

EXPANDING THE GREEN POLICY SPACE TO HUMAN AND SOCIAL RIGHTS IN BULGARIA



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Executive summary

The vision of this project is to promote discussion and cooperation between the Bulgarian Greens with human/gender/migrants rights and social justice movements, with the aim of launching a new progressive, humanistic, democratic and ultimately green “wave” in Bulgarian politics. Such a wave should stand in contrast to and contradict the ongoing right-wing nationalist trend. This publication was intended as a discussion paper for enhancing supportive interaction between Greens, on the one hand, and human rights’ and social justice movements on the other.

This study was conducted by BlueLink with support from the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Sofia. BlueLink is a digital technology and information exchange hub, rooted in Bulgaria’s environmental movement. It is registered as a non-partisan foundation for the public interest with a mission encompassing support for civil society, environmental protection, democracy and shared European values as well as the free use of digital technologies to enable free information exchange related to these purposes.

The present study’s purpose is to explore possible synergies and collaboration between green and human rights policy agendas in Bulgaria, assess the advantages they could bring, and map the steps to achieve them while avoiding risks.

Rights and social justice in the European Green policy field

The policy priorities of the European Greens fall under these areas:

- **Europe and democracy:** For an ever closer and more democratic Union that is less dependent on its member states and more useful to its citizens; a Green New Deal.
- **Climate and energy:** To stimulate renewable energy, public transport and shared mobility; welcome the Paris Agreement; reduce GHG emissions and divest from fossil fuels; phase out nuclear and coal.
- **Economy and jobs:** For green enterprises, cooperatives and local initiatives, and responsible business leadership; fair trade agreements; respect for workers’ rights and consumer protection; compliance with environmental and safety standards. Against undermining justice and monopolies; depriving subsistence to the Global South.
- **Human rights and migration:** For a fair and just society where everyone is treated equally and enjoys the same rights, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation; safe and legal access for asylum seekers; ambitious resettlement and relocation scheme; funds for countries, cities and communities that accept refugees; changing trade and development policies that finance authoritarian regimes.

- **Social justice and health:** Against austerity. For green investments in public infrastructure, goods and services.
- **Environment and food:** For strong animal welfare standards; local, sustainable and organic farming and food cooperatives; high-quality food and beverage standards; mandatory listing of product ingredients and origins. Against intensive crop and factory animal farming, GMOs and pesticides.
- **Foreign and security policy:** Non-violent conflict resolution; prevention of the financing of terror and delivery of weapons into war zones. EU-wide cooperation between security agencies to combat criminal activities like money laundering; illegal trade of drugs, arms and wildlife; human trafficking; forced prostitution. Establishment of European anti-crime agencies.

The following rights appear across the above areas:

- **Human rights:** Freedom, human rights, rule of law, solidarity and full democracy; privacy and protection of personal data; the fight against discrimination, hatred and violence; prevention of mass surveillance. Should not be compromised by public security or the fight against global terrorism.
- **Refugee rights:** For the protection of refugees' and asylum seekers' human rights; legal status, education and work; humanitarian corridors from conflict areas; integration programmes; minority rights and languages; support for first-entry member states.
- **Women's rights:** For 50/50 quotas in elections and party organs; sexual and reproductive rights; equal pay; gender-balanced composition of power structures and gender justice; compulsory gender mainstreaming at work; parental leave for all parents irrespective of gender and marital status.
- **Gender rights:** For equal rights and non-discrimination of LGBT people. Some member-parties promote same-sex marriages and the right to adopt children for same-sex couples, but no common position on this issue.
- **Social and economic rights:** For peoples' dignity; protection, freedom and welfare for all; social investments in healthcare, education and affordable housing; adequate minimum wage/income; a social EU. Against inequalities, misery.

Relevant actors and target groups

The Bulgarian Green Movement party (GM) is the member party of the European Greens in Bulgaria and generally abides by its policy priorities. At present, GM is part of a Democratic Bulgaria (DeB) coalition, together with the liberal centrist Da, Bulgaria (DB) party and conservative right-wing DSB. Ideologically diverse, the coalition is held together by a shared anti-communist sentiment stemming from the 1990s; support for rule of law and judicial reform; and opposition to clientelism, nepotism and

corruption, perceived as features of the ruling status quo. Even if not in the coalition's "driving seat", GM has promoted climate, green economy and environmental priorities to its shared political platform. Alongside other coalition members, GM co-participated in massive anti-government protests that started in June 2020 and were analysed as a case by this study.

The study identified the following non-partisan actors and groups as carrying a potential for promoting further integration, partnership and synergies with Green policies:

- independent spaces for community organising and protest mobilisation and social centres, such as Fabrika Avtonomia and the Solidarity Centre in Sofia;
- research, journalism and publishing organisations working on social and environmental justice, e.g., KOI, Baricada, DVersia (left-wing theory and analysis mag);
- novel feminist groups like LevFem and Feminist mobilisations, supportive of protests against domestic violence;
- LGBT organisations, e.g., Students for Equality;
- social-justice, democratic NGOs and watchdogs with a history of cooperation with green groups and coalitions against GMOs and CETA/TTIP or for tax justice and a just transition from coal, e.g., Solidarna Bulgaria (SB);
- trade unions, including independent ones such as ARC, whose members partake in green/climate protests and have wholeheartedly supported the nurses' strikes; Bulgarian Prisoners' Association; the established trade unions CITUB and KT Podkrepa, which have been increasingly involved in the European Green Deal and just transition debates;
- radical environmentalist groups, e.g., Fridays for Futures, Extinction Rebellion, Bulgaria; and
- moderate progressive green groups, including Za Zemiata, FoE, Greenpeace and Bankwatch, a critical voice against neoliberal globalization in Bulgaria.

