

A stylized world map composed of a grid of dots. The dots are mostly grey, but several are colored red, highlighting specific regions: parts of North America, Europe, and Asia.

The Extreme Right Wing in Bulgaria

ANTONIY TODOROV
January 2013

- The extreme right wing (also known as the far right) consists of parties and organisations ideologically linked by their espousal of extreme forms of cultural conservatism, xenophobia and, not infrequently, racism. They are strong advocates of order imposed by a »strong hand« and they profess a specific form of populism based on opposition between the elite and the people.
- The most visible extreme right organisation in Bulgaria today is the Attack Party, which has been in existence since 2005. Since its emergence, voter support for the Attack Party has significantly grown and in 2006 its leader, Volen Siderov, made it to the run-off in the presidential election. After 2009, however, the GERB Party (the incumbent governing party in Bulgaria) managed to attract a considerable number of former Attack supporters. Today, only about 6 to 7 percent of the electorate votes for the Attack Party.
- In practice, the smaller extreme right-wing organisations do not take part in the national and local elections, but they are very active in certain youth milieus and among football fans. The fact that they participate in the so-called »Loukov March«, which has been organised on an annual basis ever since 2008, suggests that they might join forces, although in practice this seems unlikely.



Contents

1. Historical Background: From the Transition Period to Now	1
2. Ideological Profile	3
2.1 Minorities as Scapegoats	3
2.2 The Unity of the Nation and the Strong State	3
2.3 Foreign Powers	4
3. The Extreme Right Wing in Action	5
3.1 The »Katounitza« Case	5
3.2 The Case of the Sofia City Mosque	6
3.3 The 2011 Gay Parade	6
3.4 The So-called »Loukov March«	7
4. Electoral Showing in the Last Decade	7
4.1 General Elections	7
4.2 Presidential Elections	10
4.3 European Elections	11
4.4 Local Elections	12
References	13

Currently, the extreme right wing in Bulgaria is represented by a number of parties and organisations with varying status and of different origins. Its most visible component is the Attack Party, which has existed since 2005. However, it has split several times, giving rise to new parties such as GORD (the Civic Association for Real Democracy), initiated and headed by the incumbent MEP Slavi Binnev, and the National Democratic Party, initiated and headed by Kapka Georgieva. Other, older far-right groupings include those associated with the daily *Monitor* and with the patriotic weekly *New Dawn* as well as parties and unions, such as the Bulgarian National Radical Party (BNRP), the New Dawn Party, the Bulgarian National Union (NBU), the Guard Union, and the Union of Bulgarian National Legions (UBNL). The list of organisations also includes »Bulgarian Horde«, »Hearth«, the »Great Bulgaria People’s Society of Students«, the various Tangrist groups (who worship the proto-Bulgarian pagan deity God Tangra) such as the »Dulo« Society, »Warriors of Tangra«, Bulgarian National Front, and many others. Although these are relatively small organisations and circles with little connection to one another, taken as a whole they represent a significant and active social stratum, which is mainly active on the Internet.

1. Historical Background: From the Transition Period to Now

The development of the extreme right wing after 1989 in Bulgaria, like similar developments in other post-communist countries, resulted from both revived and newly emerged social structural conflicts, which we call cleavages. We should, however, distinguish between structural and imaginary cleavages: the latter are no less genuine than the former, but are of a different nature. By definition, structural cleavages result from a profound historical transformation of society (connected with modernisation), whereas imaginary cleavages have an instrumental value, because they are of an ideological nature. Structural cleavages are based on the notion that for society a political conflict is a structural conflict, but they replace axiology with ontology. On the basis of the opposition between the former communists and the anti-communists, which is observable in all post-communist states, some analysts are inclined to ascribe a structural nature to this conflict, thus treating it as a cleavage.

The major oppositions in this imaginary cleavage, which certainly structured the political life of the country at the beginning of the transition, are between the victims and the executioners, between the dictatorship and the people, between the communists and the rest of the population. The problem, however, is that the boundaries between the two poles of the opposition were not always very clear and not infrequently it turned out that former communists had been victims of the regime, while among the victims of communist reprisals there were people who were not necessarily democrats either. In some East European countries this polarity between former communists and anti-communists faded quite rapidly, and twenty years after 1989 this dividing line no longer structures the political landscape in this part of Europe.

In fact, it is precisely the fading of this opposition between communists and democrats that created a fertile breeding ground for the boom in extreme right-wing formations (although we can certainly find unlikely political bedfellows including – if we take the Bulgarian example – former members of the extreme right-wing and nationalist pro-fascist formations or their successor organisations among today’s democrats).

In terms of Bulgarian specifics, the origin of the extreme right-wing formations is twofold. On the one hand, their evolution goes back to the very beginning of the transition period, when the still governing communist party decided in December 1989 to restore the names of Bulgarian ethnic Turks, who had been forced to change their names five years earlier. This step towards restoring justice elicited an extremely negative response from certain circles in the communist party itself – mainly those connected with the repressive name-changing campaign, and it was precisely from these circles that the first extreme nationalist parties emerged. They were mostly anti-Turkish, and in their essence extremely conservative and often connected with Stalinist elements that had remained from the former communist party. This is how the Public Committee for the Protection of National Interests was born (better known by its Bulgarian acronym OKZNI). Even several former dissidents (such as Roumen Vodenicharov, for instance), joined the new organisation, motivated by the same nationalist considerations. At that point, other nationalist parties such as the Fatherland Labor Party and »Era 3« gravitated toward the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) and later

on they were joined by the Thracia Political Club and the Union of Thracian Bulgarians, which raised claims to be compensated by Turkey for the property of their Bulgarian predecessors confiscated by the Ottoman Empire after the Balkan Wars.

