

Analytical report

RADICALISATION OF REJECTION

Group Hate and Right-Extremist
Attitudes in Bulgaria

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1

MAIN CONCLUSIONS

An empirical sociological survey conducted in autumn 2020 by the agency AFIS shows the resilience of far-right attitudes in Bulgarian society. Compared with a similar study in 2011, no significant dynamics were observed, but rather the **resilience of stereotypes** that reject difference.

Widespread stereotypes in today's Bulgarian society regarding "others", Turks, Roma, Jews, refugees and LGBT people are negative. However, there is also a different level of tolerance for such differences, with **the Roma being the most hated ethnic group**.

Widespread anti-Roma attitudes to a large extent reflect a **social jealousy** of integration policies and positive discrimination of this generally marginalised group in Bulgarian society. Simultaneously, superimposed on this social jealousy are the ideologies of racism, whose vectors are of various far-right types, but also nationalist right and left organisations and the intellectuals who represent them.

Although anti-Semitism does not have traditional support in Bulgarian society, it does have its proponents and those who express it among far-right political activists, who build their political identity by doing so. Anti-Semitic demonstrations remain marginal, but also inexplicable in a society where there is a shared pride in having saved Bulgarian Jews from deportation during World War II. Rather, **anti-Semitism in Bulgaria is associated with the attitude of a "strong hand"** in governing society.

The far-right organisations in Bulgaria of today have significant but limited support (in the last elections after 2010, they have not exceeded 15% of the actual votes). There have been no strong positive dynamics in the last five years. Their leaders, usually well-educated, use ideological language, but instrumentally, in order to be recognised by the audience, often not believing sincerely in their own words. Thus, in political terms, it is a matter of pragmatic instrumentalisation of far-right ideologies, which, nevertheless, carries a huge risk of the indoctrination of a large part of society.

The spread of prejudice towards "others" is also facilitated by the **low level of civil competence in society**, and the lack of understanding of basic concepts, which is how politics is explained. There is a widespread lack of comprehension of the meanings of the left and the right, of the liberal and the conservative, of the socialist and of the far right. This does not allow many people to identify far-right extremism, to qualify it with understanding, and to distinguish it from other ideological positions. Some intellectuals also play a role in this, who insist on the ideological closeness of the far right and the far left, which further confuses the notions of the general public.

The study also reveals the extremely **limited practices of interethnic contacts** and interethnic understanding. Bulgarian society remains closed in terms of its perceptions of the world, which further exacerbates xenophobia as an extreme form of distrust of foreigners.

2

INTRODUCTION

Far right, extreme nationalism, neo-fascism - we use different concepts to name political phenomena that are often misleadingly grouped under the more general term of populism. But populism, as an ideology or political style (the authors treat it differently), is a phenomenon of the democratisation of politics. Here I would refer to Cas Mudde's definition, often cited in populist studies: *"I define populism as a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups: 'the pure people' and 'the corrupt elite,' and argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people"*¹. In this sense, populism can be both a manifestation of democracy and a threat to democracy, and in the latter case we are talking about radical or extreme populism. The radical populist movements of today are dangerous to democracy, not because they resort to the theme of direct democracy, for example, but because they resort to nationalist mobilisation, based on distrust of the foreigner and even the rejection of anything described as "foreign." The extreme populism of today is, in fact, national populism, which refers to the extreme, radical, democratic manifestations of populism.

Researchers also distinguish between left-wing and right-wing populism, where usually in both cases extreme manifestations of intolerance of the system of representative liberal democracy can be analysed. Comparative studies show that the distinction between these two types of populism (left and right) is to a great extent based on one important aspect of this type of ideology or political style - the attitude towards the other. Right-wing populism is the environment in which extreme forms of xenophobia, nationalism and racism can develop, because it draws on the ideological arsenal of such far-right movements and parties as fascists or Nazis. Therefore, we should seek the environment of radical national populism among the far right.

Bulgaria, like most European countries, is also a ground for the development of far-right movements and organisations. Bulgarian society, however, has not developed its own or an original far-right ideology, it has borrowed from European models or, more recently, from Russia. Historical far-right organisations in Bulgaria appeared after the end of the First World War, in the conditions of military capitulation, and economic and political crisis. These movements borrowed a great deal from Italian fascism. During the Second World War, Bulgaria was an ally of Hitler and this stimulated the emergence of far-right organisations, following the Nazi model. Although the political regime at the time was not totalitarian, it moved in the realms of extreme authoritarianism and adopted a number of Nazi regime practices, such as anti-Jewish legislation. After 1945, a Soviet-style communist regime was established in Bulgaria, in which there was no political pluralism nor, accordingly, any far-right organisations.

With the advent of democratic transition after 1989, political pluralism was revived in Bulgaria. One of the manifestations of this was the emergence of the first far-right nationalist organisations, which, however, remained marginal. One of them was the Bulgarian Democratic Forum (BDF), declaring itself the successor to the Union of Bulgarian National Legions, a pre-World War II organisation, professed an extreme nationalist and anti-Semitic ideology. But the actual development of the parliamentary far right in Bulgaria began with the emergence of the party "Ataka" and its entry into the National Assembly in the 2005 elections. It gave rise to a circle of like-minded people, which fragmented numerous times so that several far-right parties sprang up. A peculiarity of the far right in Bulgaria is the existence of a party that is even considered traditional - IMRO-BNM (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation - Bulgarian National Movement), which declares itself the successor of an organisation in Macedonia with the same name from the end of the nineteenth century. IMRO-BNM is considered by some analysts as a manifestation of "soft populism" or "moderate nationalism", but its youth organisation is among the initiators of the so-called Lukovmarch, an annual demonstration honouring the memory of General Hristo Lukov, leader of the Bulgarian National Legions during World War II.

¹ Mudde, Cas (2004). 'The Populist Zeitgeist', Government and Opposition, 39:4, 541-563

3

DEFINITION OF RIGHT-WING EXTREMISM / GROUP HATRED

In modern Bulgaria there have been, some for almost twenty years, far-right parties that are comparable to similar parties from other European countries. Usually with the label “far right” we mean parties and organisations that are ideologically characterised by:

- extreme forms of cultural conservatism (non-acceptance of homosexuality, attachment to family authority);
- a conservative organic understanding of society, in which each of its members is obliged to play a certain, “naturally” prescribed role;
- xenophobia (with staunch nationalism) and often racism (be it anti-Semitism or other related ideologies);
- a special attachment to the order imposed by a firm hand, which is also associated with distrust of most forms of liberal individualism;
- specific populism, based on the opposition between the elite and the people, in which anti-capitalist rhetoric is also often borrowed.

These characteristic principles are very often present alongside each other, but sometimes in different original combinations.

Today the far right in Bulgaria is represented by many parties and organisations with different status and often with different genealogies. The most visible part of it is the party “Ataka”, which has existed since 2005 but has since experienced several successive splits, giving rise to new parties such as GORD (Grazhdansko Obedinenie za Realna Demokratsia) – People for Real, Open and United Democracy (of Slavi Binev), the National Democratic Party (of Kapka Georgieva)

and finally the NFSB - National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria (of Valeri Simeonov). But apart from them, and many before them, there are the circles around the newspaper “Monitor”, the Bulgarian National Union (BNS – Bulgarski Nacionalen Sayuz), the “Gvardia” (Guard) Union, the “Nova Zora” (New Dawn) circle, the Bulgarian National Radical Party (BNRP), the Union of Bulgarian National Legions. (SBNL), numerous organisations such as “Bulgarska Orda” (Bulgarian Horde), “Ognishte” (Hearth), the Students’ National Society “Velika Bulgaria” (Greater Bulgaria), the Bulgarian National Socialist Front, various Tangrist groups (referring to the proto-Bulgarian pagan god Tangra) such as the society “Dulo” (Dulo is the genus from which the early rulers of the proto-Bulgarians originated), “Wars of Tangra”, the Bulgarian National Front and many others. Although these are relatively small individual organisations and circles, as a whole and together they represent a significant and active social circle, especially visible today on various Internet sites. Most of these organisations and circles self-identify as right-wing, but among them there are also those who emphasise their “left” genealogy as being from the former Communist Party.

In this wide range of national populists in Bulgaria, there are differences that some researchers might define as the difference between “hard” and “soft” populism². Many place among the “soft” variant national-populist parties such as IMRO-BNM, a traditional nationalist party, claiming to be the successor to a late 19th-century organisation defending the struggle for the independence of Bulgarians in Macedonia, then still within the realm of the Ottoman Empire.

² Blog by Anna Krasteva - <https://annakrasteva.wordpress.com/2013/12/23/bulgarian-populism/>

4

HISTORICAL AND PRESENT-DAY POLITICAL CONTEXT OF GROUP HATRED IN BULGARIA

Historically, Bulgarian society has not developed lasting practices of group hatred, except for the Turks, traditionally identified with the authorities in the Ottoman Empire, whose rule in Bulgaria lasted five centuries. But even during the times of the national liberation struggles in the nineteenth century, the leaders of the national movement always distinguished the Turkish masters from the poor Turks, who were as oppressed as the Christians in the empire. Nor did traditional anti-Semitism develop in Bulgaria, due to the equal state of subordination of Christians and Jews during the Ottoman Empire. In addition, Christian anti-Semitism did not develop in Bulgaria, as in Catholic Europe or in Orthodox Russia. The reason is the special subordinate role of the Orthodox Church in the Ottoman Empire, organised for a long time by the Patriarchate of Constantinople, which was Greek-speaking but multiethnic.

4.1 ACUTE EXTREMISM IN THE 20TH CENTURY

Group hatred is a phenomenon in the history of independent Bulgaria and it developed mostly in the twentieth century. The root of such a phenomenon is both the organisation of education on a national basis, often legitimised by a clear and even fierce distinction from geographical neighbours, and the development of capitalism, which increases social inequalities and, along with this, opposition between different groups in society, including those which are ethnic and religious. The coups and civil conflicts of the whole first half of the twentieth century created a relatively lasting basis for the development of various forms of group hatred in Bulgarian society.

But although Bulgarian political history has produced both elite and nationwide far-right parties, none of them has succeeded in surpassing the limits of relatively sparse supporters. No mass party of the fascist type in Bulgaria managed to develop before the Second World War, despite the strong influence in the country of the German Nazis and the Italian fascists.

Bulgarian political life between the two world wars knew different types of elitist-populist parties, such as, for example, the National Alliance (1921-1923), a party union of opponents of agrarians and communists, which became the Democratic Alliance after the 1923 coup. It was an elite organisation of high-ranking businessmen, university professors and senior officers. The ideological basis of this organisation was "the protection of national interests" - a particularly sensitive topic after the capitulation in 1918.

The National Alliance arose in a situation when a series of organisations were created in Bulgaria which were strongly inspired by the success of Italian fascism: the Union of Fighters and the Bulgarian sections of the Italian fascist party. Although different from these first fascist and para-fascist organisations in Bulgaria, many of its activists demonstrated a significant interest in fascism in Italy. The party was significantly influenced by the Military Union, which emerged as a conspiratorial organisation of military officers in a situation when, due to demobilisation, almost 2,300 officers were released by the army after the signing of the Treaty of Neuilly in 1919.³ The Military Union was founded as an elite organisation with strict discipline characteristic of conspiratorial organisations, declaring their full allegiance to the monarchy and personally to Tsar Boris III. Close ties were established between the People's Alliance and the Military Union - these were exactly the same social and political circles, with exactly the same understanding of politics.

The People's Alliance also cooperated with other organisations of the elite: from university, journalistic, cultural and educational spheres. It also had strong positions among big business - the business association "Economic Development" and published the party newspaper "*Slovo*".⁴ In 1923, the People's Alliance became a real political party, far-right in ideology, elitist in social appeal, a populist-leader in organisation

³ Velichko Georgiev The National Alliance 1921-1923. University Publishing House "St Kliment Ohridski", Sofia, 1989, p. 88-99.

⁴ *ibid*, p. 194.

and political appeal. It also initiated the unification of all Bulgarian “parties of order” in the Democratic Alliance – a unification of all elite political parties. In the 1930s, Alexander Tsankov’s newly formed party, the “National Social Movement”, a small political formation of the elite-leader type, strongly influenced by German Nazism, would splinter from it.

Alexander Tsankov’s National Social Movement became a somewhat mass organisation in the early 1930s, similar to the National Socialist Party in Germany. Banned after 1934, it did not form illegal structures, and its members most probably became part of the government’s “non-partisan” consensus. A similar fate was in store for the Bulgarian National Legions, created along the lines of the Hitler model, and which in the 1940s threatened even the power of the monarchy, which led to very frosty relations between them and the government.