Other relevant groups and actors who co-participated with GM and DeB in the 2020 anti-government protests on the shared ground of anti-corruption, include:

- the "Poison Trio" - informal initiative of prominent anti-corruption public figures, non-affiliated with any political party;
- BOETZ (Fighter) - an association exposing facts and documents about high-level political corruption, along with whistle-blowers such as Anti-Corruption Fund and leading investigative site Bivol;
- Sistemata ni ubiva (The System is Killing Us) - an association of parents and legal guardians caring for children with disabilities, who gained prominence for persistent anti-government protests; and

- **Pravosudie za vseki (Justice for Everyone):** a reformist movement of legal experts and citizens, aiming to introduce key changes in the judiciary system to guarantee its impartiality and effectiveness.

Two recently founded political projects that also joined the 2020 protests appear remotely relevant to the purpose of this study: **Stand Up, Bulgaria**, an initiative of ex-BSP lawmaker and national Ombudswoman Maya Manolova (spoke in defence of social and environmental rights, higher living wages and fair business environment and against monopolies and construction in natural habitats); and populist **There is Such People**, founded by controversial showman and TV broadcasting company owner Slavi Trifonov, (stands for reform of the electoral system, e-voting, e-government, direct democracy and further integration into the EU).

Bulgaria's centre-left President Rumen Radev, elected as an independent candidate with support from the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), has sided openly with the protests and their demands.

Lessons learned from the 2020 anti-government protests

A wave of daily anti-government, anti-corruption demonstrations emerged on 9 July 2020. This presented a real-life opportunity to examine the potential for expansion of green policies toward a broader social justice and human rights agenda in the context of social upheaval and mass contestation of the way the country is being ruled, a contestation motivated by democratic values and grievances transcending political camps.

The main protest was preceded by environmental demonstrations and GM actively participated in it alongside coalition partners within DeB. Primary demands of the protest have included:

- resignations of Prime Minister Boyko Borissov and Prosecutor General Ivan Geshev for systemic corruption and deep ties with powerful elites;
- rule of law;
- freedom of speech;
- fair elections, especially for electronic and remote voting; and
- judicial reform to restrict the currently unlimited powers of the prosecutor general.

The protest failed to accomplish these demands. It also did not explicitly integrate environmental, human rights or social-justice issues. But it gained overwhelming public support, exposed the democratic shortcomings of the ruling establishment, and raised the profile and leverage of democratic civil society. The protest wave of 2020 had a positive impact on Bulgaria's

civil society and political actors who challenge the status quo and aim for re-democratization and reforms. It also emboldened green protest movements across the country, while forcing the government to start addressing the social strife caused by the pandemic.

These gains were partially shared by the Greens, whose leaders actively participated in the protests. But they also suffered a further loss of identity and potential partners and supporters to more proactive political players.

Case-analysis recommendations to overcome identity and social-base deficits of the Green Movement include:

- Accelerate transformation from single-issue to multi-host political agenda, further exploring the coalition setting.
- Proactively open up to social justice and human rights defenders and advocacy groups as a way to extend their policy portfolio and social base.
- Offer solutions to hot social issues to attract supporters from social strata outside the middle class and academia, as well as outside the capital city and isolated localities experiencing particular environmental problems; reach out to people traditionally outside the culture of dissent.
- Reframe existing policies and messages to encompass the potential of social/protest mobilisation around air pollution and other anthropocentric and social issues pertaining to the idea of fairness.
- In the poorest EU member state with a significant number of citizens living under the poverty line, pursue a compromise between environmental protection and improving the standard of living of a sizeable part of the population by developing messages and an ethic surrounding equality and quality of life.
- Clearly link economic, environmental and health issues and demand a safe, clean community and workplace environment.
- Expose the connection between the deterioration in quality of life (environment) and unregulated economic development, exploitation, misuse of public resources and political corruption.
- Find ways to expand the legal frames of justice and equality (before the law) to include social justice, labour rights, reproductive justice and substantive equality in the EU's country with the greatest level of inequality.
- Develop strategies for responding to the threat of losing green voters to mainstream or populist parties who take up environmental priorities opportunistically with the aim of benefiting from EU green funding.

Examples of cooperation

We polled a number of green and progressive activists for cues as to where possibilities for cooperation between them lie. Survey respondents, including civic and political actively engaged with defending environmental and/or human, social or economic rights, listing examples of past or potential political cooperation, such as:

- liberal-minded DB's current coalition partnership with GM;
- support from “free-thinking” individual BSP figures such as Georgi Pirinski;
- green leaders Toma Belev and Borislav Sandov being responsive to cooperation requests coming from the Left in the past;
- independent, Left digital magazine DVersia dedicated an entire issue to environmentalism;
- the anti-GMO, anti-TTIP/CETA fronts in the 2010s; and
- avoiding political identification; many respondents are open for collaboration with “anyone who cares about nature (except from the far-right)”.

Future possibilities

Further synergies possible between Green and rights-oriented policy agendas, along with practical steps for accomplishing them, suggested by the survey:

- shared spaces, meetings, discussions, joint research;
- common planning of protest or advocacy actions of joint importance for environmentalists and human- and social-rights advocates;
- an overhaul of a rights-based framework towards justice, social and environmental, as a way to expand the constituency of green and human-rights actors beyond the educated, urban middle class; and
- expanding the social base of the GM by integrating issues such as material deprivation, social inequality and exploitation to the existing judicial reform and anti-corruption agenda of the Greens.