On the other hand, when many of the old democratic parties were restored after 1990, this was accompanied by the restoration and establishment of several extreme right-wing organisations and parties such as the Bulgarian Democratic Forum (BDF), which proclaimed itself the successor of the Bulgarian National Legions of the 1940s and was accepted as one of the sixteen members of the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF). Other such organisations remained outside the UDF, namely, the Bulgarian Radical Democratic Party (headed by Dr. Ivan Georgiev) and the Christian Democratic Party (headed by Priest Gelemenov) despite the fact that they also gravitated towards the UDF. The two above-mentioned leaders were activists who at the time of communism had been subject to persecution for their nationalist beliefs and attempts to set up nationalist organisations.

On the whole, however, these »left-wing« and »right-wing« ultranationalists remained in a rather marginal position and were strongly dependent on the framework imposed on them by the BSP on the left (i. e. the party which succeeded the former communist party) and by the UDF on the right. These parties rarely ran for election with independent candidates of their own, and their political impact was negligible.

As the conflict between the former communist and anti-communists subsided, a broad vista opened up both for populist centrist parties and populist radical (more frequently extreme right-wing) parties. Around 1999–2000, the first shoots of today's spectrum of ultranationalist extreme right-wing parties began to emerge. This coincided with the time when the major phase of privatisation of the huge property of the communist state was nearing completion and economic wealth had already been redistributed. This gave rise to a new conflict – one between the winners and losers of the transition to a market economy. It did not matter so much whether the losers had actually lost something, but rather that they saw themselves as losers. It was in this new »loser« environment that new populist parties, among them extreme right-wing parties, found a fertile breeding ground.

In 1998–99 the journalist Volen Siderov, former chief editor of the popular UDF daily *Democracy*, joined the journalists' team of the daily *Monitor* and immediately gained wide popularity with his ultranationalist and often blatantly racist articles. A short time after that he launched his personal TV program called »Attack« on the national cable »SKAT« TV, the spirit of which was also ultranationalist. At the beginning of the new millennium, Siderov published a series of books with titles like *The Boomerang of Evil*, *Zharava*, *Bulgaro-phobia*, and *The Power of Mammon*, where the well-known theses about the »global conspiracy« of »Jewish Masons« were once again expounded, but this time tailored specifically to Bulgarian history and society.

As Siderov gradually gained a public image as a major spokesperson of the extreme nationalists he was able to run for mayor in Sofia, despite the fact that fewer than 2,000 voters cast their ballots for him.

On the eve of the 2005 general election, he became the leader of an election coalition of five nationalist organisations (drawn from both the Left and Right), which was registered under the name of »Attack« Coalition. The following political entities were part of this coalition:

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

This coalition was the first alliance of nationalists, although it embraced groups with different genealogies that did not necessarily share the same beliefs. Soon after the 2005 general election, in which the Attack Party coalition won seats in parliament, the first split occurred within this new organisation. Peter Beron and a number of »left-wing« nationalists began to gradually differentiate themselves from Volen Siderov, not least because of his spectacular anti-Semitic and racist speeches.

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

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

In 2012 the Attack Party itself went through a new internal conflict, which brought about yet another split. As a result, two new small organisations emerged: one led by Kapka Georgieva, the ex-wife of Volen Siderov and former chief editor of the daily *Attack*; and the other by the former Attack Party MP and incumbent MEP, Slavi Binev.

2. Ideological Profile

The ideological doctrine professed by the Attack Party is probably the most frequently quoted and most deeply analysed doctrine. Volen Siderov’s texts contain the entire palette of ideas typical of the extreme right wing. His latest book, connected with the 2011 presidential election, is called *Foundations of Bulgarism*. The lengthy text, spanning 112 pages (filled with photographs, maps, and charts) expounds the major ideas of Bulgarian nationalism: ethical defense of nationalism, substantiation of the thesis about the ancient origins of the Bulgarians who are one of the oldest autochthonic people and civilisations in Europe; and dismissal of socialist, liberal, or any other globalist doctrines as anti-national.

There are several major topics in the ideological profile of the extreme right wing: the guilty minorities; the unity of the nation and a strong state; and harmful foreign powers.

2.1 Minorities as Scapegoats

Most of the time the topics listed above are merged together in order to produce a specific ideological amalgam, which is then developed within the framework of a specific public discourse.

Minorities, in the Bulgarian case ethnic and cultural (or sexual), are constantly accused by extreme right-wing parties of being »eternally guilty«. Such accusations are traditionally directed at Jews, but other minorities, such as the homosexual community, are targeted as well. In 2005 Volen Siderov provoked a row with his very first parliamentary speech in which he declared: »At long last, the Bulgarians will receive their genuine representation in the National Assembly. In parliament now there will not only be no homosexuals, Gypsies, Turks, foreigners, Jews, and whatever others; here there will be nothing but Bulgarians!«¹ The extreme nationalists are consistent in their homophobia: thus for instance, activists of the »Guard« organisation or supporters of the VMRO Party, which is considered to be far more moderate, regularly attack participants in the gay parades organised in the capital city, Sofia.

2.2 The Unity of the Nation and the Strong State

The extreme right-wingers continually emphasise the special significance of national unity for them, as well as the special meaning of what they call »national pride«. In Volen Siderov’s opinion, Bulgarian national pride is based on Bulgarians’ »ancient origins«. However, modern installations like the *Kozloduy* nuclear power plant are also classified as something to be proud of and among a number of »sacred things« that should be safeguarded. He understands the nation as a »natural community« (Siderov 2011: 6) where each person has his or her designated place. All of these theses hark back to the time of Mussolini.