With the end of the Second World War, all fascist and parafascist organisations in Bulgaria were banned, and their leaders were either sentenced to many years in prison, or simply physically liquidated without trial or sentence. Some of these leaders managed to survive prisons and repression during communism (such as Iliya Minev, one of the leaders of the Bulgarian National Legions) and after 1989 even acquired the status of repressed by the communist regime, therefore fitting into the new democratic process as legitimate actors.

4.2 THE FAR RIGHT AFTER 1989

The development of the far right in Bulgaria after 1989, as in other post-communist countries, is at the same time the result of both revived and emerging social structural conflicts – or cleavages. We usually distinguish structural from imaginary cleavages – the latter are no less real than the former, but have a different nature. Structural cleavages are by definition the result of a profound historical transformation of society (we associate it with modernisation), while imaginary cleavages have instrumental value and their nature is ideological. They are based on the notion of political conflict as structural to society, but replace axiology with ontology. Based on the opposition observed between former communists and anti-communists in all post-communist countries, some observers tend to attribute a structural character to this conflict and treat it as a cleavage.

One main imaginary cleavage that really structured the political life at the beginning of the transition in Bulgaria was between communists and anti-communists, where the main oppositions were between the victims and the executioners, between the dictatorship and the people, between the communists and the democrats. The problem was that the boundaries

between the two poles of opposition did not seem so clear-cut, and former communists often turned out to be victims of the regime, and there were victims of communist repression who were not necessarily also democrats. Also, the confrontation between former communists and anti-communists in some Eastern European countries passed quickly and everywhere, twenty years later, it no longer structures the political landscape.

In fact, it was precisely the weakening of this opposition between communists and anti-communists (certainly among the latter we find a diverse political mix, including, if we take the example of Bulgaria, former members of far-right and nationalist pro-fascist organisations or their successors) that created the conditions for the real boom in far-right formations.

In the specificity of Bulgaria their origin had two separate roots. At the very beginning of the transition, the decision of the still ruling Communist Party in December 1989 to restore the names of the Bulgarian Turks, which had been forcibly changed five years earlier, was met with extreme negativity by some factions in the Communist Party itself, mainly those associated with the repressive name change campaign. In these circles, the first extreme nationalist parties were formed, mostly anti-Turkish and essentially extremely conservative, often associated with the Stalinist segments of the former Communist Party.

Thus was born the National Committee for the Protection of National Interests (OKZNI). It would be joined even by some former dissidents (such as Rumen Vodenicharov), driven by the same nationalist considerations. Other nationalist parties, such as the Patriotic Labour Party, Era 3, and later the Political Club “Trakia” and the Union of Thracian Bulgarians, gravitated around BSP at the time, claiming compensation from Turkey for the property of their ancestors confiscated after the Balkan Wars (1912-1913).

On the other hand, after 1990, along with the restoration of a number of the old democratic parties, there was a process of restoration-establishment of several far-right organisations and parties, such as the Bulgarian Democratic Forum (BDF), which declared itself the successor of the Bulgarian National Legions from the 1940s, and accepted as one of the 16 members of the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) coalition. Other organisations remained outside the UDF: the Bulgarian National Radical Party (of Dr. Ivan Georgiev) or the Christian Democratic Party (of Father Gelemenov), although they gravitated around the UDF. These were activists who, even during the time of communism, were persecuted for their nationalist views and attempts to create nationalist organisations. These “left” and “right” ultranationalists remained relatively marginal and depended heavily on the framework set for them on the left by the BSP,

the party derived from the former Communist Party, and the right by the UDF. In elections, these parties rarely had independent candidates and had hardly any political influence.

As the conflict between former communists and anti-communists blew over, the field opened up for both populist centrist parties and populist radical (more often far-right) parties. By 1999-2000, the first buds of today's diversity of ultra-nationalist far-right parties were emerging. This was the time when the main phase of the privatisation of the vast property of the communist state was coming to an end, when economic wealth had already been distributed. This gave rise to a new conflict - between the winners and losers of the transition to a market economy. And it was not so important whether the losers were indeed like this, but whether they experienced themselves as such. It was in this new environment of "losers" that the new populist parties, including the far right, found ground. The success of such far-right parties on the ground of the "losers" of the transition was also enhanced by the dearth of active far-left organisations in Bulgaria. There were many reasons for this lack, but it was mostly due to the hegemony of the former Communist Party in the left sector of Bulgarian politics and the low social prestige of leftist ideas (similar to the situation in other post-communist countries in Europe).

Post-communism was marked by a new conflict that became structural and produced a new cleavage - the conflict between that which was national and that which was global. The stake in this conflict was the type of international order that would be established and what was happening to nation states. In countries like Bulgaria, being simultaneously post-communist and peripheral, this conflict heightened prejudices against the global economy, fears of losing national identity, and of melting into the vast sea of globalisation. These fears further nourished the rationale of extreme populist nationalists, who might add anti-capitalist rhetoric, especially after the collapse of the historical enemy of capitalism, Soviet communism.

In the 1990s, as part of the new freedom of speech, many texts were published in Bulgaria, some of them by Hitler and Mussolini, but many more new ones. Benito Mussolini's *The Doctrine of Fascism* (numerous editions 1989 and 1992) is accompanied by an extensive introductory study of Julian Augustus, a contemporary text in glorification of fascism. In this text, for example, we read: *"The Bulgarian people have been sufficiently robbed in the last four centuries by Jews allied with the Turkish administration (...) and let us make it clear for them to understand that we, like most peoples, do not want them in Bulgaria not because of ethnic or racial prejudices (in this way they successfully deceive the world), but for the same reasons that affect criminal types, such as speculators, swindlers, conspirators and*

perverts of nations" (p. 21 of the preface in the quoted edition). Among the popular titles are the five books by Nikola Nikolov (*The World Conspiracy, The Secret Protocols, etc.*), in which the well-known theses about the "Judeo-Masonic world conspiracy" are developed.

In 1998-1999, journalist Volen Siderov, former editor-in-chief of the UDF newspaper *Demokratiya*, began working for the *Monitor* newspaper and immediately became widely known for his ultranationalist and often outright racist articles. A little later, he started his own show "Ataka" on cable television "Scat", which is also entirely in the ultranationalist spirit. At the beginning of the millennium V. Siderov published a series of books (*"The Boomerang of Evil"*, Zharava, 2002; *"Bulgarophobia"*, Boomerang BG, 2003; *"The Power of Mammon"*, Boomerang BG, 2004), where he developed the familiar theses about the "world conspiracy" of the "Judeo-Masons", but also with the specific dimensions of Bulgarian history and society.

The gradual accumulation of public image as the main spokesman for extreme nationalists allowed Siderov to stand for mayor of Sofia in 2003, although he received little support. However, on the eve of the 2005 parliamentary elections, he headed the pre-election coalition of five nationalist organisations (from both the right and the left wings) - the "Ataka" coalition. The parties in it were:

- the National Movement for the Salvation of the Fatherland (NDSO), led by Iliya Kirov ("left" nationalist);
- the Bulgarian National Patriotic Party (BNPP), whose leader was Petar Manolov (poet and former anti-communist dissident);
- "Ataka" party, led by Volen Siderov;
- "Nova Zora" (New Dawn) party, with Mincho Minchev (former BSP ally) as leader;
- Union of Patriotic Forces "Defence", with leader Yordan Velichkov (from the "left" nationalists), but also with the participation of the emblematic figure of Peter Beron, former chairman of the UDF (1990-1991).

The coalition was the first union of its kind that brought together nationalists, who, however, had different genealogies and did not necessarily share the same views. After the elections, in which "Ataka" entered parliament, the first split in "Ataka" took place - Petar Beron and a number of "left" nationalists gradually parted ways with Volen Siderov, with the reasons including his blatant anti-Semitic and anti-Roma statements.

The "left" nationalists dispersed into various small organisations. Some of these people, such as Grigor Velevev and Petar Beron, were unsuccessful presidential candidates in 2006 and then, in 2009, founded another nationalist party in the form of the Union

of Bulgarian Nationalists “Whole Bulgaria” (OBN “Whole Bulgaria”), which claimed to be a party of “modern constructive nationalism”. Grigor Velez was also the author of numerous books (he was a university professor, although he was a pathologist) such as “Bulgarian nationalism and its future” (2009). He was the founder and for a long time the editor of the newspaper “About the Bulgarian Nation”.

The right-wing nationalists who remained outside “Ataka”, also founded a series of small and very active parties such as the Bulgarian National Union (BNS, the successor to an organisation called the “Right Democratic Movement” and formerly affiliated with the Bulgarian National Radical Party). BNS leader Boyan Rasate founded the new organisation in 2000 and became close to “Ataka” (2003-2006), but subsequently split with Volen Siderov and founded the far-right-wing “Gvardia” (Guard).

The party “Ataka” itself experienced a new internal conflict in 2012, which led to a new split - two new small organisations emerged, led by Kapka Georgieva (Siderov’s former companion) and former “Ataka” MP Slavi Binev.

4.3 UNITED PATRIOTS

“United patriots” was originally a political coalition of three nationalist far-right parties, IMRO-BND, “Ataka” and NFSB, which joined forces for the 2017 parliamentary elections.

The oldest of these parties is IMRO-BND, which was established in 1990. The party declared itself the successor of the old IMRO of 1893. Since 1997 the party has been headed by Krassimir Karakachanov. IMRO defines itself as a right-wing patriotic party. Its economic views are in the direction of private initiative, in cultural terms it professes traditionalism, in political terms it is a nationalist party, sometimes defined by the term “moderate nationalism”. On the other hand, this is a well-organised party, especially its youth section, active in many demonstrations and mobilisations, and it collaborates with small far-right groups such as the Bulgarian National Union (BNS) and the neo-Nazi branch in Bulgaria of Blood and Honour. Young people from IMRO also mobilised during the anti-Roma protests (for example in 2011 in

the village of Katunitsa, in the region of Plovdiv). They are among the main organisers of the “Lukov March”, organised from February 2003 onwards in honour of the first leader of the Bulgarian National Legions Hristo Lukov. Officially, IMRO leaders distance themselves from neo-Nazism. In 2017, the party initiated a powerful (and successful) movement to reject the Istanbul Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women, mostly with the argument that this international act introduced a “third sex” in Bulgaria and was a covert form of promoting homosexuality. The action mobilised a diverse following of various ultra-conservative, religious and far-right opponents of the liberal order. The influence of various fundamentalist evangelical circles in the United States⁵, as well as conservative Orthodox circles in Russia are suspected in the actions against the Istanbul Convention.

The National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria (NFSB) is the newest of the three parties, established after the conflict between Valeri Simeonov, owner of Skat TV and Volen Siderov in 2011. The conflict was acute right up until the beginning of 2016, when it subsided and both parties began to join forces. The reasons for the conflict were both economic and personal: Simeonov did not accept Siderov’s one-man rule, nor did he accept the influence of Russian interests in the party (Simeonov has a business in Burgas, which probably makes him opposed to Russian economic interests). The NFSB has the same ideology as “Ataka”, although it is far more pro-Western and anti-Russian regarding foreign policy. The reason for the conflict also lay in the attitude towards Boyko Borisov and GERB - in 2011 Volen Siderov began to differentiate himself from Boyko Borisov.

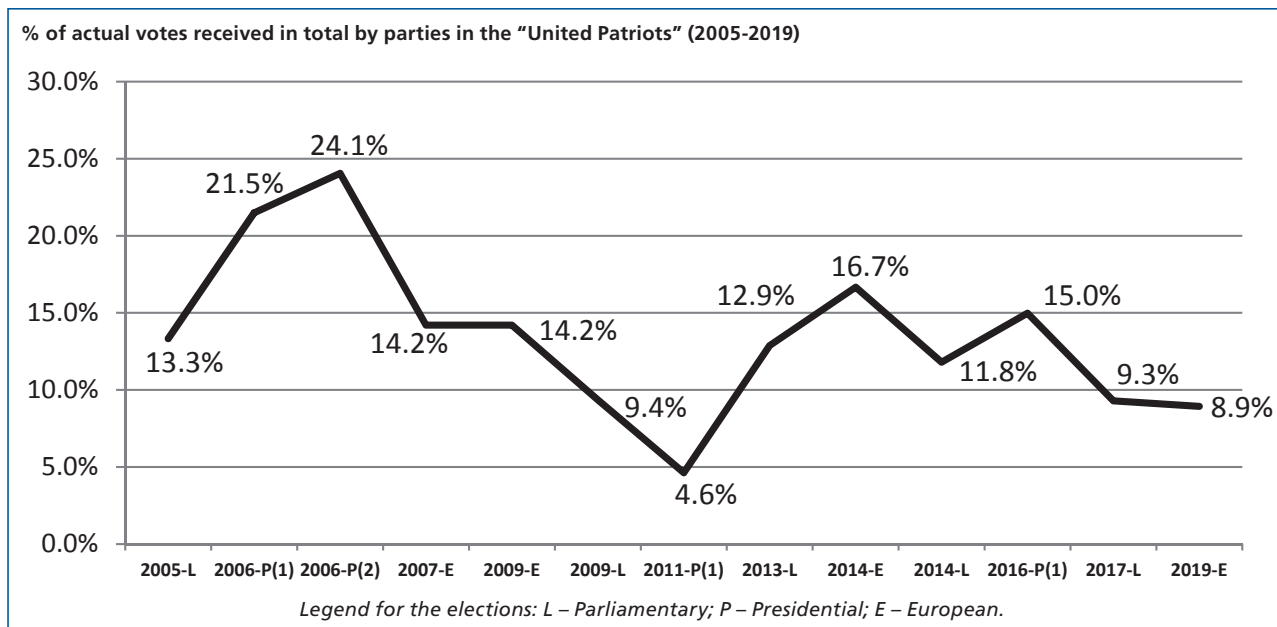
In 2020, “Ataka” left the coalition and it remained only as a combination of IMRO-BND and NFSB.