Introduction and purpose

In spite of their many differences, environmental and human rights movements in Bulgaria appear most united by their common foes. The rights of refugees, women, the poor, and sexual or ethnic minorities, as well as the policies and groups that defend them, have suffered intensifying attacks over the past decade. Its perpetrators have been new and old conservative, reactionary and nationalistic voices, amplified by mainstream and social media.

Very much the same crowd has targeted nature protection and climate activists, their causes and the policies that uphold them over the same period, and in very similar ways. Politically, it gravitates around a cluster of populist patriotic movements who gained significant leverage over mainstream discoursesince entering government in 2017. Otherwise deeply divided, their shared agenda filters down to nationalism, undermining minority (particularly LGBT and Roma) rights, and dismantling nature-protection provisions in the name of profit. It naturally puts them at odds

with national and EU policy frameworks, institutions and organisations that safeguard environmental, human, social and economic rights.

Traditional and more powerful political actors have followed suit. Centre-right party GERB of Prime Minister Boyko Borissov, an EPP member, has traditionally favoured austerity, industrial and corporate interests over environmental protection and social justice. Afraid of losing popularity, it bowed to a reactionary campaign against gender rights in 2018 and withdrew its support for the so-called Istanbul Convention — the Council of Europe's primary instrument against gender-based violence, backed by the EU.

More surprisingly, the opposition party of BSP also sided with the far-right religious and ultra-conservative “choir”, confronting its own European political family — the European Socialists who had unequivocally backed the Istanbul Convention. BSP had never been much of an environmental champion due to its protective approach to large polluting sectors of the economy, inherited from the socialist era. But its change of heart on and siding with the far-right's agenda, disconnected it further from women and human rights movements.

Having common enemies anecdotally suggests joining forces. Green, social and human rights movements have their ideological and conceptual differences. But alliances between them are not unheard of. On the contrary, there is a relatively large field where nature and climate protection priorities overlap with human, social and economic rights. These dictate common policy and action approaches — including political ones.

Politically, the Greens are a possible protagonist for these shared approaches. Where traditional left-wing parties such as BSP have lost voters' support in other EU member states, Green parties and leaders appear to have gained ground. This could be observed at the recent elections for the European Parliament and in member states such as Austria, Germany and even Slovakia, among others. Green parties have also been relatively successful in an environment of electoral backlash against right-wing neoliberal policies, where the left-wing has performed well — such as in France and Portugal.

The European Greens have currently one member in Bulgaria — the Greens, recently renamed Green Movement (GM). Active nature-protection activists were among its founders back in 2008. Their actions and persistent media bashing by pro-establishment, pro-industry critics gave prominence to GM, and the party has elected representatives on a local level. But it has

been unable to pass the national electoral threshold, most recently as part of the Liberal coalition Да България (Yes Bulgaria!).

Back in 1998, some of the most prominent nature-protection activists in Bulgaria co-created BlueLink as a digital technology and information exchange hub. Some of them later co-initiated and joined the Bulgarian Greens as a political vehicle for the green movement. However, BlueLink was not given any mandate with a partisan agenda. On the contrary, BlueLink was launched with a mission to support civil society, clearly connecting environmental protection with democracy and shared European values, including human, social and economic rights.

Pursuing this mission in the present circumstances described above has led us to some essential questions. What possible synergies and collaboration opportunities exist for the green and human rights policy agendas and political representation? What advantages could such a collaboration bring to both movements? How could this be pursued effectively and what obstacles lie in the way? In search of responses, BlueLink embarked upon initial mapping and information gathering, graciously supported by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation's office in Bulgaria.

The vision of this project is to promote discussion and cooperation between representatives of the green movement and human/gender/migrants rights and social justice movements, with a view to launching a new progressive, humanistic, democratic and ultimately green "wave" in Bulgarian politics. Such a wave should check the right-wing nationalist trend, described above. This publication was planned as a discussion paper for enhancing supportive interaction between Greens and human rights movements and expanding their shared political and social fields. But the richness of data has demanded a more detailed analysis. Eventually we turned it into a thought-provoking analytical report. We believe it to be relevant for other post-socialist countries, such as Hungary, Poland and Romania, where similar trends can be observed.

This research process unfortunately coincided with the outbreak of COVID-19. The anti-epidemic measures imposed influenced the choice of research methods to avoid face-to-face contact and somewhat delayed implementation as well.

In the summer of 2020, just when our research data had been largely collected, an outburst of social and political protest erupted, of potentially profound importance for this study. Thousands flooded the squares of Sofia and other Bulgarian cities, protesting against corruption, nepotism, the government and the political status-quo. The protest wave brought together various groups, including green political and civic activists marching and demonstrating side by side with social and human rights defenders, trade-unionists, and centre-left political leaders, among others. It seemed like the synergies, which this project was aiming to explore and

prepare for, could already be taking place. We had to examine if this was the case.

A team of researchers was formed with relevant and mutually complementing expertise. It includes: Jana Tsoneva, PhD, founding member of KOI Books, a Sofia-based NGO; Pavel Antonov, PhD, BlueLink's Executive Editor and analyst of environmental and human rights-related discourses; and Ksenia Vakhrusheva, PhD, who has studied green policies and social movements in Bulgaria, the EU and Russia. Political scientist and direct democracy expert Daniela Bojinova, PhD, joined to probe the anti-government protest case. Bojinova's intricate knowledge of green political processes as former Co-Chair of the Bulgarian Greens was a major asset to the study.