1. www.bghelsinki.org/bg/publikacii/obektiv/bulgarski-helzinski-komitet/2005-11/grazhdani-sreshtu-omrazata/

In its credo (i. e. its main programmatic text), the BNU defines itself as follows: »The Bulgarian National Union is not an ordinary organisation. The BNU is an Order, in which – upon joining it – every member pledges to be faithful to the Motherland and irreconcilable with the enemies of Bulgaria, while maintaining good comradely relations with his/her brothers/sisters-in-arms.«² This text seems to be borrowed from older models from the 1930s. As for the Bulgarian National Legions, the claim made in the organisation’s programmatic text reads as follows: »Communists, socialists, left-wing agrarians, leaders of parties of a covert anti-state orientation, and militant groups are dividing the nation into hostile camps. This is draining its strength.«³

The unity of the people (and because it is the people that make up the nation, the two notions are synonymous) is the paramount consideration and all who divide it are enemies of the people. This rhetoric is traditional and includes demands for a hierarchy-based order, strong leadership, and submission; only the specific examples are new.

Another text of the BNU, which strongly resembles a propaganda pamphlet from the time of Mussolini, defines the objective of the organisation in the following way: »What in fact is your objective? It is to create a modern state, in which Bulgarians can live well – a state of cleanliness, order, peace and quiet.«⁴ The text continues with a condemnation of democracy: »What we have seen thus far from democracy is only dirt, criminality, unemployment, retirees searching the dustbins, exploitation, narcotic drugs, corruption, prostitution, rights for the minorities, affluent politicians, unfulfilled promises, etc. This is not our ideal of a state! Might that be yours? Democracy has been exhausted and its time has gone.«

2.3 Foreign Powers

The extreme right-wing parties in Bulgaria can also be distinguished by their foreign political profile. All of them hold nationalist stances on all issues where domestic and foreign interests can be said to conflict, e. g.: the demand of many European states for the closure of the

Kozloduy nuclear power plant as a precondition for Bulgaria’s accession to the EU, the participation of Bulgaria in the international peacekeeping missions in Afghanistan and Iraq, the country’s NATO membership as a new foreign political dependence, etc.

In the period prior to EU accession in 2007 the leader of the GERB Party⁵, Boiko Borissov, also made a positive statement on foreign policy, namely: »GERB’s attitude to Turkey is the same one that we have with respect to Serbia, Croatia, Macedonia ... Any country that has duly met the EU criteria will be welcomed by the EU member states.« The UDF also declared its support for the EU membership of Turkey, thus differing from Ivan Kostov’s party, Democrats for a Strong Bulgaria (DSB). Analyst Dimiter Avramov, who is close to UDF circles, explicitly stated in his blog: »Turkey was Bulgaria’s loyal political ally and gave support to our accession to NATO at a time when this was a strategic choice of extreme importance for the country’s national security ... This is the reason why Bulgaria must lend support to Turkey’s integration in the EU rather than hamper it!« It was only the Attack Party and DSB that maintained a clear stance against Turkey’s EU membership, although their arguments for doing so were different. In Bulgaria, much like the other EU member states, the division between proponents and opponents of Turkey’s accession did not coincide completely with the division between the left-wing and right-wing political formations.

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

The argument that Turkey is not a European country is based not so much on geographical realities (10 percent of its territory is in Europe, the rest is in Asia), but rather on the view that »Europe’s Christian roots« and the pre-

2. bg.bgns.net/content/view/12/26/

3. www.forum.bg-nacionalisti.org/index.php?PHPSESSID=c6e39588a3c2ac5283fe5ac59bc425cc&ac

4. bg.bgns.net/content/view/18/62/

5. *Graždani za Evropejsko Razvitiie na Bălgarija* (Citizens for a European Development of Bulgaria).

vailing Moslem religion in Turkey are incompatible. It is this aspect of »cultural incompatibility« that has most frequently been pointed out, at least by those who see Europe mainly as a Christian community or – at best – as a community sharing »Christian values«. The opponents of Turkey's EU accession often point out that Turkey is a Moslem country, a member of the Islamic Conference Organisation and therefore its place is not in Europe, as the continent is predominantly Christian. Dimiter Stoyanov, who is an MEP elected on the party slate of the Attack Party, declared before participants in an anti-Turkish demonstration in Brussels on 3 October 3 2007 that it was unnatural for a society built on Christian values to unite with a Moslem state, a state, moreover, that is located outside the boundaries of Europe (Shkodrova 2005).

This anti-Turkish line has been a constant feature of the extreme right wing in Bulgaria right up to the present day. In May 2011, activists of the Attack Party organised an assault on worshippers in the only mosque (built in the sixteenth century) in Sofia. This was only one of numerous protest actions organised by members of the extreme rightwing in Bulgaria against Bulgarian Turks and Moslems over the past several years.

3. The Extreme Right Wing in Action

3.1 The »Katounitza« Case

In September 2011, in the village of Katounitza near the town of Plovdiv, a spontaneous riot erupted between Bulgarians and Roma living in this village. It was triggered by the death of nineteen-year-old Anguel Petrov, who was run down by a minivan driven by men close to Kiril Rashkov – a notorious »Gypsy Baron« and rich businessman who resided in the same village. The Bulgarian villagers rose up in rebellion and began to destroy Rashkov's property and one of the houses in his courtyard was set on fire.⁶ Later on the protesters were joined by fans of the Plovdiv football team and the act of vengeance continued.

What is significant about this incident is that the authorities failed to prevent the fighters from taking the law into their own hands and even seemed to encourage them. The problem here is that Kiril Rashkov is a man who had

repeatedly abused the law and who for a long time had gone unpunished; the excessive violence of the villagers, however, was motivated by the fact that he is a Gypsy.

