same time, the disqualification of the opponent by a “devastating” type of discourse is a game meant to play on the malicious passions of the audience. In this way, the political debate has been replaced increasingly more by some kind of a show, and the politicians are manifesting an increasingly greater preference for show programs as the venue of their media appearances. The mass media often demonstrate a similar conduct: they play the role of the “fourth estate”, though not in the metaphorical sense – in their capacity of intermediaries of public opinion, but in the true sense of the word, presenting themselves as corporate participants in the political process who

defend their own beliefs and interpretations. Moreover, what they defend are actually the beliefs of the advertisers, not the understanding of the journalists themselves. In such a situation, the audience feels as if it were witnessing a performance, which has nothing to do with the people in the audience, and today these people are likely to applaud tempestuously those who will be usually downtrodden by the same audience four years later.

Civic activist culture in Bulgarian society today remains a relatively marginal phenomenon. It is shared largely in the better educated circles, but it is also a paradoxical manifestation of the passion for engaging in civic activity at any cost, which has been inherited from the times of communism. On one hand, the dominant values nourished by mass culture and advertising in the mass media environment are strongly individualistic and market oriented. This overshadows the values of solidarity-based civic activities, and this is something that is assessed nowadays as a relic from communism, rather than the foundations of liberal democracy. On the other hand, political organizations no longer enjoy any high prestige, and the membership in such organizations and the militantism within their structures is assessed from the viewpoint of the costs and benefits ensuing from them. Few are the citizens who get committed led by a certain ideal or a cause. Similar is the situation with the trade unions as well, which are far from the idea of being the most popular form of manifesting civic commitment. On a yet another hand is the network of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which public opinion rapidly identified as the major manifestation of civic society. In its essence, this network is far from numerous. The direct participants in this NGO networks are private businesses, which compete among themselves for the declining amount of subsidies extended mostly by foreign donors. Their contribution to civic activities is almost insignificant now and the public opinion has almost

disqualified them, bringing them down to the level of ordinary private companies, specializing in writing projects and submitting reports at the prescribed stages of their implementation. Of late, this sector has been joined by numerous sports organizations, which very often serve as cover for dubious groupings.

This more or less pessimistic picture of civic participation in Bulgaria should not make us disregard the existence of dispersed civic movements, the members of which are few in number, but are capable of instantaneous mobilization. They attract mainly younger people and bring them together for a given cause. The political mobilization during the students' rallies in 2009, as well as the subsequent environmental protests, are a new manifestation of such a civic culture. These now dispersed civic movements could become a valuable factor in Bulgarian civic culture as long as they manage to retain their autonomy and succeed in protecting themselves from being turned into instruments of individual political parties, as these parties are acting today to a large extent much like corporate private entities.

It is obvious that Bulgarian society needs an active network for civic education and civic culture. It needs a network precisely, not a centralized structure or an institution, in order to encompass both the public educational institutions and the political parties, the trade unions, the non-governmental organizations, and the various civic initiatives and movements, ensuring their broad and effective cooperation. The active citizen does not generate himself or herself, what he/she needs is an educational effort and proper upbringing, as well as good examples and personal experience.

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