Study objectives and data collection

To explore possible synergies and collaboration between green, social and human rights policy agendas, assess the advantages they could bring, and map the steps to achieve them while avoiding risks, we set the following objectives for this study:

- Define green policies in terms of defending human, ethnic, women's, gender, refugee, social and economic rights and establish an analytical framework for assessing their mutual closeness.
- Map relevant actors / target groups on both sides of the divide in Bulgaria.
- Showcase successful examples of co-operative action.
- Identify areas of further synergies between green and rights-oriented policy agendas and practical steps for accomplishing them.

Accomplishing these would require addressing the following research questions:

- Which green policies relate to defending human, ethnic, women's, gender, refugee, social and economic rights and in what way?
- Who are the relevant actors and target groups on both sides of the divide in Bulgaria?
- What successful examples exist for cooperation between rights-based and green actors?
- What further synergies are possible between green and rights-oriented policy agendas and what practical steps can be taken for accomplishing them by the actors identified?

Rather opportunistically, we reacted to ongoing political developments that seemed directly linked to the purpose of this research and added an additional question:

- What opportunities, gains or risks did the 2020 anti-government protests in Bulgaria present to the green political movement's legitimacy, who were the other parties taking part in them, and how did it affect the political and civic landscape?

Apart from closely analysing what happened at the protests, to find answers to the above questions, we reviewed available literature online, including policy analyses. This helped map "the green policy space" and led to establishing the major types of rights encompassed by mainstream Green political analyses. These types served as a simple analytical framework, which was applied to the data collected, in view of answering the research questions.

Then we embarked upon gathering additional information for the purpose of analysis. The first method used for this was desk-research of relevant actors. We prioritized political parties, non-profit organisations and other institutions engaged in supporting green, social or human rights causes in Bulgaria. The research team monitored their web, social networking and media channels.

From within these target groups, we identified civic and political activists, actively engaged with defending environmental and/or human, social or economic rights. We harnessed their individual opinions, considerations and understanding of the processes relevant to this study with the help of an online questionnaire.

We designed a survey consisting of 21 questions (multiple choice, checkboxes and open-ended), prompting the respondents to first share demographic details and then consider actual or possible alliances between progressive and green actors. Within the predetermined sample of respondents, completion was anonymous. This was in order to minimize the risk of participants bending to ideological, political or organisational peer pressure, or other potential risks.

Fifty-seven respondents fitting our target-participant profile were invited to complete the survey; 30 completed it, of whom 17 indicated themselves as males, 12 as females and one as other. The majority of respondents are aged between 41 and 65 years and reside in a big city or the capital Sofia. Sixteen respondents hold tertiary degrees, nine hold more than one; four are doctors, and only one has not earned a university degree (likely because they are still pursuing university studies). This "profile" necessarily skews the survey results, but it is also somewhat representative of the social group of citizens active in the public sphere on environmental questions, who tend to be educated urban dwellers.

The survey respondents tend to belong to the so-called "liberal professions". They work in the fields of journalism, finance, law, the civic sector (NGOs

and European projects), economics, education, software development, publishing, design and environmental policy.

The survey was filled out by eight persons identifying as green, six liberals and eight left/socialists. One is an anarchist, one a conservative, one communist, one democrat and four give a non-response (either blank or declare themselves apolitical). When asked to position themselves on the strict left-right spectrum, 16 respondents declared themselves belonging to the left compared to 12 on the right (three centrists and eight rightists). Despite that, when asked to state who they would vote for if the elections were now, 10 people said “nobody” and 10 for the Greens and/or whatever coalition they are part of. Of those, who selected Green Movement and Democratic Bulgaria, four identify as leftists.

In terms of political sympathies, most respondents would like to see a genuine left-green coalition with the Green Movement party as a member. This is quite a minority stance, yet precisely the one this policy paper wants to see realized!

Furthermore, four semi-structured interviews were held with pre-selected priority participants, including political decision-makers and leaders whose opinions and vision are decisive for pursuing a potential integration of environmental and rights-oriented policy agendas. The interviews closely followed the structure of the questionnaire but allowed for greater freedom of interpretation and greater nuance of responses. All participants were interviewed online. They provided informed consent for their participation, based on an information sheet outlining the purpose and methods of the study, which was provided to them prior to each interview.

In addition, the anti-government protest wave of the summer was included as a case study of the potential expansion of green policies toward a broader social and human rights agenda. For this purpose, information about the case of the protests of 2020 was collected and analysed.

Human and social rights in green policy space

The prospect of expanding the green policy and political space to human, social and economic rights served as the starting point of this study. Its objectives are pragmatic, and its findings need to be grounded within Bulgaria's political and civil society fields. With these considerations in mind, we shall summarize here the respective policy definitions applied by the European Green Party¹. The European Greens divide their programme into seven thematic parts:

¹ European Greens, “Our positions”, accessed on 16.07.2020 from <https://europeangreens.eu/positions>