The audience of the video recordings of this event were amazed to see policemen standing aside and simply watching people throwing stones and incendiary devices, mainly Molotov cocktails, at the houses of Tzar Kiro (as Kiril Rashkov is nick-named). They also saw how the forces of law reacted to the mobilisation of football fans (among whom they could see people with Nazi tattoos who were unequivocally expressing their attitude to the Roma and Turkish people). The village of Katounitza is located twenty kilometers from Plovdiv. The access road to the village is either through the village of Yagodovo or directly from the main highway between Plovdiv and Sadovo. Neither of these two entry points seem to have been blocked by the police after it became clear that the football fans were being mobilised through social networks »to restore justice«. Questions also arise concerning the arrest and detention of Tzar Kiro. The arrest as a measure of police protection is comprehensible, but what is more puzzling is why the authorities had been protecting this family until that time – apparently in exchange for certain services, such as Roma votes.

This outburst of popular rage against rampant lawlessness, the freedom of a handful of criminally enriched »fat cats« and »well-dressed businessmen« to abuse the laws, to evade taxation and to live outside the rule of law seems to have crossed an important boundary. But there is also another element in this popular reaction. In the video recordings we see a multitude of football fans, skinheads, nationalists, and rather disoriented teenagers who have gone out not to join a peaceful rally, but – on the contrary – to overtly threaten the Roma and engage in physical retribution against them. The Attack Party circulated a brochure entitled »The Criminality of Gypsies – a Threat to the State«. This is a collection of short texts, which are dated without indicating the source. All the titles have a similar ring to them: »Gypsies Have Robbed...«, »Gypsies Have Killed...«, etc. The collection ends with an article written by Volen Siderov back in 2000 and reprinted from *Monitor*, the title of which reads »Is the Gypsy Proliferation Overtaking Bulgaria?« This is followed by a new article of his, which accuses all Bulgarian governments thus far of having »opened up a political umbrella over the crimes of the Roma population«.

6. www.vesti.bg/index.phtml?tid=40&oid=4145691

3.2 The Case of the Sofia City Mosque

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

This provocation went a step further on 20 May 2011, when before Friday prayers, a group of Attack Party supporters organised a protest rally against the external loudspeakers of the mosque used to invite worshippers to prayer, close to the fence of the mosque. The Attack Party zealots began goading the Moslems with offensive words and when the Moslems fought back, the incident escalated into physical clashes. The police intervened and arrested a few people.

The first and major reason for these actions was that the Attack Party and its leader were looking for ways to reverse the decline in electoral support, which had resulted from the policy the party had been pursuing over the past several years – from a stance of full support for the incumbent GERB government to a situation in which they relinquished any separate political identity. Actually, the above incident provided Volen Siderov with plausible grounds to announce that his party was going into opposition.

Observers from the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee monitoring the human rights situation in Bulgaria have also registered other incidents involving attacks on Moslems and desecration of mosques, accompanied by far-right propaganda and the deployment of Nazi symbols, in the towns of Silistra, Plovdiv, Pleven, Blagoevgrad, Pazardjik, etc.⁷ Some of these attacks against Moslems have also resulted in foreign immigrants being injured. In some cases, the protesting attackers have chanted a racist and xenophobic slogan that has now become notorious, namely: »Gypsies in the soap cauldron, Turks under the knife!«

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

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

3.3 The 2011 Gay Parade

Another target of extreme right-wing attacks are homosexuals. For the past five years, an annual »Sofia Pride« parade has been held. These are marches advocating equal rights for the LGTB (Lesbian, Gay, Transgender and Bisexual) community. The number of participants in these parades often exceeds a thousand.

Nationalist organisations have usually tried to organise counter-parades, but in the last two years the authorities have managed to avoid clashes of the kind that took place back in 2008, when a large group of extreme right-wing nationalists attacked the parade and even threw a Molotov cocktail at the participants.

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

In his public addresses, Volen Siderov himself usually treats the parade as a provocation. In his opinion, these parades are an irritating and absolutely unnecessary demonstration.⁸ In June 2011, *Attack* published an article by Milko Nickolov, in which he called the parade »a provocative action against Christian morality and the state sovereignty of the Republic of Bulgaria...« According to author Milko Nickolov, »...by virtue of allowing such perverse points of view, the authorities should also permit parades of paedophiles, sodomites, bestiality practitioners, terrorists who murder people (and have monuments erected in this country), and all such sorts of monsters, fiends, and destroyers of Bulgarian statehood.«⁹ This stance equates the people of the LGTB community with the most repulsive categories

7. http://www.bghelsinki.org/media/uploads/annual_reports/2011.pdf

8. <http://news.myvidin.com/about-38054.html>

9. <http://www.arhiv.vestnikataka.bg/archive.php?broi=1643&text=&fromDate=&toDate=&newsID=95771>

of criminals. The stance of the Attack Party, however, finds support in many circles of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church.

3.4 The So-called »Loukov March«

The best-attended manifestation of the extreme right-wing nationalist formations is the annual »Loukov March« – an event organised in February every year, ever since 2003, in the capital city, Sofia. The event is defined as »a memorial torch-light procession in honor of General Christo Loukov«. The principal organiser of the event is the Bulgarian National Union, but other organisations with names such as »National Resistance«, »Blood and Honor«, etc., are also involved in it.