The parties that today make up the “United Patriots” have relatively constant participation in the elections and receive limited but consistent electoral support. Their electorate ranges from 150,000 to 600,000 votes (5-24% of the votes cast), whilst voter mobilisation varies according to the stakes of the election. The table and graph show their results in votes and percentage of voters in the elections. The following legend is used in the table and graph: L - parliamentary elections; P - presidential elections; E - European elections.

5 Petar Karaboev, Georgi Angelov, Jesus against “gender” – who Borisov gave way to regarding the Convention. “Dnevnik” February 17th 2018 (https://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2018/02/17/3130749_djizus_sreshtu_djendura_-_pred_kogo_otstupi_borisov_zal/)

Votes received by parties in the “United Patriots” in all elections from 2005 to 2019.

	“Ataka”	NFSB	IMRO-BND	Patriotic front (IMRO + NFSB)	United Patriots (IMRO + NFSB + “Ataka”)	All far right parties
2005-L	296,848		189,268			486,116
2006-P(1)	597,175					597,175
2006-P(2)	649,387					649,387
2007-E	275,237					275,237
2009-	307,985		57,922			365,907
2009-L	395,733					395,733
2011-P(1)	122,466		33,236			155,702
2013-L	258,481	131,169	66,803			456,453
2014-	66,210	68,376	238,629			373,215
2014-L	148,262			239,101		387,363
2016-P(1)					572,673	572,673
2017-L					318,513	318,513
2019-E	20,906	22,421	143,830			187157



In the current government of Boyko Borisov (2017) The “United Patriots” officially have 4 ministers out of a total of 21: defence, economy, tourism and ecology.

Apart from this group of far-right parties, another party that has also been particularly active in

recent years is the “Vazrazhdane” (Revival) party, founded in 2014 by Kostadin Kostadinov, a former IMRO-BND activist, who became famous for his screenplays for films and collaboration in the nationalist TV channel “Scat”.

5

ANALYSIS OF THE SURVEY DATA IN TERMS OF THEIR CONTEXT

Ruslan Yordanov summarises what the far-right nationalists in Bulgaria today have in common in an article for the left-wing magazine *Tema*: “They are against the EU in this form and, in synchrony with Jean-Marie Le Pen and Jörg Haider, advocate a Europe of nations. They fight against Bulgaria’s entry into NATO and call the pact a ‘bandit organisation.’ They use aggressive rhetoric towards minorities. They believe in the Zionist conspiracy - the Jews rule the world through banks, the IMF, the World Bank, the WTO, NATO, the Club of Rome, the Bilderbergs and, of course, Jewish bankers. According to Volen Siderov, Jews and Freemasons founded the United States, carried out the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, the October Revolution and the coming of Hitler.”⁶ This is probably the most synthetic way to present the ideological mixture of the far right in Bulgaria, in which it is by no means unique.

Probably the ideological doctrine professed by “Ataka” is the one which is most frequently quoted and most analysed. Volen Siderov’s texts contain the whole amalgam of ideas of the far right. His latest book in connection with the presidential elections in 2011 is entitled “Fundamentals of Bulgarianism”. In the lengthy text of 112 pages the main ideas of Bulgarian nationalism are developed: ethical protection of nationalism; justification of the thesis about the deep antiquity of Bulgarians as one of the oldest autochthonous peoples and civilisations of Europe; and the rejection of socialist, liberal and any other globalist doctrines as anti-national.

In the ideological profile of the far right there are several main themes: guilty minorities; the unity of the nation and a strong state; as well as harmful foreign forces. Most often, the themes are mixed so as to give rise to a specific ideological amalgam, developed within a specific public discourse. The questionnaire for repre-

sentative quantitative research (Afis Agency)⁷ contains 25 questions in total, the first 18 of which relate to topics that researchers most often associate with value orientations and preferred topics on the far-right political spectrum: national self-esteem, rejection of non-indigenous people, reservations towards foreigners, and distrust of the establishment.

Methodological framework of the empirical research:

For quantitative research:

Period of survey: August 2020
Sample size: 1200 adult citizens of the Republic of Bulgaria
Representation: Of persons over 18 years
Registration method: Quantitative; Standardised CATI interview
Selection method: Random, generation of random phone numbers
Telephone checking of 10% of the effective interviews followed

For the qualitative research:

Period of survey: September - November 2020
4 in-depth interviews with leaders of public opinion
2 focus group discussions - (FG1) Veliko Tarnovo (8 participants) and (FG2) Sofia (8 participants)

The questions from the questionnaire enable us to evaluate four main dimensions of value perceptions, which are usually considered to be the basis for far-right attitudes. These are:

⁷ The empirical research (September-October 2020) included a nationally representative survey through a direct survey of 1,200 people by means of a pre-designed questionnaire (quantitative survey), 4 in-depth interviews with leaders of public opinion and 2 focus group discussions with young people up to 40 years of age in Sofia (the capital city, 1.3 million) and Veliko Tarnovo (a regional city, 0.07 million). The findings are based on quantitative survey data, while the interpretations of the quantitative survey data are complemented by qualitative group discussions and interviews.

⁶ Yordanov, Ruslan. Their struggle *Tema* magazine, issue 19 (32) брой 19 (32), 13 - 22 May 2002.

- Ethnocentrism.
- Racism.
- Xenophobia and Islamophobia.
- Conspiracy belief.

The four dimensions require some clarification.

Ethnocentrism is associated with overrating the meaning and qualities of that which is Bulgarian, with the belief in some superiority over others and concern for the purity of the ethnos.

Racism is associated with a belief in the superiority of the white race, but also with a concern for its purity. In Bulgaria, racism is mainly related to the Roma minority, although it is usually also associated with anti-Semitism.

Xenophobia is a feeling of fear of others and a desire to maintain social distance from foreigners, but also from foreigners who are considered different. In Bulgaria, this applies mostly to Turks and the Roma people, but also to homosexuals, all treated as “foreigners” because they are different.

Conspiracy belief is a belief in various conspiracy “theories” and those about the “secret centres of power”, external influence in Bulgaria, the coronavirus, etc.

These dimensions are tested in both group discussions (in Sofia and Veliko Tarnovo), mainly among young people (up to 40 years of age). The results of the group discussions enable us to clarify the public understanding of these four dimensions and the nuances of the initial review of the result of the quantitative survey.

An initial examination of the distributions of the survey questions creates the impression of a society that is ethnocentric, to a great extent racist and xenophobic, and which believes in various conspiracy “theories”. Because on almost all issues related to these four dimensions of far-right value orientations, the accumulation of selected answers on the 5-point scale of agreement is in the position of “completely agree” with statements that sound categorically part of far-right ideologies.

The option to “completely agree” prevails in statements such as: *“Everyone in our country should be proud of Bulgaria”, “Bulgarians are by nature better than others”, “White people rightly lead the world”, “Islam is foreign to the Bulgarian culture”, “No more Muslims should be allowed to settle in Bulgaria”, “If Roma were to settle in my neighbourhood, that would be a problem”, “Roma only make use of the social system”, “Roma are prone to criminal deeds”, “Jews still have too much influence in the world”, “There are secret organisations that have a great influence on political decisions”*. Nevertheless, there are nuances that are not insignificant.

For the purposes of the analysis, however, I have grouped the selected degrees of the scale 2, 3 and 4 (the two extreme degrees avoided). The sense of grouping is the identification of positions that show some hesitation between two extreme positions, as well as emphasising the weight of the two extreme positions.

5.1 ETHNIC DISTANCES

Modern Bulgarian society, despite the effects of globalisation, remains on the whole a rather ethnically homogeneous society: the Bulgarian ethnic group accounted for 76% of the total population according to the 2011 census. According to the same data, Bulgarian Turks made up almost 8% and 4.4% were Roma.⁸ It is noteworthy that in the same census 10% did not identify themselves ethnically or did not want to answer. It is noteworthy that in the same census 10% did not identify themselves ethnically or did not want to answer. This may mean different things, but some researchers⁹ evaluate this as a problem of social prestige of different ethnic groups, which is the reason why many Roma prefer either not to self-determine or choose self-determination as Bulgarians or Turks – ethnic groups considered more socially prestigious.

However, despite this relatively large ethnic diversity, inter-ethnic contacts in Bulgarian society do not seem to be as frequent as expected in a multi-ethnic society, where almost 24% of the entire population belongs to an ethnic group that is not Bulgarian. In the empirical sociological survey, more than 1/5 of the respondents stated that they had never communicated with representatives of other ethnic groups.

Question (in %)	Frequently	Rarely	Never
21. How often do you communicate with representatives of other ethnic groups?	29.3	46.6	21.0

The social composition of those who stated that they had never communicated with representatives of other ethnic groups was, to a great extent, logical. They predominated amongst village dwellers, but also among those who self-identified as far right (including extreme right). This situation coincides with many studies in Western Europe, which show that those of far right conviction often live in places where they have no direct contact with people of other ethnicities.

⁸ NSI. Census of population and housing in the Republic of Bulgaria, 2011: <https://censusresults.nsi.bg/Census/Reports/2/2/R9.aspx>.

⁹ Alexey Pamporov “The number of the Roma population in Bulgaria as a problem”, in the Integration of the Roma into the Bulgarian society, Sofia, 2007.

As regards ethnic distances, the group that seems least desirable to have in the vicinity are the Roma. This is not surprising, given that ethno-racial prejudices against them are the most widespread.

Question (in %)	Completely disagree		Completely agree
	1	2-3-4	5
8. If Roma were to settle in my neighbourhood, that would be a problem.	8.1	47.0	43.8

Here, the social profile of those who share such concerns is logical, given the above conclusions about racial prejudices. This time those who predominate are 40-year-olds, residents of regional and small towns, as well as entrepreneurs and the unemployed. Supporters of nationalists and BSP also share such fears.

It is curious to do a more in-depth analysis by cross-referencing the above two questions. It turns out that a significant number of those who stated that they never communicate with other ethnic groups fully agree that the settling of Roma in their neighbourhood would be a problem (37% of this group). This can also indicate the way in which interethnic relations are modelled by practically indirect information, and regardless of direct observations or interaction with the other group.

In %		If Roma were to settle in my neighbourhood, that would be a problem		
		Completely disagree	2,3,4	Completely agree
How often do you communicate with representatives of other ethnic groups?	Frequently	12.8	42.9	44.0
	Rarely	6.1	44.5	47.9
	Never	5.6	55.5	37.3

A number of questions in the questionnaire of the quantitative research are aimed at measuring the existing ethnic and cultural distances in Bulgarian society. The results show a worrying picture - a very low tolerance for intimacy with a representative of various minority groups, both ethnic and sexual-cultural. People in Bulgaria have especially strong reservations about Roma and refugees, but no so less for homosexuals.

20. Would you accept a member of the following groups to be ... ? (in %):	Your fellow citizen	Your neighbour	A guest in your home	Your close relative through marriage
A Turk	22.10	24.50	22.00	15.40
A Roma person	15.00	8.90	9.20	5.40
A refugee	13.00	9.20	9.30	7.70
A homosexual	13.80	10.70	10.40	4.80

Based on the raw data from the quantitative study, I have recalculated for each of the respondents their place on a scale with 4 possible positions from extreme ethnocentrism to extreme tolerance regarding different ethnic groups (foreigners and refugees), without homosexuals. In the question posed "20. Would you accept a member of the following groups to be: (1) your fellow citizen, (2) your neighbour, (3) a guest in your home or (4) your relative", respondents have the opportunity to answer for each of these positions their attitude towards Turks, Roma and refugees. The choices in the answers for each group are marked, and no choice mentioned is marked as 0.