- **Europe and democracy.** The Greens stand for “an ever-closer Union and want to make it more democratic, relevant and useful to citizens”. They want the EU to “change its policies and priorities towards a Green New Deal, to reform and democratise its decision-making process to make it less dependent on Member States and closer to its citizens”.
- **Climate and energy.** The Greens stand for reducing GHG emissions that cause climate change and welcome the Paris Agreement. In order to achieve this, countries should start phasing out nuclear and coal power plants, reduce the use of fossil fuels, stimulate renewable energy, and utilize more public transport and shared mobility tools. They also want to “encourage investors, funds and cities to cut their financial ties with the fossil fuel sector by divesting”.
- **Economy and jobs.** The Greens promote support for Green enterprises, cooperatives and local initiatives, and they urge responsible business leadership. They stand for “fair trade agreements that respect workers’ rights and consumer protection, compliance with environmental and safety standards, not undermining the judicial system, not forcing out smaller competitors nor causing a threat to the subsistence of people in developing countries”. They also advocate for “economic guarantees for citizens and active spending policies to support economic regeneration, as well as more investments in lifelong learning to enable employees to gain skills during their professional careers”.
- **Human rights and migration.** The Greens consider “Human dignity, equality and solidarity as core European values that form the cornerstones of the European Project”. They also “believe in a fair and just society where everyone is treated equally and enjoys the same rights, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation”. Regarding the migration crisis, they advocate for “a full use of the existing legal instruments to ensure the safe and legal access [for asylum seekers to EU countries]; for a more ambitious resettlement and relocation scheme; for support mechanisms and funds for countries, cities and communities that accept to relocate refugees, as well as to encourage others to reconsider their decision not to participate; for a focus on addressing the root causes of migration by changing trade and development policies that finance authoritarian regimes”.
- **Social justice and health.** The Greens are against austerity policy measures and propose green investments in public infrastructure and public goods and services instead.
- **Environment and food.** The Greens want to end intensive crop farming and factory animal farming and work on the promotion of strong animal welfare standards. They prioritise local farming, local food cooperatives and sustainable and organic farming. They would like to establish high-quality standards for all food and beverages and mandatory lists of ingredients as well as clear origins of all products. They are against usage of genetically modified organisms and pesticides.

- **Foreign and security policy.** The Greens “strongly believe in the merit of non-violent conflict resolution, ranging from diplomatic warnings to targeted sanctions, to prevent the financing of terror and the delivery of weapons into war zones”. They also consider that “cooperation and coordination between security agencies, authorities and the police on a European level is indispensable for combatting criminal activities such as money laundering; the illegal trade of drugs, arms and wildlife; human trafficking; and forced prostitution”. They “support the establishment of European agencies with the capacity to effectively stop criminal activities within Europe’s external borders”. Having defined the scope of green policies within which we operate, we now move on to establishing how they connect to human, ethnic, women’s, gender, refugee, social and economic rights.

Human rights

The European Green Party underlines² that the European Project is founded upon the principles of peace, freedom, justice, tolerance and diversity. Greens value the protection of human rights more than public security; they are against mass surveillance and count on freedom, human rights, rule of law, solidarity and full democracy as the only way to combat discrimination, hatred and violence. Enhancing security and cooperation against global terrorism cannot compromise fundamental rights and liberties. The right to privacy and protection of personal data should also be ensured.

Refugee rights

The European Greens strongly believe³ that refugees and asylum seekers should be treated according to human rights standards, which the EU states should facilitate the process of obtaining legal status and the possibility for education and work. If necessary, the EU should ensure humanitarian corridors for refugees to escape conflict areas, and member states should ensure integration programmes and support for first-entry states as well. They also support minority rights and the protection of minority languages.

Women’s rights

The Greens pay a lot of attention in their policies to women’s rights, including gender quotas, 50/50 women’s participation⁴ in elections and party organs, sexual and reproductive rights⁵, equal pay for equal work, and a more gender-balanced composition of power structures and gender justice. The European Green party always has two co-chairs — male and female — and tries to hold a 50/50 balance in all its organs and events. They also suggest

² European Greens. “On liberties and fundamental rights in Europe.” accessed on 17.12.2020 from <https://europeangreens.eu/zagreb2015/liberties-and-fundamental-rights-europe>

³ European Greens. “The EU and Europeans can do more for refugees.” accessed on 17.12.2020 from <https://europeangreens.eu/lyon2015/eu-and-europeans-can-do-more-refugees>

⁴ European Greens “Gender quota debate.” accessed on 17.12.2020 from <https://europeangreens.eu/news/gender-quota-debate>

⁵ European Greens. “Sexual and reproductive rights: the cornerstone of a feminist Europe.” accessed on 17.12.2020 from

compulsory gender mainstreaming at work and ensure parental leave for all parents irrespective of their gender and marital status.

Gender rights

The European Green party continuously supports equal rights and non-discrimination for LGBT people; green politicians and some member-parties promote same-sex marriages and the right to adopt children for same-sex couples, but there is no common position on this issue. During the last 10 years, there have been no resolutions on LGBT rights issued by the Party.

Social and economic rights

The Greens consider protection of socioeconomic rights a vital step towards a sustainable society. They state that socioeconomic inequalities, coupled with the climatic and environmental degradation of many areas, increase misery and destroy peoples' dignity. Therefore, the state should provide protection, freedom and welfare for all people in an equal way. States should make social investments in healthcare, education and affordable housing as well as to ensure adequate minimum wage/income.

The Greens identify the further development of a social Europe as a vital priority for the EU. For the Greens, social justice and ecological justice are inextricably linked.⁶

According to the UNEP, by 2017, protecting the right to a healthy environment had gained constitutional recognition and protection in over 100 countries.⁷

The Green movement in a human and social rights context

Contemporary Green movements originate from the revolutionary upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s. That epochal transformation of the political landscape in the West is usually captured by the umbrella term, "New Social Movements". These are broadly considered "post-material" a fundamental departure from class struggles in the industrial era. The term encompasses movements fighting for recognition (as opposed to redistribution)⁸ such as feminist and gay liberation struggles but also environmentalism in its manifold expressions, prison abolitionism, anti-psychiatry, anti-colonial struggles and others.