General Christo Loukov (1888–1943) participated in World War I, was Minister of War (1935–1938), and founded the Union of Bulgarian National Legions during World War II – an organisation closely modelled on Nazi organisations. In 1943, he was assassinated by a militant task force of the prohibited Communist Party. General Loukov has become a symbol for today's numerous extreme right-wing and nationalist organisations. The February memorial procession is held under torchlight and many of the participants are clad in uniforms and wear various symbols recalling the Nazi heritage. Of late, the number of participants has usually been between 800 and 1,000, but in 2012, the Bulgarian mourners were joined by participants from foreign countries such as Germany, Russia, Belgium, and Romania.¹⁰

The »Loukov March« has provoked harsh reactions from human rights monitors and intellectual circles. In an open letter to the Sofia city mayor, the chairman of the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, Krassimir Kanev, calls this event a »direct instigation to violence and discrimination of ethnic and sexual minorities« and »a hatred-rousing event«.¹¹ The youth association of the Sofia city organisation of the BSP has also sharply condemned the open staging of the »Loukov March« because it usually becomes an arena for manifesting racist and xenophobic acts and attitudes on the part of both Bulgarian and foreign organisations.¹²

10. <http://www.lukovmarsh.info/>

11. <http://www.bghelsinki.org/bg/novini/bg/single/otvoreno-pismo-nabhk-do-jordanka-fandkova/>

12. <http://www.duma.bg/duma/node/26707>

The participants in the procession have also been classified as »nationalist and racist groups« by the Organisation against Neo-Nazism, Racism, and Xenophobia whose acronym is »HORA«, which means »people« in Bulgarian).¹³

Although this march still remains limited in terms of participation, the very fact that it is held provokes numerous reactions and protests. At the same time, it also brings together the otherwise divided extreme right-wing nationalist organisations, and fights often break out between them.

4. Electoral Showing in the Last Decade

Following its emergence in 2005, the Attack Party initially attracted an increasing number of voters. This trend continued until 2009, when many Attack supporters began to defect to the GERB Party.

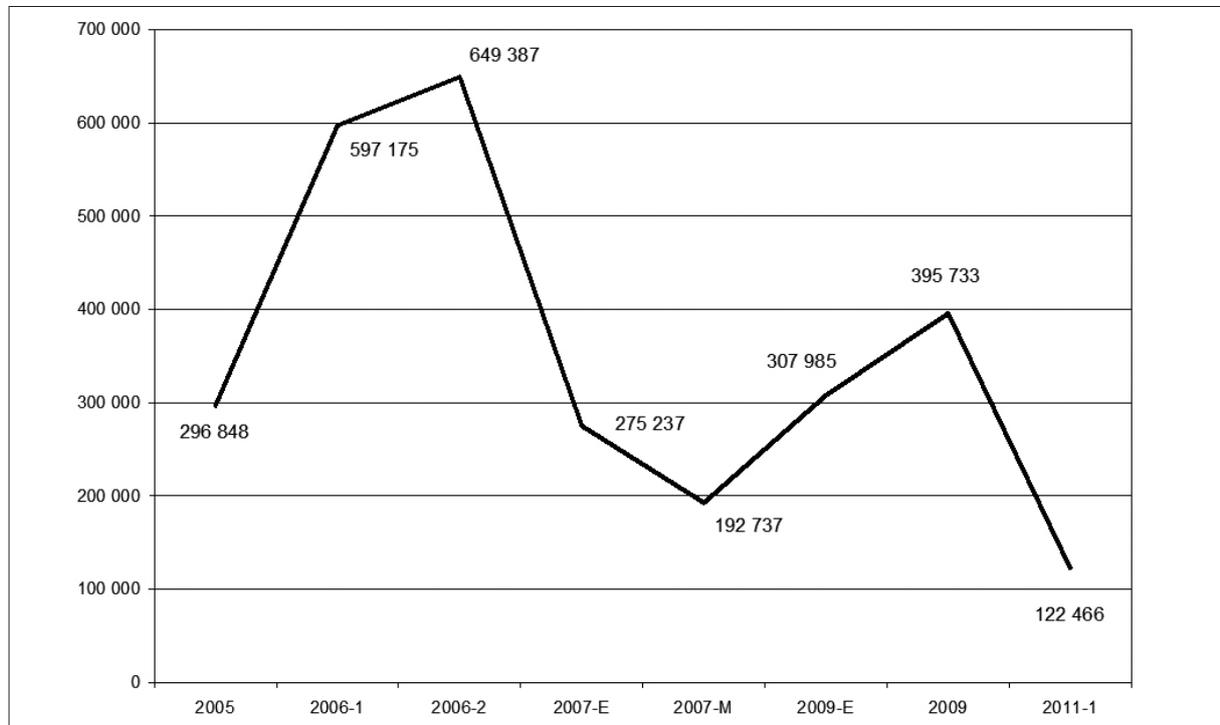
An analysis of all national elections for which the Attack Party has run (general, presidential, including run-offs, local, and European) reveals an initial strong mobilisation (2005–2006). This may be explained by the fact that this was a new party that raised high expectations. After that there was a reversal which lasted until the initial electoral result at the European elections in 2007. The period 2007–2009 saw a new mobilisation (when the Attack Party was in opposition to a tri-partite coalition of the BSP, NMSII, and the MRF, which took the party to a new electoral peak, albeit well below its electoral achievement at the 2006 presidential election). After 2009, the Attack Party's wholehearted support for the GERB government seems to have weakened its status and tarnished its image, so that presidential candidate Volen Siderov achieved a poor showing at the 2011 presidential election.

4.1 General Elections

When in 2005 the Attack Party was returned to parliament with a sufficient number of votes (296,868) and formed a parliamentary faction of its own, observers began to speak of an extreme right-wing wave. What interested researchers most, however, was the question of where these new voters were coming from.

13. stopnazi-bg.blogspot.com/2011/02/2011.html

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



In principle, they had emerged as a result of the crisis and restructuring of the UDF (with the split of Stefan Sofiansky's party and Ivan Kostov's leaving the UDF) on the one hand, and the volatility of NMSII voters only some of whom proved to have a more durable self-identification with this movement, on the other. Also important here was the split within the NMSII itself which gave rise to a new formation called Bulgarian New Democracy in December 2007. The split within the Attack Party parliamentary faction almost straight after its formation was symptomatic as well, because it was indicative of the divided nature of this new party.