The recalculation is based on the number of ethnic groups mentioned (different from Bulgarian) for each respondent, where the new variable has possible positions from 0 to 4 or from no foreign group up to where all three groups are mentioned. Respectively, I determined the first position to be "extreme ethnocentrism" and the last position to be "extreme tolerance". I calculated this new variable for each of the positions of proximity in the questionnaire. The result is interesting and can be seen in the following table, where the percentages show the share of those categorised as "ethnocentric" or "tolerant" on the scale in the total number of respondents for each category of distances.

The survey shows a significant proportion of extreme ethnocentrists and a rather small proportion of ethno-tolerant citizens. The table is based on the new variable, in which respondents are ranked as a summary of how intensively they accept other ethnic groups as fellow citizens, neighbours, guests or relatives. The respondents are grouped into 4 new groups, where the first group includes respondents who do not accept other ethnic groups even as fellow citizens, and the last group accounts for respondents who accept other ethnic groups at the same time as fellow citizens, neighbours, guests or relatives. Here is the summary of this recalculation and the proportion of the new 4 groups among the total of 1200 respondents:

Position on the scale	Number of those surveyed	Category	%
1	580	"extremely ethnocentric"	48.3%
2	350		29.2%
3	153		12.8%
4	117	"extremely tolerant"	9.8%
Total	1200		100.0%

Almost half of the respondents are in some way extreme ethnocentrists, in the sense that they share significant reservations about other ethnic groups (in this case, the calculation is made only based on the attitude towards Turks, Roma and refugees).

Historically, this ethnocentrism can be explained in a different way. During the Ottoman Empire, Bulgarians survived not because they integrated (partially) into the empire, but because they lived in separate and isolated communities that did not practise mixed marriages. After the Liberation in 1878, the new Bulgarian state pursued a policy of joining the areas inhabited by ethnic Bulgarians, i.e. it preferred ethnic homogeneity. Part of this policy was to encourage Bulgarian Turks to emigrate in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, but also to make various agreements with Turkey in the twentieth century for exchange of population and various deportations.

The table shows the ideological self-definition of the four groups of respondents, according to their position on the new variable “ethnocentrism – tolerance”.

Politically, extreme ethnocentrists self-identify as centre-right and right-wing, but also more as supporters of nationalists, smaller parties and, to some extent, BSP. They predominate in the age categories of 50-year-olds, and they are mostly well-educated. The impression is given that they are overrepresented not only among householders (which is somewhat expected), but also among students, which is very problematic. Overrepresentation is also to be observed among people with a high income.

		Q24. Political ideas						Total
		Left	Centre-left	Centre	Centre-right	Right	NA	
Ethnocentric	1	9.5%	8.9%	16.6%	15.0%	14.8%	35.2%	100.0%
	2	13.3%	11.0%	28.0%	12.9%	9.1%	25.8%	100.0%
	3	7.8%	12.6%	26.2%	8.7%	6.8%	37.9%	100.0%
Tolerant	4	3.8%	10.3%	29.5%	12.8%	2.6%	41.0%	100.0%
Total		9.8%	9.8%	20.8%	13.8%	12.1%	33.8%	100.0%

The most ethnocentric (refusal even to grant citizenship for foreigners) believe to the greatest extent that:

- ethnic relations in Bulgaria have deteriorated.
- ethnic origin influences infectious diseases.
- ethnic origin affects the tendency commit crimes.
- ethnic origin affects the tendency for violence.

Extreme ethnocentrists do not differ from others in their pride in Bulgaria, but share slightly more that Bulgarians are better than others. They predominate among those who said that:

- *white people rightly lead the world.*
- *there are many foreigners in Bulgaria.*
- *different peoples should not mix.*
- *Islam is foreign to Bulgarian culture.*
- *no more Muslims should be allowed in Bulgaria.*
- *it would be a problem if Roma were to settle in the neighbourhood.*
- *Roma make use the welfare state.*
- *Roma are prone to crime.*
- *Jews have a great influence in the world*

Extreme ethnocentrists are distinctly more likely to believe in various conspiracy “theories”.

Ethnocentrists state far more that they have never had contact with other ethnic groups.

Conversely, the most tolerant (kinship with all) most clearly advocate the thesis that everyone should be proud of Bulgaria, but are least likely to think that

Bulgarians are better than others. They spurn agreement with the idea of white supremacy, are not afraid of Roma people, and do not believe that Jews have much power in the world. However, there are far fewer of them than extreme ethnocentrists.

Focus groups again provided an opportunity to glean nuances of the perceptions of minorities.

With regard to Turks, the views expressed seemed more tolerant and, despite that, an expectation was apparent that they would adapt to Bulgarian society and not express their difference much. Statements such as: *“I am not against the Turks, but each should know their place”* or *“it is not normal to hear the mosque in the centre of Sofia”* lead to just such an understanding. However, there were also many positive opinions: they are *“people absolutely like us, working, looking after their children”*; *“Clean and learned people”*; *“Hardworking”*. And yet: *“People like everyone else. But when they speak Bulgarian, everything is fine.”* (FG2) There was also an opinion that reproduced a point of reference from the ideology of the so-called “Revival process” (the forced change of Turkish personal names to Bulgarian in 1984-1985): *“It is not right to call them Turks, because historically they are Bulgarian-Mohammedans. They do not differ from the Bulgarians, but they have Turkish-Arabic names”* (FG2).

The most negative attitude expressed in the focus group discussions was that towards the Roma people. The notions about this minority were ignominious:

“there are few of them who live in clean houses” and “they are of almost no use to Bulgaria” (FG1). In addition, “they have more privileges than Bulgarians, they do not want to adapt or work, they do not send their children to school” (FG1). The possibility of changing this marginalised position of the Roma in the discussions ranged from total pessimism (“it cannot be changed”, FG1) to “population control, restraint” (FG1). Of course, some opinions were also expressed that the situation of the Roma group is such because they are not educated (FG1). In the discussion in Veliko Tarnovo, however, more tolerant opinions were expressed: “we ought not to categorise them, the Roma are developing well, I know and communicate with such people, there is no difference between me and them; some of them are lagging behind, but this is the case everywhere” or “there are people with values among gypsies, but the opposite is also true.”

With regard to LGBTI communities, focus group discussions showed a moderately conservative attitude. Some learned the meaning of the acronym for the first time: *“now we have learned what it is” (FG1). On the one hand, there was tolerance: “as people are no different from us, they deserve respect” or “I have a lesbian friend who helped me to radically change my mind” (FG2). But there was unanimity in that LGBTI communities should not flaunt their difference: “not to show things”, “not to flaunt” (FG1) or “I am very much against their public displays” (FG2). In short - patience towards them, as long as they are not noticed. Not very different from the Turks.*

There was another understanding in focus group discussions that was against the victimisation of LGBTI communities. There was unanimity that violence against them is unacceptable, but at the same time *“they should not be regarded as victims” and “point out that they are maltreated, which is not true.” (FG2)*

The explanation given for encouraging LGBTI communities in the Western world was quite paradoxical: *“LGBTI policies in Britain and France advocate a decline in population there.” But for Bulgaria “this is a disastrous policy and we must fight against it.” (FG2).*

The attitude towards refugees in focus group discussions also revealed nuances. On one hand, there was the belief that *“refugees are fleeing from disaster and I am for them, we are human and we must help”* and that *“everyone has the right to escape from a place where they cannot adapt” (FG1). But a clear distinction was made between refugees and immigrants: “I am against immigrants” (FG2). The problem was almost unanimously seen as being that refugees are only eligible if “the state manages to socialise them” because “you will have to fit in, not live on benefits” (FG1).*

And yet, according to one of the opinions regarding differences *“everything must be in moderation” (FG1).*

5.2 XENOPHOBIA, TURKOPHOBIA, ISLAMOPHOBIA

The idea of Bulgaria, as far as can be understood from the results of the quantitative survey, contains three elements: a sense of national pride and understanding, albeit with nuances that Bulgarians are better than others. The low proportion of respondents who strongly disagree with such statements is striking. Along with this Bulgarian-centrism, the idea of Bulgaria excludes Islam, considered foreign to Bulgarian culture by a significant majority, as well as the fear of the possible settling of more Muslims in Bulgaria. This Bulgarian-centrism also contains elements of Turkophobia and the Islamophobia related to it, although this is with different nuances, especially compared to Islamophobia in former colonial countries such as France.

Ethnocentrism and xenophobia are related attitudes; in the Bulgarian society of today there is no contradistinction between them and they are usually shared by far-right organisations and their supporters. Speaking of xenophobia in Bulgaria, it is usually the Turks who are the first to be the subject of such an attitude. For far-right nationalists, the collective image of the “Turks” includes both the memory of Ottoman rule (“Turkish slavery”) and modern Turkey, with what is considered to be its “fifth column” in Bulgaria - Bulgarian Turks.

The manifestation of these anti-Turkish attitudes is visible in the attitude of Bulgarian parties towards Turkey’s potential membership in the European Union. Only “Ataka” and DSB are clearly opposed to membership, albeit with completely different arguments, which is an essential point (DSB expresses criticism of democracy in Turkey). In the group of far-right opponents of Turkey’s EU membership, one of the arguments commonly expressed is that Turkey is not a European country, not so much in a geographical as in a cultural aspect. The reason for the opposition is *“Turkey’s unsuitability to become a lodger in a well-arranged Christian home on the Old Continent,”* as Stefan Solakov wrote in the “Ataka” newspaper (Solakov 2007).

The argument that Turkey is not a European country is based not so much on geographical palpability (10% of the country’s territory is geographically in Europe, the rest in Asia) as on the understanding of incompatibility between the “Christian roots” of Europe and the predominant Muslim religion in Turkey. It is precisely this aspect of “cultural incompatibility” that stands out most. Because in this argument, Europe is understood mostly as a Christian community, or at best, as a community that shares “Christian values.” Frequently opponents of Turkish membership point out that Turkey is an Islamic country, a member of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, which is

why its place is not in the EU, which is predominantly Christian. On October 3rd, 2007 Dimitar Stoyanov, a former MEP from "Ataka", stated before participants in an anti-Turkish demonstration in Brussels that it was unnatural for a society built on Christian values to unite with a Muslim state that was even outside the borders of Europe.¹⁰ This anti-Turkish line in the stance of the far right in Bulgaria is also anti-Muslim and is still displayed today.

In Sofia, representatives of "Ataka" repeatedly played the sounds of bells and Christian chants on loudspeakers near the Banya Bashi mosque in Sofia with a provocative purpose. Then in 2011, before Friday prayers, a group of "Ataka" supporters organised a protest rally near the fence of the mosque against the loudspeakers used by the mosque to invite worshippers. They called out insulting words at the Muslims who had gathered there. Physical clashes ensued when the Muslims retaliated. The police intervened and arrested several people.

Human rights observers in Bulgaria from the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee also noted other incidents involving attacks on Muslims or the desecration of mosques, motivated with far-right arguments and the use of Nazi symbols.¹¹ In the course of these actions against Muslims, foreigners were injured, often immigrants. And in some cases, protesters used the now-famous racist and xenophobic slogan "Gypsies into soap, Turks under the knife!" Human rights activists also noted extreme right-wing aggression against members of other faiths, such as attacks on Jehovah's Witnesses and Protestant missionaries. In many cases, fans of various football clubs in the country were involved, which have recently become centres for the spreading of racist and xenophobic ideologies.

According to the survey conducted, there are more nuances to the opinion that *"there are too many foreigners in Bulgaria"*. To some extent, this finding is the result of a historically prevalent situation - the country has not been attractive to foreigners seeking a better life. On the other hand, the issue gained importance in the context of the crisis of migration in 2014-2015, but at the present moment Bulgaria is weakly affected by the refugee wave.