⁶ European Greens. "The pillar of social rights in the EU," accessed on 17.12.2020 from <https://europeangreens.eu/pillar-social-rights-eu>

⁷ UN Environment Programme, "What are your environmental rights?" accessed on 10.07.2020 from <https://www.unenvironment.org/explore-topics/environmental-rights-and-governance/what-we-do/advancing-environmental-rights/what-0>

⁸ Fraser, N. 2003. Nancy Fraser From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a 'Post-Socialist' Age.

The Left correspondingly evolved to respond to these shifts with the New Left breaking explicitly with Soviet diamat orthodoxies in the wake of the brutally suppressed Hungarian revolution of 1956 and the Prague Spring of 1968. In a bid to revitalize the Socialist movement, Eurocommunism styled itself as an alternative to the ossified, violent and bureaucratic Soviet system and embraced the new movements, integrating their demands. Meanwhile, environmentalist and anti-nuclear critiques gave the new political forms powerful impetus, giving rise to diverse movements such as eco-feminism, eco-socialism, etc.

While this evolution of left-wing politics seems to lend green movements a “natural” left veneer, the relation between Green and Left politics is not straightforward. As Andrew Dobson argues⁹, since its inception, the green movement has been ambivalent to both capitalism and communism because it perceives them as sharing fundamental modernist and rationalist presuppositions about infinite growth, economic-industrial development and bureaucratic management, which clash with nature’s logic and “interests” that the Greens task themselves with defending.

The environmentalist movement thus tried to carve for itself a “third” space between Left and Right, despite its pedigree from the revolutionary tremors of the 1960s. In turn, both the Left and the Right have tried to fold it within themselves. For example, it is commonplace for both eco-socialists and climate deniers to say that environmentalism is practical anti-capitalism in that it tries to limit expansion of industrial development and rein in growth. Literary works of utopian ecologism often depicted a social order devoid of private property.

On the other hand, the Right praises the green movement for espousing an inter-generational perspective (which harks back to Burke) and for its critical stances to Enlightenment ideologies (which aligns it with Romanticism). One of the earliest systematizations of nature conservation in the West came from a pro-capitalist corner in the guise of John Evelyn’s *Silva*: an early 17th century treatise on conservation. Evelyn’s “managerial ecology” sought to preserve English forests only for the sake of their sustainable and profitable exploitation in commercial activity, in part by outsourcing the timber-intensive iron industry to New England.¹⁰ The origins of ecology are thus intertwined with the history of the Empire and imperial conquest: British forest management “cut its teeth” during the British Raj.¹¹ Meanwhile, early American conservationists systematically violated the interests of the indigenous peoples inhabiting the newly created natural reserves, creating a durable and unfortunate link between nature preservation, settler colonialism and racism.

⁹ Dobson, A., 2007, *Green political thought*, Routledge

¹⁰ Merchant, C., 1990, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*, San Francisco: HarperOne, p. 236:239

¹¹ Grove, R. 2002, “Climatic Fears: Colonialism and the History of Environmentalism”, in *Harvard international review* 23: 50.

This is a far cry from the post-war situation, when environmentalism in the Euro-Atlantic context became cognate with radical New Left, New Wave/"deep ecology" and the anti-war movements in their various permutations.¹² This does not mean that environmentalism and labour activism in the Western context are bereft of tensions. Far from it. If anything, examples of conflicts between conservationists and working class or rural communities abound — much to the benefit of industries depending on deforestation or extractivism that happily exploit the rifts.¹³ In terms of political organisation, however, green and leftist or liberal-left agendas find a lot of common ground: from radical democracy to anti-militarism and a susceptibility to rights-based agendas. (It is partly for this reason that the 2019 Green-Black government coalition in Austria scandalized many, but not nearly as much as Joschka Fischer's endorsement of the Iraq invasion in 2003). The "baggage" of this historical association has made it possible to put forth radical visions extending the conventional framing of environmentalism as a kind of right: the right to clean air, water and soil, for example.¹⁴ Similarly, there is a mounting body of scholarship that documents the extremely uneven distribution of environmental pollution and the effects of climate change across various geographic locations, based on race and class, calling for the coupling of social justice and environmentalism as environmental justice.¹⁵

As Naomi Klein says apropos climate change, the climate justice movement is animated by the realization that poor countries, usually in the Global South, face destruction and get to pay the ecological price for the industrial development of the net-emitters of greenhouse gasses in the Global North. The idea of "rights" is useful because it suggests finality, non-negotiability and inalienability, but it needs the supplement of "justice", for no just transition to a greener future is possible without redressing the global socio-economic asymmetries and inequalities that are shaping our chances vis-a-vis the coming ecological catastrophe.

12 It must be noted that the association of ecology and anti-capitalism actually arrived rather late in the West. It was a reality much earlier in the Soviet Union of the early 1920s which passed the world's most comprehensive and extensive nature preservation laws in modern history (Louis Proyect, n.d. "Nazi 'Ecology'" accessed on 28.10.2020 from http://www.columbia.edu/~lnp3/mydocs/ecology/nazi_ecology.htm)

13 Salazar, D., & Alper, D. 2002, *Reconciling Environmentalism and the Left: Perspectives on Democracy and Social Justice in British Columbia's Environmental Movement*. Canadian Journal of Political Science, 35(3), 527-566. doi:10.1017/S0008423902778347

14 Hiskes, Richard P., 2009, *The Human Right to a Green Future Environmental Rights and Intergenerational Justice*, Cambridge: CUP and Weston, B. and Bollier, D., 2013, *Green Governance: Ecological Survival, Human Rights, and the Law of the Commons*, Cambridge: CUP