At the time it was established the Attack Party was able to count almost 300,000 people among its supporters, which is a sizeable part not only of voter turn-out (8.14 percent), but also of the national electorate (4.42 percent). There may be various reasons for the rapid structuring of such an anti-systemic party, but the most significant of them in 2005 were probably the following:

- The disappointment of broad social strata with the economic and social results of the country's transition to a market economy, which had been achieved at

great social cost. Generally speaking these were the people who considered themselves to be the »big losers« of the transition, having cherished very high expectations about its promised outcome.

- The marginalisation of the Roma people and the significant rise in the crime rate within their community, which gave rise to an anti-Roma discourse and attitudes among certain parts of society.
- The crisis of confidence in political parties and the increasing suspicions, among a broad public, that parties were no longer associations committed to a given social and political cause, but rather private groupings pursuing certain business ends.

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

- Some of these voters might have come from among the ranks of the disillusioned BSP and UDF voters who had begun to feel disenchanting as early as 1991–1994

and who had actually refused to go on voting, but in whom the discontent with the transition had continued to accumulate. The distinction between these two 1990 groups of disillusioned »red« and »blue« voters lies in the fact that they each identified a different culprit for their discontent. The Attack Party offered them two equally acceptable culprits – the new oligarchs who could have come both from the ranks of the »red« nomenclature and the newly-rich »blue« activists. In comparison with 1990, the total number of lost BSP and UDF voters stood at 1.3 million in 1991.

- Some of these voters might have originated from among the electorate of the Alliance of Democratic Forces (ADF) who were bitterly disappointed after 1997. Having expected a decisive »break with communism«, they were disappointed with the new capitalist reality, which proved incapable of giving a fair chance to every Bulgarian. In 2001, the ADF had 1.3 million voters fewer than in 1997.
- Some of these voters might have been more recently disappointed people who felt disillusioned with the NMSII in 2005 (when this party lost 1.2 million voters in comparison with 2001) and who had decided to radically shift their vote, as they assessed their life achievements more or less as a failure.

All of the above are people who held high political expectations, particularly of the first free national elections post-1990. They voted, were disappointed, and had become increasingly bitter until they began to cherish a desire for revenge, expressed in a determination »to punish all the culprits«. Hence if we look more closely we see that the Attack Party seems to have scored gains among three different groups: a portion of the voters disappointed with NMSII, some of the voters of the small parties, and some of those who abstained from voting in 2001 who were mostly previously disillusioned ADF voters. The Attack Party failed to make any gains on 2001 BSP territory and if some of those who voted for the new party could be classified as »red«, these were most likely people who had voted for the BSP in 1994 but had then become so disillusioned that they never voted for it again. Such voters might have »drifted« to the NMSI in 2001, but having been disappointed once again, in 2005, they cast their votes for the Attack Party (Todorov 2010: 420–421).

An empirical study conducted in 2007 on the Attack Party electorate by the Political Science Department of the New Bulgaria University under the supervision of Evgenia Ivanova indicates that the electorate at that time encompassed three main categories of voters, which the researchers labelled: 1. »biographical communists« (those who feel hatred for today's socialists because they feel they have been betrayed); 2. »biographical nationalists«; 3. »ordinary middle-class people«. The study also quotes a survey conducted in 2005 by the MBMD Pollster Agency on the political origins of the Attack Party voters, which indicates that the major influx of voters comes from the small parties and the 2001 abstainees. The MBMD survey also shows that some of the voter influx comes from the NMSII, while the drift from the ADF or the BSP seems very limited (Ivanova 2007: 9–12).

The July 2009 general election revealed a somewhat unexpected re-politicisation of Bulgarian society. Above all, this election was characterised by an unusually high voter turnout (61 percent), despite the summer season and the European elections, which had taken place just a month before. Observers thought that two successive national elections within the space of a month would rather demobilise voters, but this forecast proved to be incorrect. The high level of voter turnout benefitted mainly the winners from the GERB Party: instead of the expected average of 1.1 million voters casting their ballots for them, they received the support of almost 1.7 million citizens.

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

The whole-hearted support lent to the new GERB governance by the Attack Party after 2009, which lasted more or less until 2011, brought about internal differences among the extreme right-wing nationalists. Some of them chose to differentiate themselves from Volen Siderov and formed new parties. This weakened electoral support for the Attack Party, since GERB, especially its leader, Boiko Borissov, had appropriated many of Attack's major theses, managing at the same time to present them in a much more acceptable way to Bulgaria's

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

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

European partners. The voter withdrawal from the Attack Party acquired substantial dimensions after the internal split in the party in the period following the 2011 presidential election, in which Volen Siderov failed, with an exceedingly low result.

4.2 Presidential Elections

The significance of the Attack Party as a new factor in the political life of Bulgaria was consolidated at the 2006 presidential election. The more important feature of this election, however, was its impact on political mobilisation in the country. On the one hand, it represented the culmination of the previous tendency, but on the other, it also contained new elements, which had the potential to determine the future of the political process in Bulgaria.

In the first round of the election, Volen Siderov – the candidate of the Attack Party – unexpectedly came in second place. He received 597,175 votes or 21.5 percent of the ballots cast with a relatively low voter turn-out of only 44 percent. We should add, however, that in this first round, about 40,000 ballots were cast for Siderov's presidential running mates Peter Beron and Grigor Velev – nationalist candidates previously related to the Attack Party. Thus, the overall nationalist vote at this presidential election amounted to about 640,000 votes or almost 10 percent of the overall national electorate, a remarkable result given that the electorate of these presidential candidates consisted of voters who were easy to mobilise. In the run-off, Volen Siderov received 649,387 votes, which indicates that he had managed to mobilise

the maximum threshold of the ultra-nationalist vote in Bulgaria at that time (i.e. 24 percent of the entire voter turn-out).