Question (in %)	Completely disagree		Completely agree
	1	2-3-4	5
1. Everyone in our country should be proud of Bulgaria.	2.6	39.4	57.4
2. Bulgarians are by nature better than others".	8.2	59.4	31.3
4. There are too many foreigners in Bulgaria.	19.0	59.8	17.8
6. Islam is foreign to Bulgarian culture.	11.0	52.9	32.0
7. No more Muslims should be allowed to settle in Bulgaria.	10.9	49.9	33.4

There are diverse social profiles of those who declare overt ethnocentrism, but there are some peculiarities. Among those who fully accept the statement that everyone should be proud of Bulgaria there is a greater proportion the oldest cohort (over 60), residents of Sofia, people with rather low education and, more often than not, householders. It is surprising that high-income (above average) people are also overrepresented. Probably these are people who are generally satisfied with life, cope without public support and do not depend on anyone. Politically, BSP and GERB voters prevail, i.e. supporters of the largest system parties. Conversely, the level of those who share the above statement is low among villagers, probably because they do not feel much pride in their own situation.¹²

The number of people who share of such a belief is also relatively lower among people who place themselves on the far right on the scale of political self-determination. This is especially interesting because it means that those who stand on the extreme right do not share the belief that "everyone in our country should be proud of Bulgaria." It is possible that these "right wingers" (including the far right) are critical of Bulgaria today and find no reason to be proud of it. It is probable that the question formulated in this way is not particularly indicative of ethnocentrism, but rather of satisfaction with one's own situation.

The conviction that Bulgarians are better than others is shared predominantly among residents of Sofia and regional cities, but also by householders and people with high incomes. Again, this question prob-

¹⁰ Shkodrova A. Integration of Turkey into the EU – contradictory reactions in Bulgaria. B: Balkan insight, 10/11/2005 (http://evroportal.bg/article_view.php?id=727714).

¹¹ BHC. Human Rights in Bulgaria in 2019 Annual report. (<https://bghelsinki.org/web/files/reports/123/files/BHC-Human-Rights-in-Bulgaria-in-2019-bg-issn-2367-6930.pdf>)

¹² The fundamental reason is that among village dwellers, Turks and the Roma people have a larger proportion than the proportion of them in cities. At the same time, we know from other studies that among non-Bulgarian ethnic groups the proportion of those who answer "Yes" to this question is usually understated (although not less than 50%). Especially among Turks, this is more often an automatism or an answer dictated by a desire to be polite to the interviewer. The ethnicisation of official patriotism maintains a constant clash of self-concepts in their minds – "I am a Bulgarian, i.e. non-Turk" versus "I am a Turk". (note by C.N.)

ably leads more to an evaluation of one's own position in society, rather than being a mark of ethnocentrism. All the same, there is a greater proportion of supporters of BSP among those who share this viewpoint, while to a much lesser extent it is shared by supporters of "Democratic Bulgaria" (DB). Or in the distribution of answers here we have a division along the lines of "former communists - anti-communists", with the former taking an optimistic position and the latter a realistic one.

Ethnocentrism is far more strongly detected in questions related to foreigners and Muslims. Those who feel that there are too many foreigners in Bulgaria are among people with secondary education and those who are unemployed. But they are also among those who identify as nationalists and supporters of GERB. Probably this is because of fears about foreign workers, who put Bulgarians out of their jobs, but also out of ordinary xenophobia. The over-representation of those who strongly support this opinion among the young and people in education is striking, which should be a cause for concern.

The rejection of new Muslim settlers (refugees or migrants), as well as the conviction that "Islam is foreign to Bulgarian culture" is shared predominantly by the middle generation (40-49 years old, i.e. those born in the 1970s), but also among supporters of BSP and nationalists. This corresponds to the idea of Bulgaria definitely being a cultural-Christian country, where Muslims are foreigners, regardless of the fact that Islam has been traditional Bulgaria for a considerable amount of time.

The focus groups in Sofia and Veliko Tarnovo help us to find nuances in these conclusions about ethnocentrism. For example, arguments for "the pride of Bulgaria" included *"an extremely beautiful country; with a rich history, because we have been very strong, and our nation is very strong and resilient"* (FG1). As well as *"because of the rich history of the alphabet, hospitality"* (FG2). The rescue of the Bulgarian Jews and the help for the Armenians were also emphasised. (FG2)

But the understanding was also expressed that we must *"be realistic, because Bulgarians are slightly envious and lazy."* (FY1) It was emphasised that *"we are still human and we make mistakes"*. There was also a belief in the discussions that *"we can be proud of our deeds"* and pride in history *"is not an end in itself."* (FG2)

5.3 RACISM/ANTISEMITISM AND ROMAPHOBIA

Minorities, in the Bulgarian case ethnic and cultural (or sexual), have been branded by far-right parties

as "the usual suspects." Traditionally, however, these are the Jews - the article quoted in *Tema* magazine cites the journalist from the Monitor circle Iliya Iliev: *"Since Lukanov, the Jews in Bulgaria have taken more and more key positions in the government of Bulgaria. There are five ministers with Jewish roots in this cabinet. Two of the chairmen of the four parties represented in parliament also have a Jewish streak. Not a single pure Bulgarian for at least two generations in front of the people! The picture is similar in the collective leaderships of these parties."* (Yordanov 2002). The official programme of the BNRP (Bulgarian National Radical Party) begins as follows: *"Since ancient times, Jews have sought to establish themselves as the dominant race in the world through Judaism, as a religion, and Zionism, as a militant nationalism."*¹³ The program of "Wars of Tangra" states: *"Two peoples on Earth have their own national God: the Jews have placed themselves under the rule of the blood-thirsty YHWH; we, Bulgarians, have our Unlocked Sky, our Shining Tangra."*¹⁴

These displays of anti-Semitism in the Bulgarian society of today seem unfounded when one bears in mind that during World War II the mobilisation of individual members of parliament, political parties and the Orthodox Church managed to prevent the planned deportation of Bulgarian Jews to Nazi extermination camps in Poland. But on the other hand, the Bulgarian authorities in the newly acceded territories of Macedonia and Southern Thrace fully cooperated in the deportation of 11,000 Jews. Anti-Semitism in Bulgarian society was largely introduced in the twentieth century with various ideologies that came from large European countries. But for various reasons it took root in Bulgaria, where, after all, it remains relatively limited.

Along with Jews, Turks and Roma people are no less the target of disqualification by the far right. And if the Turks are mentioned mostly in the historical aspect of the "500 years of Turkish slavery", then the Roma are a target of xenophobia in general. Volen Siderov has repeatedly expounded the theory of "Gypsyfication" as a threat to Bulgaria. In an interview with *"Ataka"* newspaper, Siderov said: *"Exactly 10 years ago, I wrote an article in 'Monitor' newspaper titled 'Is Bulgaria being Gypsyfied?' I don't think there is anything offensive in the word gypsyfication, because here we are talking about the growth of this population, which does not want to integrate into Bulgarian society, but lives encapsulated."*¹⁵

¹³ BNRP. Programme (<http://burgas.bnrp.info/>).

¹⁴ Wars of Tangra (www.voininatangra.org/modules/xfsection/article.php?articleid=286).

¹⁵ http://www.vestnikataka.com/?module=displaystory&story_id=61184&format=print&edition_id=1054

There are also scathing speeches against other minorities, such as those about homosexuals. In 2005, Volen Siderov caused a scandal with his first speech in parliament, where he stated: *"Finally, Bulgarians will have their own representation in parliament. There will not only be pederasts, gypsies, Turks, foreigners, Jews and all kinds of others, but there will be only and exclusively Bulgarians!"*¹⁶ In homophobia, extreme nationalists are consistent - activists of "Gvardia" (Guard) or even IMRO, which is considered more moderate, regularly attack activists at gay parades in Sofia.

It is amazing, however, that there is a significant proportion of those surveyed in this study who strongly agree that *"Jews still have too much influence in the world,"* an old thesis of historical anti-Semitism, and also that the share of those who categorically reject such an opinion is very insignificant. It is amazing because there is no historical anti-Semitism in Bulgaria, and the Jewish community of today in Bulgaria is very small, with an almost imperceptible presence in positions of great power and influence.

The current quantitative survey, however, indicates a significant proportion of racist prejudices and ideas among respondents. It is quite unusual for a country like Bulgaria, which does not have a colonial past (rather, this country itself was colonised), to have a relatively high proportion of respondents who fully agree that *"white people rightly lead the world."* As well as the comparatively low proportion of those who strongly disagree with this.

The attitude towards another classic idea of racism, that *"different peoples should not mix"* reveals far more nuances. On this issue, the respondents are not simply divided, but those who categorically reject this idea number more than those who fully agree with such a statement. It is possible that this reflects the small experience of the Bulgarian society of mixed marriages with foreigners. There is a lack of official data on such marriages, but many researchers¹⁷ reckon that they are relatively rare in the modern history of Bulgaria, and even now, if it comes to marriages between people of different ethnicities within the country.

If we speak of racial prejudices in Bulgaria, this is most often displayed in the ardently negative attitude towards the Roma people, a historical minority in Bulgarian society. Today, the Roma people repre-

sent a significant part (if not the most significant) of the poorest strata of Bulgarian society. Among respondents prejudices that *"Roma are prone to crime"* and *"Roma only make use of the social system"* are widespread. The idea of this minority is like that of a marginalised useless group of people, who are somehow almost genetically predisposed to crime, do not want to work (slackers) and because of this they take advantage (unfairly) of the rights that the social system gives them.

Question (in %)	Completely disagree		Completely agree
	1	2-3-4	5
3. White people rightly lead the world.	11.0	55.3	30.7
5. Different peoples should not mix.	21.1	59.4	16.8
9. Roma only make use of the social system.	3.4	43.4	52.4
10. Roma are prone to crime.	2.9	50.3	45.3
11. Jews still have too much influence in the world.	5.2	51.9	31.8

The social profile of those who share these understandings is slightly more homogeneous. But their character is startling, especially from the point of view of their political self-determination.

The understanding that *"white people rightly lead the world"* is found mainly among 30-year-olds (born shortly after 1989), but also among entrepreneurs and people with a higher income. As expected, this is shared mostly among those who identify as nationalists, but also almost equally by supporters of GERB and BSP. It is astonishing that, among those who share such a viewpoint, those who self-identify as "left" are overrepresented.

In the same manner, the strong belief that *"different peoples should not mix"* is shared mainly by two quite different social groups: (a) entrepreneurs and people with high-incomes, and (b) pensioners and those with low-incomes. At first glance, paradoxically, but probably understandably - this racist prejudice is encountered among supporters of nationalists, but also those of BSP (influential among senior citizens).

The belief that Roma people on the whole are "antisocial parasites" (making use of the social system and prone to crime) is an old racist prejudice. Those who think so are mainly 30-year-olds (as well as those convinced of "white supremacy"), people with high incomes, but also supporters of nationalists and BSP. Here, but more understandably, the unemployed are overrepresented - they probably feel it is a matter of social egoism and a sense of jealousy regarding the social benefits for the Roma population.

¹⁶ www.bghelsinki.org/bg/publikacii/obektiv/blgarski-khelzinski-komitet/2005-11/grazhdani-sreshu-omrazata/

¹⁷ Anastasiya Pashova, *Mixed marriages – a model of ethnic and religious tolerance. Curricula vitae and research*. Sofia, Publishing House "SemaRSH", 2004. (<http://www.history.swu.bg/brak.htm>)

In connection with the idea above, it is not surprising to see the social profile of those who are firmly convinced that “Jews still have too much influence in the world”. Again, we see an over-representation of 30-year-olds, people with high incomes, and supporters of nationalists and BSP. But also there is a high proportion of the unemployed. Such a belief is least apparent among the youngest (up to 30 years of age), which may mean that the preconditions for anti-Semitism will decrease in the future.

The paradox with these elements of racism (latent or open) is that in many cases they are shared by BSP supporters (officially a leftist and socialist party). In some cases, this may be “social racism” (or social jealousy) towards the Roma, but in other cases it is ordinary anti-Semitism.

Racial prejudices are relatively widespread because of the proportion of respondents who attribute negative qualities such as propensity to begging, crime, physical violence, unemployment, or infectious disease to ethnicity. However, here the opinion of respondents seems divided, with the belief prevailing that there is only such a connection with begging and crime. This is due to the negative attitude towards the Roma community as a whole and the prejudices towards it.

23. Do you agree with the statement that the phenomena stated are influenced by the racial origin of the people who display them? (in %)	Yes	No
– Infectious diseases	41.3	47.2
– Physical violence	47.1	43.4
– Unemployment	47.8	40.8
– Begging	60.9	30.7
– Crime	55.3	34.0

Something that is interesting is the parallel with the study of Afis from 2011, when identical questions were asked. The distance of nine years, however, has not significantly changed attitudes, despite the slightly reduced proportion of “yes” answers. Considering the high relative proportions, we are apparently witnessing the reaffirmation of stable public attitudes, rather than modelling them in a positive direction. A more serious change is reported only with regard to begging and unemployment. Here the reasons can primarily be found in the general impoverishment of the Bulgarian population over the last decade and growing inequality, which partly weakens the role of ethnicity as a significant factor.