15 Klein, N., 2014, *This Changes Everything*, Simon & Schuster and Paul Mohai, David Pellow, J. Timmons Roberts. 2009. "Environmental Justice". *Annual Review of Environment and Resources*, 2009 34:1, 405-430

Tracing environmentalism and human and social rights across Bulgaria's post-1990 politics

Three decades on, the old political configurations from the 1990s have reshuffled significantly. The old anti-communist Right has split and evolved in neoliberal and conservative directions giving progressive forces opportunities to exploit the cracks within the early anti-communist Right and force through new alliances based on human, social and nature's rights. More surprisingly, the traditional socialist Left has lately followed suit. An analytical outline of political representation of environmentalism, in comparison to human and social rights movements, traces important historical phases to arrive at the conjuncture that this current report analyses.

Environmentalism was one of the movements that challenged the Socialist regime in Bulgaria in the late 1980s. (This is not to say that critical Socialist-era environmentalism did not exist before. For example, the works of the Bulgarian natural philosopher Pavel Georgiev published in the 1970s and the 1980s offered a penetrating critique of the environmental costs of the growth-based model of economic development of Bulgaria and the Socialist bloc.)¹⁶

In 1987, persistent air pollution in the Danubian industrial city of Rousse sparked protests by concerned citizens, who were called together by a group of women. These protests are often said to have given birth to the protracted Bulgarian dissident movement. The protests in Rousse and the dissident movement that sprang up from them tied the critique of pollution to the critique of totalitarianism, giving the push for democratic change a decisive ecological edge.¹⁷ One of the earliest examples of this was the formation of the dissident Ekoglasnost organisation, which attracted thousands of supporters within the turbulent months of 1989-1990.

Ekoglasnost quickly moved to co-establish the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF), the earliest anti-communist opposition coalition. At this early phase, UDF comprised diverse organisations and parties: from social-democratic and agrarian to conservative, monarchist and even far-right ones. Their common ground was opposition to the former state-socialist regime, whose politics could still be seen in Bulgaria via BSP.

The early green movement's political representatives were quick to split ideologically along the pro-anti BSP political divide. In 1991-1992, a Green

¹⁶ Georgiev, P. 2020 [1983], "The dynamics of growth and bioeconomy of socialism" [Динамика на растежа и биоекономика на социализма], in DVersia mag, issue 13

¹⁷ Krastanova, R., 2012, The green movement and the green parties in Bulgaria: between systemic integration and systemic change [Zelenoto dvizhenie i zelenite partii v Bălgarija : meždū integracija v sistemata i sistemna promjana], Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Sofia, accessed on 10.10.2020 from <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/sofia/O9019.pdf>

Conservative Party's representative to UDF, Philip Dimitrov, became the country's first anti-communist Prime Minister. By 1994, Ekoglasnost had unravelled into two successor splinter groups, joining BSP and UDF, respectively. A Green Party created in 1990 by an early Ekoglasnost activist and the first UDF mayor of Sofia, Alexander Karakachanov, eventually swung Left and entered into coalitions with BSP, splitting itself in the meantime to eject a pro-industry Party of Bulgarian Greens. The Green Party was a co-founder of the European Greens in 2004, while a short-lived Green Alliance party was founded in 2006.

In the meantime, UDF itself underwent successive splits and crises and eventually forged a coherent Right-wing, pro-Western identity. As a centralised political party led by Ivan Kostov, its 1997-2001 government set the country firmly on course toward economic austerity and NATO and EU membership.

During the 2000s, the green political parties of the 1990s gradually lost their identities and electoral appeal while economy-driven priorities and EU-accession topped the political agenda. Eventually, by the time of Bulgaria's accession to the EU in 2007, they were almost entirely digested by their respective gravity centres toward the left and right of the political spectrum.

Following its heyday in 1989-1990, the grassroots environmental movement in Bulgaria also declined in terms of public support and numbers and morphed into a multitude of professional non-governmental organisations (NGOs), funded by predominantly international donors as part of Bulgaria meeting EU-accession conditionalities. In this period, grassroots political environmentalism reached its lowest point in regard to public outreach – green issues remained important only to a small part of society, mostly highly educated and relatively affluent urban dwellers.

The EU pre-accession period was formative for the ideological and political orientation of Bulgaria's new human rights movements as well. In the Bulgarian context, state socialism's late phase was marked by economically painful, protracted implosion, but also by a major shift of the ruling socialist regime toward nationalism and anti-Muslim minority rhetoric. Due to the legacy BSP associated itself with, human rights, democratic participation, tolerance of differences, religious rights, the inclusion of minorities, etc. became the purview of the anti-communist Right in the wake of 1989.

Though traditionally the domain of the left-liberal politics (understood in the broadest possible terms), groups concerned with human rights, inclusion of vulnerable communities, women, refugees, sexual and ethnic minorities and social rights grew quite alienated from the traditional, parliamentary-represented Left (BSP). New groups and non-governmental organisations emerged, particularly in the human, women's or gender rights arenas,

which were far removed from the conservatism and ossification of BSP and often ideologically better suited to neoliberal world views.¹⁸

The period between 1998 and 2008 was marked by relative political stability, with all major parties sharing the EU accession agenda and economic growth-oriented neoliberal policy. BSP appeared emancipated from its socialist-era dependencies and succeeded to remain intact, in spite of several splinters. In contrast, following the collapse of UDF after the end of its term in government, a constellation of players emerged, aspiring to claim leadership in the centre-Right political spectrum. Most successful among these was Boyko Borissov, a self-styled charismatic popular leader who took off from his post as mayor of Sofia to lead his own centre-right party GERB to a landslide win in the 2009 elections.