What is impressive here is that the Attack Party leader received significant support from at least 160,000 – 180,000 2005 NMSII voters. The absence of an independent candidate nominated by the National Movement, the lack of a categorical stance on the part of the NMSII leadership, but mostly the disparate nature of the NMSII electorate, where voters professing different values co-exist, are the likely reasons for their choice. In fact, at the 2006 presidential election NMSII was electorally split: in the run-off 400,000 voted for Parvanov, 180,000 in favour of Siderov and the remaining 140,000 abstained from voting altogether.

The reaction was similar among UDF and DSB voters: in the run-off, they were almost equally divided between the two presidential candidates. Half of them had remained trapped in the now obsolete conviction of the need to put up unremitting resistance to the »communists«, which was why they gave their support to Siderov as an opponent of Parvanov. This lack of a democratic reflex and the understanding that both candidates were equally unacceptable (as Ivan Kostov himself said back then) brought about the division of the electorate between these two democratic parties. The other half, however, manifested a genuine democratic reflex and voted against Siderov, obviously considering him to be the »greater evil« (thus for instance, Maria Kapon, a Democratic Party MP, unequivocally distanced herself from the stance of her right-wing colleagues and declared that she would vote against Siderov). And yet, the

Table 2: Party Composition of the Votes in Favour of Volen Siderov in 2006
(an Alpha Research Agency Survey)

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

major influx of votes in support of Siderov at the run-off most probably came from within the UDF and DSB circles, whereas some former BSP voters who had voted for Siderov in the first round of the election, most likely became scared by the fact that he had made it to the run-off and this time decided to vote for Parvanov.

Analysing electoral support for the Attack Party, some researchers have put forward the hypothesis that the bulk of its voters came from within the circles of former BSP supporters and this is the reason why they identified Attack as an extreme left-wing party. The Attack Party itself defined itself as an extreme right-wing party when the MEPs elected on its party slate sided with Le Pen's MEPs and those of the rest of the far-right parties in the European Parliament.¹⁴ In fact, some of those who voted for Attack really were former BSP supporters, but probably from the pre-1994–1995 period rather than from the 2001–2005 period and as such holders of nationalist ideas (the circles around the Public Committee for the Protection of National Interests – better known as OKZNI) or had professed some kind of Stalinist attachment to order and the strong hand. At any rate, the attitude to Volen Siderov turned into a litmus test for sharing or rejecting the values defended by a modern liberal democracy.

In 2011, Siderov withdrew his two-year-long support for the GERB government and ran the presidential election in the capacity of a competitor for the governing majority. How-

ever, in the first round of the election he received a mere 122,466 votes (3.6 percent of voter turn-out, thus ranking fourth out of a total of twenty-one presidential candidates). To his result, however, we can add another 92,286 votes cast for Pavel Chernev and Stefan Solakov, who until recently were closely connected with the Attack Party, plus the 33,236 votes cast for Krassimir Karakachanov – the presidential candidate of the VMRO, a right-wing nationalist party, which has consistently distanced itself from the Attack Party. Thus in reality, extreme right-wing nationalist circles mustered the support of 220,000–260,000 voters in 2011. The decline in comparison with 2005 is obvious. The reason is that a portion of these voters had defected to the GERB. Nevertheless, extreme nationalists in Bulgaria are a significant force to be reckoned with.

4.3 European Elections

At the first European elections in 2007, the Attack Party received 275,237 votes, which once again shows a substantial level of mobilisation (14.2 percent of all ballots cast), given the very low overall voter turn-out. Much like the situation in other European Union states, it is the anti-systemic and extremist parties that manage to mobilise themselves best. The outcome of the European elections made it possible for the Attack Party to return three MEPs to the European Parliament who joined the parliamentary faction of extreme right-wing supporters of national sovereignty, which subsequently disintegrated.

In fact, the first European elections in the former socialist countries held in 2004 were mostly won by parties that can be classified as Euro-sceptics and populist,

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

although this Euro-scepticism is of a varied nature so we cannot apply such a classification without appropriate reservations with respect to each individual party.

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

At the 2007 European elections, the Attack Party managed to mobilise its supporters very well indeed, despite the fact that the level of mobilisation was not as high as the one attained at the 2006 presidential election. It was clear that the people it was mobilising considered themselves to have been on the losing side during the country's transition, and now they were attributing their disappointments to the EU.

But Euro-scepticism is something else. It may take the form of blatantly extreme right-wing populism (such as populism in Poland), but it can also be a democratic type of Euro-scepticism (such as in the Czech Republic, for instance), or moderate and even liberal patriotism (such as that in Estonia and Latvia). In 2004, some Eastern European countries (Slovenia and Hungary) did not return any Euro-sceptic parties at all to the European Parliament). Once again, in this respect Bulgaria was somewhere in the middle – its Euro-sceptic parties did moderately well at their first European election.

At the regular European elections in 2009, the Attack Party continued to progress, polling a total of 308,052 votes, but this time it won only two MEP seats. One of these MEPs – Dimitar Stoyanov (stepson of Volen Siderov) – became notorious as early as 2006 in the capacity of an election observer, when he made an outrageous comment about the Hungarian MEP Livia Járóka

on account of her Roma origin. Indeed, MEP Dimitar Stoyanov's prominence at the European Parliament is due mainly to his anti-Roma statements, which have provoked several protest reactions among among other MEPs.