Do you agree with the statement that the phenomena stated are influenced by the racial origin of the people who display them? (in % Only “yes” answers)	2011	2020
– Infectious diseases	43,2	41,3
– Physical violence	51,7	47,1
– Unemployment	58,0	47,8
– Begging	73,0	60,9
– Crime	58,6	55,3

The focus groups give us the nuances of racial prejudice. In the first place, both are unanimous that the belief in the superiority of whites is an “*extreme statement, it sounds very extreme*” (FG1) or even a “*display of inhumanity*”. But at the same time there is such a statement: “*I am not a racist, but it is an indisputable fact that almost all industrial revolutions, the development of humanity took place on the white continent*” (FG2).

5.4 THE CONSPIRATORIAL MENTALITY

There is nothing new about conspiracy “theories” in Bulgarian society, but the development of social networks and electronic media today contributes to them being spread far more quickly. There is no proven link between the understandings shared by far-right-wing parties and their tendency to readily accept various conspiracy “theories”. The connection is in the field of xenophobia, fear and distrust of foreigners. They usually look for explanations for the troubles in the alleged interference of various foreign forces (governments, organisations and oligarchs) in the internal affairs of Bulgaria. Such explanations are readily accepted by the followers of these parties uncritically, as the easiest and most convenient explanation, even more so since they coincide with the understanding of the supposed hatred of foreigners towards Bulgaria.

In this aspect another important factor is the foreign policy profile of the far-right parties in Bulgaria. All of them take a nationalist stance on all topics, where they can contrast external and internal interests: the request of many European countries for the closure of the Kozloduy Nuclear Power Plant units as a condition for the accession of Bulgaria to the EU; the participation of Bulgaria in international peacekeeping missions in Afghanistan and Iraq; NATO membership as a new foreign policy dependence, etc. The common idea shared by most far-right circles is expressed in a document of the BNL (Legionnaires): “*International secret and overt forces are shaking our national spirit and preparing our final slavery.*”¹⁸

¹⁸ www.forum.bg-nacionalisti.org/index.php?PHPSESSID=c6e39588a3c2ac5283fe5ac59bc425cc&ac...

A usual part of the ideological value universe of the far right is the belief in the existence of a global conspiracy against humanity (the nation). The questionnaire in the present study contains several questions related to this, three general ones on the topic and three related to specific topics such as climate change, the debate on the issue of the law on the child in Bulgaria and the coronavirus pandemic.

The results show a rather high proportion of respondents who fully accept claims such as *“there are secret organisations that have a great influence on political decisions”, “politicians and other leaders are just puppets of the forces that stand behind them”,* and *“I believe more in my own feelings than in so-called experts.”* Almost a third express this opinion, while the number of those who strongly disagree with it is significantly smaller - about 6%. Even those who chose intermediate positions of agreement (somewhat yes or somewhat no) can be attributed to

people who do not completely rule out the veracity of such statements.

Although it seems startling, it is possible that sharing such an opinion is more connected to the general distrust of public authorities and institutions, including the elite (experts). Because on specific topics, the opinion of respondents is not so unambiguous and categorical in favour of such conspiratorial statements. Here, the opinion on how much the danger of coronavirus is exaggerated stands out as an exception with a visibly higher proportion of those who completely agree with it. However, this is probably due to the very uncertainty about the size of the threat. There is also a predominance of those who disagree on the existence of a secret plan to *“take children away from their parents and hand them over to the West for adoption”* - a much debated topic during the campaign of various ultra-conservative circles against the Child Strategy recently discussed.

Question (in %)	Completely disagree		Completely agree
	1	2-3-4	5
12. There are secret organisations that have a great influence on political decisions.	6.1	51.6	30.1
13. Politicians and other leaders are just puppets of the forces that stand behind them.	6.0	50.3	34.3
14. I believe more in my own feelings than in so-called experts.	6.7	60.3	30.7
15. The research which proves climate change is mostly fake.	21.1	58.3	12.6
16. There is a secret plan to take children away from their parents and hand them over to the West for adoption.	23.8	45.7	13.4
17. The real danger of the coronavirus is exaggerated.	13.3	55.3	29.6
18. There is a danger that people will be forcibly vaccinated or marked with chips under the pretext of fighting the coronavirus pandemic.	19.3	49.3	23.8

The social profile of those who completely agree with these statements is very similar to the social profile of those who share different racial prejudices. In most cases, these are more likely to be residents of small towns, unemployed, and supporters of nationalists or BSP. But there are also peculiarities that are not insignificant. In any case, these are people who are dissatisfied with their situation, who are more critical of the government and who do not trust it. But they are people who are probably afraid of losing the social position they have, even though they are not satisfied with it. Something that also makes an impression is that high-income people, as well as entrepreneurs, are overrepresented in the group, which unconditionally accepts the idea that some secret power centres that rule the world. They are also overrepresented among those who categorically reject “experts”, obviously certain of their own opinion and assured of their social status, although they are dissatisfied with its public recognition.

The social profile of those who believe that the coronavirus epidemic is exaggerated is slightly different: the youngest group and those in education predominate - probably those who believe that quarantine

measures are most harmful for them or prevent them from doing what they want.

There is another difference in the profile of those who believe in the existence of a secret plan to take children away from their parents in Bulgaria and hand them over to the West for adoption: they are predominantly 30-year-olds (expected), but also the unemployed and low-income people, as well as supporters of BSP and MRF. Evidently, these are disadvantaged social categories who are afraid of losing what no one should otherwise take away from them (their children).

During the pandemic a real fear of infection is spreading. The statement: *“I fear for my own health and the health of my loved ones due to the coronavirus pandemic”* is categorically accepted mostly by residents of small towns, pensioners, low-income people, as well as supporters of BSP and MRF. Fear is likely to be greater among social categories with fewer opportunities, including that of personal survival.

The focus groups again provided us with the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of these

convictions. To some extent they even contradicted the consensus that emerged in the quantitative research. Opinions were given that conspiracy “theories” are a *“something of a high sensation that diverts attention from something else”* (FG1) or that *“the attraction to it is typical of illiterate people”* (FG2). But there were also more moderate (sceptical) opinions: *“somewhere in the cup there may be some truth”* (FG1) or *“there is truth in every statement”* (FG2).

5.5 DIACHRONIC ANALYSIS¹⁹

In 2011, the Agency Afis conducted a nationally representative survey on a topic close to the current one,

applying the Bogardus scale for social distance. The advantage of it is that it can serve as a convenient measure of social cohesion in a modern urban society. The comparison between the quantitative quantities in time enables us to check whether the attitudes studied undergo change over time, in what direction, with what intensity and to what extent the factors in such a change can be indicated.

We have developed a *“Social Proximity Indicator”* (SPI), which allows comparability between the two sets of data. At each of the steps in the gradation of proximity (Fellow citizen, Neighbour, Guest, Close relative through marriage) we assigned a number between 1 and 4. The sum of these numbers represents the SPI. It varies from 0 to 10.²⁰

Integral indicator of proximity*

Average value	Turk	Roma	Bulgarian	Refugee**	Homosexual
2011	5.2	3.1	9.5	3.5	2.3
2020	3.7	1.6	9.5	1.7	1.7

* The sum of the values of proximity on a four-level weighting for the answers to the question: *“Would you accept a member of the following groups to be your... ?”*

** For 2011 – the average value of the indicator for “African” and “Asian”.

This comparison enables us to draw the following conclusions:

- A significant decrease in the indicator of social proximity can be observed with regard to all categories, except for “Bulgarian”. As usually about 85% identify as Bulgarians, first and foremost this indicates a major change in the attitudes of the ethnic majority.
- The increase in distance covers not just two ethnic categories, but together with this foreigners and persons with a minority (“other”) sexual orientation. This wide spectrum of simultaneous changes gives reason for us to think that it is a matter of the reinforcing not simply and not so much of a set of views supporting national pride, nor of a strengthening of “racial” stereotypes, as a syndrome of xenophobic reactions to real or media-constructed events.
- By xenophobic reaction we understand a state in which that which is foreign, or unusual, is perceived as a source of threat. It can also be easily targeted at citizens of the country, identified by any mark (profession, age, region, religious, ideological, etc.), especially when contacts are limited and mediated by media which have motives to intensify conflicts and discord between the bearers of this mark and the majority.

It should be noted that growing xenophobia is a leading factor, but not the only one. It does not exclude the other components of the classic F-scale of T. Adorno, as nationalist and racial prejudices, but it is related to them and provides ground on which they can grow gradually, provided that such views are launched and perceived as an “alternative truth” or bearing status prestige.

Before we look for links related to causes, it is good to outline what there is in common and what differences there are in this integral indicator with the more specific signs of racism, nationalism, xenophobia and belief in conspiracy theories. First and foremost, in the 2020 survey, its magnitude, as expected, is directly proportional to the above-mentioned signs of authoritarianism and hostile stereotypes. However, the connection with the theses *“Different peoples should not be mixed”*, *“If Roma were to settle in my neighbourhood, this would be a problem”*, *“No more Muslims should be allowed to settle in Bulgaria”* is the clearest. The link with other clusters, such as national pride and conspiracy theories (behind-the-scenes topics and “Jewish influence”), is significantly

¹⁹ The analysis is the work of Chavdar Naidenov.

²⁰ In the 2011 survey the question about the “refugee” social group was not asked, but it did include a question about “African” and “Asian”. Experimentally, we averaged the values for these two groups and compared them with the “refugee” indicator obtained in the more recent study. The overall picture confirmed the validity of such a comparison over time, and therefore we are publishing this comparison.

weaker. This suggests that the indicator most strongly reflects the effect on the attitudes regarding the immigration-refugee wave, combined with the growing negativity towards the Roma minority.

Similar to the tolerance indicator analysed above, the proximity indicator shows relatively higher values in the capital city and it is lowest in the villages; it is higher in people up to 50 years of age; it is also so among people with higher education; and it is lower for those on low incomes. It is noteworthy that among the supporters of the two main parties, GERB and BSP, it is slightly lower than the national average, although their supporters usually show political reflexes of socially integrated, pro-systemic personalities. Among nationalist parties, the indicator is the lowest, while among those of the MRF, which is profiled as the Turkish minority, it is the highest. As can be expected, the strongest factor is personal social interaction - the more often people have business interactions or have free conversations with representatives of other ethnic groups, the more comprehensible and the closer they feel as personalities. If the proximity indicator in 2020 is 18.2 on average, then for those who never communicate with members of other ethnic groups it is only 13.2. Conversely, for those who constantly communicate, it reaches 24.5.

What has changed in public attitudes on these issues in 9 years? The dynamic section shows that, compared to 2011, there has been a significant decline in the proximity indicator. The decline is 5.5 (from 23.6 to 18.2). Leading the decline are the following categories:

- Residents of villages - from 22.5 to 15.3;
- The youngest cohort under 18 - from 27.8 to 18.7;
- Students - from 28.7 to 18.4;
- The unemployed - from 24.0 to 17.2;
- In the electorate of MRF - from 29.2 to 20.3;
- In the electorate of GERB - from 23.8 to 17.2.

There is a significant but predictable change in connection with the frequency of contacts between representatives of different ethnic groups. If for those who never communicate with other ethnic communities, the decline in the indicator of social proximity is from 17.5 to 13.2, i.e. by 4.3, those who constantly communicate are less affected by the general deterioration of the atmosphere in society and the media. Among them, from 26.8 in 2011, the SPI reached 24.5 in 2020.

We can see that the greatest role in the decline in the feeling of closeness to other social groups is played by several categories that had previously made an important contribution to it. Among the youngest we observe a reduced desire to communicate with Roma from 3.7 to 1.7, with Turks from 6.0 to 2.6, and with homosexuals from 3.5 to 1.5.

The following data related to this situation show the semantic order of several social categories in people's consciousness. They show where cracks and fractures form in the relationship between them. The data obtained for correlation between degrees of proximity are indicative, although the values do not have the properties of divisions on an interval scale.

Correlations between indicators of social proximity on a 4-level scale (2020)

	Turk	Roma	Bulgarian	Refugee	Homosexual
Turk	1	0.521	-0.035	0.515	0.479
Roma	0.521	1	-0.02	0.647	0.671
Bulgarian	-0.035	-0.02	1	-0.026	-0.105
Refugee	0.515	0.647	-0.026	1	0.644
Homosexual	0.479	0.671	-0.105	0.644	1

The strength of the correlation with a positive sign indicates that the respondent's proximity to one category (for example, a Turk) increases with the proximity to another category (for example, a refugee). If the sign is negative, then the strength of the correlation indicates the extent to which an increase in one proximity is associated with a decrease in the other proximity.