4.4 Local Elections

At the 2007 local election, the Attack Party consolidated its position by winning seats on local councils, although on the level of smaller communities, having won only five mayor's seats altogether. This is well below the expectations based on the results of the 2005 general election and the 2006 presidential election. This time the Attack Party failed to mobilise even its voters from the European election, held just a few months earlier, and only 70 percent of its then electorate gave support to its candidates for municipal councillors. The party won 269 municipal councillor seats but succeeded in nominating candidates of its own in only 97 of the municipalities (out of a total of 264 municipalities in the country). The overall number of votes it received for its municipal councillor candidates was a mere 192,737, an outcome much lower than the party's performance at all previous elections. This means that two years after its emergence, the party had failed to root itself sufficiently strongly throughout the country and had remained a party mainly of the bigger towns and certain local regions.

At the 2011 local elections, the withdrawal of support from the Attack Party became very visible – the party managed to win no more than 50 municipal council seats altogether. This outcome, together with its failure at the presidential election held at the same time, gave rise to sharp criticism of its leader, Volen Siderov, and provoked yet another split in the party after Dimitar Stoyanov left as well. Many observers think that the disintegration processes within the Attack Party have become irreversible now and the party is highly unlikely to make it to the Bulgarian Parliament at the next regular general election scheduled to take place in 2013. The latest opinion poll surveys held by various pollster agencies indicate that the Attack Party lacks the potential to cross the 4 percent electoral threshold and its electoral support is now limited to between 1 and 2 percent of the country's electorate.¹⁵

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



References

- Assemirov (Tepavicharov) E.** (2007): Populism. The Blog of Emil Assemirov; <http://assemirov.hit.bg/index.htm>.
- Georgiev Zh.** (2005): Interview for the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, »Objective« Club; <http://www.bghelsinki.org/index.php?module=pages&lg=bg&page=obektiv13603>.
- Democrats for a Strong Bulgaria** (2006): Declaration of the DSB on the EU–Turkey Negotiations, Sofia, 11 Dec. 2006; http://www.dsb.bg/display.php?sub=news_1&open_news=2427.
- Ivanova, Evelina** (1994): Populism and Legitimacy, in: *Political Studies*, no. 2.
- Ivanova, Evgenia (ed.)** (2007): *Fear and Thirst for Retribution*, Veliko Turnovo: FABER.
- Yordanov, Rouslan** (2002): Their Combat, *Thema*, no. 19 (32), May 13–22 May 2002.
- Kalfin I.**: »Bulgaria Has the Chance of Becoming an Energy Transportation Center in the Balkans.« An interview given to the »Focus« News Agency; http://www.mfa.bg/bg/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=16840&Itemid=225.
- Krastev I.** (2006): A New Political Pole Was Born – That of the Denouncers. Interview for the daily 24 Hours, 26 October 2006.
- Lukacs, John** (2005): *Democracy and Populism*, Obsidian Publishing House (Democracy and Populism: Fear & Hatred, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).
- Minchev O.** (2006): Bulgaria and Turkey's EU Membership. IRME/IRIS; http://www.iris-bg.org/files/Bulgaria_and_Turkey_Membership_in_the_EU_Part2_bg.pdf.
- Nikolov S.** (2007): Turkey and the Geo-Strategic Aspects of a Future EU Membership, in: *Expert*, a publication of the Bulgarian Diplomatic Society, December 2007; <http://www.expert-bdd.com/statiq.php?id=234>.
- Nikolov T.** (2005): Turkey in the EU or Europe beyond the Bosphorus, *The Objective*, Issue No.125; <http://www.bghelsinki.org/obektiv/125-10.pdf>.
- Perrineau P.** (2003): Academic Lecture at the NBU; <http://www.nbu.bg/index.php?!=824>.
- Perrineau P./Rouban, L. (dir.)** (2007): *La politique en France et en Europe*, Sciences Po, Les presses.
- Petrov I.** (2006): Does the European Union Need Turkey?, in: *BG Factor*, 14.12.2006; http://www.bgfactor.org/index_.php?cm=14&id=9450.
- Poppetrov N.** (2008): *Fascism in Bulgaria*, Sofia, »Kama« Publishing House.
- Siderov, Volen** (2011): *Foundations of Bulgarism*, The Attack Political Party.
- Smilov D.** (2006): *Dnevnik*, 11.11.2006; <http://evropa.dnevnik.bg/show?storyid=293899>.
- Solakov, Stefan** (2007): Bulgarian »Moles« Are Digging in the Turkish Tunnel Leading to Europe, *Attack*, 03.04.2007; http://www.vestnikataka.com/?module=displaystory&story_id=29288&edition_id=464&format=html.
- Todorov, Antoniy** (2010): *Citizens, Elections, Parties. Bulgaria 1879–2009*, Sofia: Iztok-Zapad Publishing House.
- Skodrova A.** (2005): The Integration of Turkey in the EU – contradictory responses in Bulgaria, in: *Balkan Insight*, 10.11.2005; http://evroportal.bg/article_view.php?id=727714.



About the author

Antony Todorov, PhD, is Professor of Political Science at the New Bulgarian University in Sofia. He specializes in voter behaviour and political parties. He is the author of *Elements of Politics* (2012), *Citizens, Parties, Elections: Bulgaria 1879–2009* (2010), *Political Life in Bulgaria 1989–2005* (2005), *Modern Political Thought* (2001), etc. He is also Chairman of the Bulgarian Association for Political Science, and Editor-in-Chief of the journal *Political Studies*.

Imprint

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung | Dep. for Central and Eastern Europe
Hiroshimastr. 28 | 10785 Berlin | Germany

Responsible:
Dr. Reinhard Krumm, Head, Dep. for Central and Eastern Europe

Phone: ++49-30-269-35-7726 | Fax: ++49-30-269-35-9250
<http://www.fes.de/international/moe>

To order publications:
info.moe@fes.de

The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

This publication is printed on paper from sustainable forestry.



ISBN 978-3-86498-464-8