We find that:

- "A Bulgarian" is perceived (primarily by representatives of Bulgarians themselves) as moderately opposed to the other categories.
- In the consciousness primarily of the ethnic majority there is no great distance between these extremely diverse categories - the two large minorities, refugees, and homosexuals. The common denominator can only be that they are perceived as foreign, with regard to thinking, acting, and communicating in another way that is "incomprehensible to me" and, therefore, as undesirable for normal interactions. This speaks of considerable encapsulation between communities.

What is the direction of change? In 2011, the correlations of the categories tested with “Bulgarian” were moderate, but with a positive sign. The perception of “homosexual” is shifting dramatically - it is becoming distanced from “Bulgarian” and is approaching minorities and refugees. The correlation with “Bulgarian” has decreased by 0.22 points, and with Roma it has increased by 0.35, with “African or Asian” it has increased by 0.14, and with Turkish by 0.11. Or, to summarise: **in society faults or cleavages are increasing in all sorts of ways.**

Diachronic analysis brings to the fore or confirms several factors that explain the growth of authoritarian and xenophobic attitudes in Bulgarian society over the duration of 9 years.

- Growing inequality and the declassification of large sectors of society, create an emotional need for confirmation that there are undoubtedly sectors of the population whose way of living is worse. Such information about the lives of the poor and illiterate enjoys success in the media and provides the reassuring illusion that only those who have been the cause of their own suffering suffer. The topic of “Roma ghettos” in the media, as well as the very word “ghetto” itself, point to the existence of such a phenomenon in North American cities and, paradoxically, support the arguments of cultural or biological racism.
- Spontaneously developing urban processes, in which, as everywhere in the world, there is an absence of urban strategy, mean that neighbourhoods with very different income, professional and ethnic profile are formed. This leads to the encapsulation of interactions, which in turn reinforces prejudice.
- The immigrant-refugee wave of 2015-17, which passed by Bulgaria, and partly through it, caused many fears and at times panic, and sharply increased the feeling of defencelessness in front of the “foreigner”, regardless of how the “foreigner” in question is personalised.
- The “brutalisation” of political speaking during the mandate of Boyko Borisov has made an imperceptible but serious contribution to reducing the dialogue between different categories and communities. This refers to a rhetorical style that uses verbal humiliation, defamation and slander not just against political opponents. The human dignity of various categories is systematically degraded, starting with the Roma minority and going as far as pensioners, doctors, those who take sick leave, the unemployed, even mothers with children with disabilities, etc. Arrests of public figures are demonstratively shown on television.
- Various social stereotypes, myths and prejudices

are widely exploited. There is a rejection of minimum standards of reliability and shared facts. These deviations from the very preconditions for representative democracy have not been punished by voters and have been trivialised. Due to the authority of “their” party, the majority of right-wing voters, who by 2009 had switched to GERB, are gradually losing respect for liberal models and increasingly regard attitudes of coercion and domination as being acceptable.

- Over the last four years the corridors of power have witnessed the rise of a coalition of nationalists who have given the status of semi-respectability to a wide range of intolerant positions that condone restriction, deprivation of rights, group punishment and discipline, which poses a threat to ethnic and sexual groups.
- The difficulties of the European integration project, the euro crisis, the depression of Southern Europe and the departure of Great Britain have weakened the brakes on traditional, nationalist projects, inherited from the time before the Second World War. The enervation of state institutions under the pressure of globalised liberalism has an analogical effect. Hesitant xenophilia frees up ground for xenophobia.
- A similar feeling of loss of perspective is part of the context of the study itself - the Covid-19 pandemic, which has been accompanied by fears about health and an interruption of normal life unprecedented in the memory of current generations, as well as a sense of inadequacy of institutions.
- Over these 9 years, the propaganda of “alternative-right”, “new conservatism” has gained momentum, which tries to insert a sign of equality between oligarchism and the political left and to connect them with the traditional conservative fears of “undermining the foundations.” In the period between the two studies, there was a media campaign and a change in the textbooks, aimed at rehabilitation and even glorification of the political, spiritual and even economic image of the Kingdom of Bulgaria between the two world wars. This is contrasted with the communist regime, but this period also denies basic liberal values. At the very least, all this has an impact on young people and graduates, as well as on the local application of Western models.

The general conclusion from the diachronic analysis is that the signs of authoritarianism, discrimination, hostile stereotypes and xenophobia are not decreasing, but increasing. They are not just a recurrence of undemocratic traditions, but also a nascent and consolidating phenomenon. They are the fruit of new socio-economic conditions, and tensions between

classes with different property status and social capital (above all, any affiliation to ethnic majority, access to education and career). Therefore, the two tactics: passively waiting for these phenomena to “fade away” and dissipate with the changing of genera-

tions; and treating the symptoms of anti-liberalism and self-isolation of communities, without the common cause being affected, will not yield any more results than they have given in the previous two decades or so of their application.

6

EXPLANATIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS

An ideological universe in the field of far-right circles in the Bulgarian society of today is constructed as a more or less ordered totality of ethnocentrism (including Islamophobia), racism (mostly against the Roma people), xenophobia (fear of that which is different and foreign) and paranoia (belief in conspiracy theories). In the four in-depth interviews conducted with public figures who have the opportunity to form public opinion (ideological “influencers”), four possible interpretations of the phenomenon of the far right in Bulgarian society are outlined.

The interviewees are public figures. The first interview (I1) was with a lady who is a trade union activist with left-wing convictions, the second interview (I2) was with politician who is in a left-wing party and is a member of parliament, the third interview (I3) was with a university lecturer with Christian Democratic convictions and the fourth interview (I4) was with a political activist of IMRO. These interviews enable us to make a typology of the explanations for the far-right orientations in Bulgarian society.

6.1 INSTRUMENTAL RACISM AND XENOPHOBIA OF THE ELITE

In this interview the understanding is promoted that the far right is a concept that is not related to a political cleavage in relation to the economy. The far right is *“a negative attitude towards minorities, including ethnic, racial and social ones.”* It is an *“uneducated attitude”* shared by a minority, *“resembling minorities (who criticise - B.M.) without being aware of it.”* It is the reaction of an *“overthrown”* minority in society.

But if we talk about the far right as *“a consciously higher level, it is a thing that is in favour of big business interests.”* Because this is a far-right minority, which is essentially *“rejected by the elites and which transfers the responsibility for its misfortunes to the minorities (of another order - B.M.)”*.

But the Bulgarian far right, as a phenomenon of society, is something of a similar order. It is a minority

sector in society, which asserts itself *“by stigmatising people who are like it, but who are different when it comes to ethnicity and sexual orientation.”* In general, it is *“the result of the collapse of the system of education.”* It propounds various conspiracy “theories” because *“it does not understand how economic processes work.”*

But at the level of the elite, of the representatives in the political elite of the far right, things are different. It is a matter of political strategy to occupy a certain electoral niche, to attract voters with far-right understandings or even in the wider field of sharing ethnocentric views. But not necessarily to personally share such views.

“I would say about IMRO that this type of far-right rhetoric is an attempt to occupy a market niche, not so much a real position of the speakers.” This means leaders like Angel Dzhambazki or Krassimir Karachanov. The leader of the “Vazrazhdane” (Revival) party, Kostadinov, is another example – in answer to the question: *“why did he not abandon anti-Gypsyism, he replied that he could not abandon anti-Gypsyism because someone else would take his place.”* Of course, there are “ideological ethnocentrists” among the elite of far-right parties who believe in what they say. Valeri Simeonov and Carlos Contreras are like this, *“while others have accepted these roles so that there is a place under the political sun for them as well.”*

But among the followers of the far right there is also a mass of misguided youths, such as the Lukovmarch participants, as well as some of the football fans. These are *“young people who have been tricked by this marketing strategy of the national elites. They find no other way to be active. And there (in the group - B.M.) they are valued, not as individuals, but as a unit of combat. This is how they feel as part of a team, a collective. They can find no other way to be useful.”* This is a group of followers who are misled by an ideology that they probably do not share personally, at least, fully. Rather, they accept a role that they are assigned to play - something like the “guard of the nation”.

What are the reasons for the spread of these far-right ideas? *"The source is dissatisfaction with life. That's why over the last 10 years we've seen such a growth, but these people getting into government has completely compromised them."* For this reason it is also true that *"until we start living better, we can't expect people not to turn to the far right."* According to this understanding, the main reasons for the stability of the far right in Bulgarian politics are social. But also in terms of the disintegration of social solidarity: *"collapse of social and labour rights; it has devalued the fact that you have responsibility for someone else."*

Another group of reasons is educational - the *"withdrawal of professionals from their professional vocation"*, including teachers.

"I don't think people are racists. Now it's easier for them to say what they think, because it isn't sanctioned. But the bigger wave of racist talk is the ones in high positions pointing to the enemy. And the people follow." Those who are to blame are the elites and those leaders of far-right organisations who instil hatred through their speech, but also orientate the thinking of their followers.

Public rejection of the Roma people in society is an element of such thinking and speaking. But people *"do not recognise the Roma when they are not hanging on bins; they may even live with Roma, but they don't know it."* *"It's the same in working collectives. There are cases when people say negative things about the Roma people, and when you point out a Roma colleague, they say: 'He isn't Roma, he's a literate person.'" Ignorance goes together with prejudice.*

6.2 SOCIAL RACISM AND XENOPHOBIA (I2)

This interviewee's feelings about claim that the Roma are a group that benefit from social services in some way are that it is rejected as prejudice – it is a claim that is part of the ideological arsenal of the far right. *"In my opinion this is mythology. One has to be blind to say, when one sees a Roma ghetto, that the Roma are privileged. A left-winger cannot fail to see the living conditions of these people. They are socially weak. The mantra that there are people who give birth to children to get their hands on income supplements is crazy."* According to the speaker, in Bulgaria there is a *"negative attitude towards this community"*, a *"latent racism"*, which is mostly narrative, *"It is limited to stories"*, which is different for some Western societies, where racism is also a *"readiness for physical violence."*

But in Bulgaria, *"the far right is linked only to political parties"*, this is *"both a conservative and a*

nationalist position." *"Ataka' is an example of a far-right party: deeply religious, conservative, nationalist, a party of fighters. IMRO and NFSB are the same. They protect traditional culture such as Orthodoxy and the traditional family. But as parties they are ready for all kinds of coalitions."* This means they are not authentic. *"They do not create xenophobic and racist sentiments. They are convinced that these sentiments exist, and they ride them, even though they reinforce them. They are not outright fascists, most of them are sly politicians. They identify a niche and exploit it."*

The idea that numerous supporters of BSP share ethnocentric and racist viewpoints is significant. So could the party be taking a conservative-nationalist stance in recent times when it rejects the Istanbul Convention and opposes the acceptance of refugees? According to the interviewee, *"there are conservative people in BSP, in favour of the traditional family, for example, or those living in border areas, but BSP has not given up the leftist idea."* With regard to the Istanbul Convention, *"Bulgarians were divided into two equally erroneous standpoints: it was as if one supported support 'violence against women' and others the 'third sex'. In fact, 99% of the Istanbul Convention is part of the existing legislation in Bulgaria."* But it is ascertained that in the world *"there are shifts of discourse to conservative and even extreme conservative."*

The reasons vary, but in Bulgaria they are mostly social: *"there is a strong reaction to the disappointment of citizens with the falsehood of the liberal transition."* But this is not a conservative wave, because *"if people today were asked not about ideological labels, but about understandable questions, they would, for the most part, turn out to be left-wing liberals."* *"I don't think our nation has any hatred for that which is different."* Of course, *"there is certainly racism and homophobia, but I don't think they are decisive in public relations in general."*

The solution is in the integration of these minorities into social and political life: *"But as in any other case, the solution is to fully integrate these people into social life, not to encapsulate them in minority groups who are fighting for their rights. The parties, BSP included, must incorporate people from these minorities everywhere, for them to take part in common struggles."*

With regard to the reasons for ethnocentrism in our society, the speaker's explanation is: *"We are part of a nation that is living with the thought of its own disappearance. Therefore, there are fears that we might be melted down. An ingrained complex regarding Islam. Also a complex of grannies who don't speak the language of their grandchildren who live in the West. We have a feeling of inferiority."*

In conclusion - the debate needs to be normalised: *"Extremes have remained in politics and they form the terrain upon which the battle is being waged."*

6.3 PROXIMITY OF FAR LEFT WING AND FAR RIGHT WING (I3)

"Extreme positions in Bulgaria are not represented on a mass scale, they are more peripheral, both as a political representation and as a relative proportion of citizens who have a tendency to support them." But the peculiarity of Bulgaria is that *"there is an overlap of far right and far left, something that is incomprehensible in Europe."*

The far-right positions in Bulgaria are usually based on *"radical Russophilia and Eurasianism, with deeply-rooted Eurasian views from the modern right-wing Russian periphery."* But there are also social reasons for this: *"In Bulgaria, the structuring factor is the circumstance that in the last three decades a significant number of the citizens have been declassified, and have lost their chances, which has led to their radicalisation in both the far left and the far right."*

But to the question as to why BSP fits into such an ideological environment, the answer is: *"BSP has not been part of any kind of progressive left wing since at least the middle of the twentieth century."* In fact, according to the speaker, in BSP there is a clash of two main trends: one of social democratisation (but conservative, from the 1950s and 1960s) and one of a nostalgic left wing (which is essentially conservative). BSP is slightly affected by the *"social-liberal progressivism of the more radical left wing."*

But *"the foundation of this new conservatism"* in the societies of the Central and Eastern European Initiative (CEI) is the fact that many of the countries in the region have recently gained their independence, which coincided with the time of the post-national liberal ideologies of the West. Many of these ideas, including in connection with the Istanbul Convention, were seen in our country as *"foreign infiltrations"*.

As for the displays of violence against LGBT communities in Bulgaria, they are *"motivated by right-wing extremism, which does not tolerate difference, and not by conservatism."* It is the result of the fear that *"this Western pressure to impose new values threatens the established, traditional way of life."* But *"on the other hand there is the dynamics of the LGBT movements, which up until 10 years ago were underground movements, but which began to come to light, with the traditional pride. But not so much as a human rights frame-*

work, as views about explaining society through their ideological vision of the world." In society there are reservations about the understanding that *"gender can be socially constructed"* and there is an unacceptance of such a Western understanding, but *"right-wing extremism is extremism, a radicalisation of this rejection."*

Whether racism is increasing in society? The speaker accepted that it was rather the opposite of the situation from the time of the communist regimes: *"there is more of an improvement in the situation from the point of view of a normal liberal standpoint."* *"About 40 years ago, I knew well the public moods in the then German Democratic Republic, Czechoslovakia and Poland - then the Bulgarian orientation was much more xenophobic and racist."* But there are also current reasons: *"On the other hand, these views are fuelled by the fact that the state is practically deserting its commitments to maintain normal civil order. Along with the mass unemployment of the Roma in Bulgaria for almost two decades: they began to make a living in an illegitimate way, with the expansion of petty theft, which was directed against the people in villages."*

But the speaker does not accept the radical opposition between a position of human rights, *"which is the basis for interpreting the problems of the Roma through victimisation,"* and a primitive position of right-wing radicalism, which *"attributes all deficits to Roma people."* *"But we have to get away from the taboos of political correctness. The Roma population must undergo a cultural revolution towards modernisation."*

Radical movements exist latently in society. *"Radical movements on the left and on the right are movements of people who have dropped out of the public mainstream. They seek excuses for this. On the left, this is related to social injustice. On the right, they are connected with the conspiracy against the nation and tradition. These tendencies exist latently as hostility."* But with the arrival of "Ataka", they are already politically represented. Therefore, both latent and official radicalism exist.

Official radicalism in Bulgaria, just like all political currents in our country, *"shines with reflected light"*, i.e. it is a reflection of external dynamics, it is not authentic. However, on the other hand, latent, *"hidden racism came to the fore in connection with the new social networks."* *"However, this is not some Bulgarian specificity."*

However, what can be expected is *"a wider dissemination of such views, stronger social polarisation, and a strengthening of traditionalist views. This is due to the lack of maturity of conservatism."*

6.4 JUSTIFIED MISTRUST OF ROMA AND REFUGEES (I4)

Although it is more radical, the position in this interview is to a great extent like that in the previous one, justifying the proximity of left and right radical views: *"Both the left and the right are playing with patriotism."*

Nationalism and patriotism should not be distinguished or opposed against each other, because *"nationalism is the protection of the national interest, including through education, and patriotic education from an early age can shape the character and future views of a new generation, upon which the future of Bulgaria depends."*

The interview assumes an extremely conservative stance on LGBT policy issues, although, on the whole, it denounces violence. More generally, reservations are about liberal sex education, especially in connection with the scathing reaction of IMRO to the book *"As a Vagina"*, intended for sex education for girls. *"There are scandalous things in this brochure, I wouldn't call it a book. I agree, there must be sex education. But why doesn't this happen in biology classes? Why don't schools open and get invited as gynaecological lecturers? Why not biologists? Or psychologists too, if you wish? But not those psychologists who are on the feeder of NGOs, who have already tried using questionnaires to ask children what gender they are outside of men and women."* The position is that the issues of sex are mostly questions of biology, there is a disregard for the social dimensions of the topic. But there is also a reaction to extremes in this area: *"There is a need for sex education, but why does it have to be done in such a brutal way."*

First and foremost, there is a rejection (expected) of the Istanbul Convention: *"through certain texts, there has been an attempt to fund various NGOs under the benevolent protection of women and children, and transgender ideas have been promoted."* But it is clear that *"according to the Constitution, the family is between a man and a woman"* (understood as biological sexes - B.M.). *"That's been scientifically proven."* As for a possible change in attitudes towards same-sex marriage, *"a Bulgarian is a patriarchal person, they are conservative; maybe the time will come for Bulgaria to open up to gay marriage, but this has not yet come."*

Regarding the recent attack on young people from the LGBT community in Plovdiv, the speaker points out: *"we are categorically against this, and against homophobic violence"* (of course as a position of IMRO - B.M.). Of course, the lady who was speaking wondered if things happened exactly as the media described them: *"In the media they were not seeking*

NGOs that protect families. Were the children on the other side of the conflict sought?"

The reason for the reaction against the LGBT community is the ostentation of this kind of difference: *"When there is so much talk about diversity, it provokes an angry reaction in other people."* And that is because *"I don't think that sexual minorities are discriminated against in Bulgaria", "no one discriminates against them."* But *"ostentation irritates society - gay parades, loud-mouthed talk in the media."*

It is striking that there is a quick connection between the attitude towards the LGBT community and Roma people: *"I don't mind everyone being the way they want to be. But demanding more rights with the hypocritical statement that you are discriminated against ... These people have way more social comfort. Bulgaria is a tolerant country, the only one that saved its Jews. But gypsies refuse to fulfil their constitutional obligation to get an education; they have turned having babies into a profession. But they claim to be discriminated against and refuse to integrate. It's the same with the LGBT community."*

The negative attitude towards Roma people is of particular interest in the interview. The reason for this is that *"these people do not have work habits, they refuse to get qualified."* There are exceptions – *"people from the Roma community who are educated, but they do not rely on social benefits."* The solution is in the package of integration measures proposed by IMRO: *"For example, compulsory education... For example, to criminalise rejection of education. Education must be the basis of everything."*

In general, when it comes to violence against minorities, *"the topic is being abused"*, both in our country and around the world. *"The killing of a black guy in America has led to monuments to historical figures being destroyed. And the same thing has started happening here in Bulgaria. About someone slapping a gay man, no one asked whether this gay man had not done something to provoke him."* As for the violence against the Roma, it is more that the opposite is true: *"the same people to whom society provides some life comfort, make society suffer because of them". "How many examples should I give you about how many marginal individuals have freaked out in villages, how many young Bulgarian men and women have lost their lives?"*

The position regarding differences is that in fact there is nobody to defend the rights of the majority, of Bulgarians, of heterosexuals, of the people living in Bulgaria against the crime of people in minorities: *"On a domestic level, there are villages where if a Bulgarian went into a shop to ask for bread, he would be thrown out... If you are a normal Bulgarian and a gay couple sat next to you on the train and*

started making a display of their love, would you stand for it? Refugees? These people literally came and devastated the centre of Sofia. Because Algerians rape a Bulgarian woman, gypsies rape and kill a Bulgarian woman."

In conclusion, it is stated that *"Bulgarians are pretty conservative for the most part"* and that *"we are becoming more conservative", "this is a trend*

all over the world". That is why we need to stand up for Christian values: *"We need to defend that which is Bulgarian, our traditional religion. Even commonplace Christianity. Let us not allow provocations on the territory of Bulgaria. The family should be that of a man and a woman. Bulgaria should be an Eastern Orthodox country. The official language should be Bulgarian. The church has preserved us as a people."*

7

CONCLUSION

If we compare, for example, the results of this study (2020) with an earlier study of Afis (2011), the situation appears no less worrying in terms of the spreading of far-right values and ideologies. But it is probably also a matter of stabilising this sector in Bulgarian society.

From the current study it is evident that fear of the coronavirus pandemic is a significant factor in sharing different ideas from the ideological arsenal of the far right wing: those who are most fearful show a strong sensitivity to the pride of Bulgaria, the exclusivity of Bulgarians, the dominant role of whites in the world, and to all measures of ethnocentrism, racism and ethnic distances. The same goes for the tendency to believe in various conspiracy theories.

Notwithstanding, the study shows that beyond the relatively limited electoral potential of far-right parties (on average about 10% of those who have voted, or 6% of the adult population over the entire period 2001-2020), the potential terrain of ethnocentrism, xenophobia, anti-Roma racism accounts for more than 1/3, but with the potential for perceiving such attitudes even up to 1/2. Consequently, there is a problem.

In addition to the findings made so far, there is the fact of obvious ideological confusion (concepts such as left versus right, respectively extreme left versus extreme right, and liberal versus conservative are mixed, and there is little differentiation between them). To some extent, only

that which is moderate is differentiated from that which is radical, but even this is not always certain. In the best case, the supporters of one or another party (in total this accounts for up to 60% of the respondents, the other 40% have no party preferences) perceive the official self-identification of this party. GERB voters self-identify between centre-right and right; those of BSP between centre-left and left, and nationalists self-determine to the right of centre. But in total, more than 1/5 have neither a preferred party nor political self-identification.

Several statements in the focus groups show this lack of orientation in the political space:

- *"We associate the right with democracy, freedom and order... The left - with restrictions, dictatorship"*
- *"Conservatism is on the left."*
- *"Nationalism can be radical or extreme, I can't classify it as left or right."*
- *"Right means capitalism and justice, left means socialism and injustice."*
- *"The far left is a world without nations, religions, culture. But the left also means a world with an infinite number of nations, religions, cultures and genders."*

It can be said, however, that what is found at the political level (among parties) is not authentic fascism (according to Umberto Eco), but imitations, which exploit the feeling of dissatisfaction with life.

8

RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the research, as well as previous research, show that modern Bulgarian society has a problem with far-right ideologies and organisations. Possible policies to limit their influence in society must be in three parallel directions:

1. A policy of integration and equality
 - a. Promoting integration policies for the Roma minority as a priority.
 - b. Encouraging the involvement of the Roma population in policies of integration.
 - c. Supporting the capacity of the state to receive and assist refugees, including integration.
 - d. Priority policies for combating poverty, combating social jealousy and competition between the strata of the poor for access to social assistance.
2. Educational policies
 - a. An educational programme in support of tolerance and in rejection of violence and hate speech.
 - b. A mass educational campaign to clarify the landmarks in the political space (left and right, conservative and liberal, extremist and tolerant), aimed primarily at identifying far-right ideas.
 - c. Promoting civil patriotism as opposed to ethnonationalism.
 - d. Promoting the mass learning of foreign languages and cultures.
3. Informational policies
 - a. Stimulating an information campaign on why minorities are objectively disadvantaged and why social and legal measures to protect them are not discrimination against the majority.
 - b. An information campaign to oppose racism in all its manifestations, including mentioning the Holocaust.
 - c. Opposition, including by legal means, of hate speech.
 - d. Encouraging more foreign news to be shown on public media.

The overall course of the country should be changed in the direction, in general, of reducing material inequality, increasing the shares of the value produced, which is obtained from labour, at the expense of capital; ensuring that every citizen has access to education, depending on success, not origin; restoring access to healthcare according to illness, not income; homogenising zoning in the cities, a municipal housing policy (which is practically absent in the country); increasing the social responsibility of the media, increasing the proportion of the public that defends and justifies deliberately “outdated” classical liberal and socialist values, such as humanistic optimism, faith in reason, equality, cooperation, trust between people, the dignity of the individual and the citizen, etc.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BZNS	(Bulgarski Zemedelski Naroden Sayuz) – Bulgarian Agrarian National Union
BCP	Bulgarian Communist Party
BSP	Bulgarian Socialist Party
IMRO-BNM	(Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation – Bulgarian National Movement)
GERB	(Grazhdani za Evropeisko Razvitie na Bulgaria) – Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria
DB	Democratic Bulgaria
MRF	Movement for Rights and Freedoms
DSB	Democrats for a Strong Bulgaria
UDF	Union of Democratic Forces

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