Bulgaria's economy at the time was dominated by local players who capitalised significantly from murky privatisations and syphoning of public finances. Large portions of the economy and major companies had passed into private hands, which were now reaching out to consolidate mass media ownership, with the purpose of imposing influence on political processes¹⁹ With economic growth slowed by the global financial crisis of 2008-2011, the EU's Structural and Cohesion funds became a primary source of fresh capital - controlled and distributed by the government.

Bulgaria's political Right had evolved in strictly pro-business directions ever since the era of Ivan Kostov. While still clinging to unreformed coal, nuclear and other environmentally hazardous industries and traditional ties with Russia, BSP had embraced EU accession and opened to neoliberal policies²⁰ The process culminated with the adoption of the flat tax during its term in government in 2008.

Already in 2005, Ahmed Dogan, the founding leader of the nominally liberal Movement of Rights and Freedoms (DPS), had openly boasted about his party's "ring of companies".²¹ Purporting to represent Turkish and Roma minorities since the early 1990s, his party had been perpetually mired in corruption and allegations of influence peddling. With other mainstream political players blamed for the same clientelism, corruption and nepotism

18 Ivancheva, M., "Continuity in Rupture: The Paradoxical History of the Women's Movement in Bulgaria. What Do Ideas Do?" Junior Visiting Fellows' Conferences, IWM Vienna 33 <https://www.iwm.at/publications/5-junior-visiting-fellows-conferences/vol-xxxiii/continuity-in-rupture/>

19 Karasimeonov, G. 2012. Challenges facing the consolidation of democracy in Bulgaria. Analyses. Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Office Sofia.

20 Popivanov, B., Changing Images of the Left in Bulgaria, Hannover: ibidem-verlag and Mueller, M., 2012, "The Left in Bulgaria", in Daiber, B., Hildebrandt, C., and Striethorst, A. (eds.) From Revolution to Coalition – Radical Left Parties in Europe, Berlin: Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, pp. 276-291.

21 Mediapool 2005. We have a circle of companies: they fund us - we help them. Mediapool. 26.06.2005. Accessed on 01.10.2020.

became commonplace,²² imposing what critical analyst O'Brennan has described as the "yoke of oligarchy".²³

Dependent on industries' funding and increasingly neoliberal, mainstream political parties grew ideologically open to climate denialism and hostile to environmentalism. Shortly after Bulgaria's joining of the EU, green activists found themselves deprived of almost any support in parliament. With the economy slowly recovering from its 1990s collapse, environmental threats re-emerged. They included air pollution, extractive industries and excessive construction overtaking the Black Sea coastline and mountains. Combined with a growing interest in sustainable lifestyles and better food quality among urban dwellers, detected regionally by Petr Jehlicka²⁴, they shaped a new supportive context for grassroots green activism.

Leading NGO activists embarked on a project to launch their own political platform. In 2008, they created a new political party named *Зелените* (The Greens) with the purpose of reinstating political support for green policies. Respect for human rights and social justice were listed among the party's founding principles, alongside environmental protection and sustainable development.²⁵

But the prospect of a grassroots-driven green political alternative was not welcome by the political status quo. Stigmatizing green activists as "eco-terrorists" and "traitors" had already begun in the 1990s. Since 2009, verbal bashing of environmentalism and its advocates escalated hysterically, picked up by loyal editors and opportunistic opinion leaders alike.²⁶ The Greens soon became a primary target of repeated smear campaigns, resulting in a persistent hostile discourse, conveniently facilitated by a predominantly neoliberal ethos of the media field — in line with Pierre Bourdieu's visionary analysis.²⁷ This undermined the legitimization of the green political movement and prevented it from attracting electoral support and effectively promoting a green policy agenda.

22 See A. B. Spendzharova and Milada AnaVachudova, 'Catching up? Consolidating Liberal Democracy in Bulgaria and Romania after Accession, West European Politics, Volume 35, 39-58 2012; Milada Ana. Vachudova, 'Corruption and Compliance in the EU's Post-Communist Members and Candidates', Journal of Common Market Studies, Volume 47, 43-62, 2009; I. Ganey, 'Post-accession Hooliganism: Democratic Governance in Bulgaria and Romania after 2007', East European Politics and Societies, Volume e27 (2013)

23 O'Brennan, J. 'Bulgarians Under the Yoke of Oligarchy' (2014) "Bulgarians Under the Yoke of Oligarchy". NEW LEFT REVIEW, 86:

24 Jehlicka, P. 2018, Wasted Eastern promise: The sustainability lessons the West ignores. 57th International University Week 'The Protection of Nature and the Environment in Southeast Europe: Players, Discourses, Strategies of Action'. Academy for Civic Education Tutzing, 1 – 5 October 2018

25 GreenPower, 2018, Declaration of the Executive Committee for the creation of a real green party in Bulgaria. Blopost, retrieved on 10.11.2020.

26 Antonov, P., 2014, Neoliberalisation of post-socialist journalistic practice in Bulgaria. Baltic Sea Region and Eastern Europe: A new generation on the move. CBEES Annual Conference 2014, December 4-5. Stockholm.

27 Bourdieu, P., 1998. On Television. The New Press. New York.

An important opportunity to shake the status-quo was missed in 2013, when Borissov's first government was forced to resign by powerful protests across the country. Environmental groups and the Greens took part in the protests, but the movement was primarily focused on social inequality and rising fuel/utility prices due to monopolies. The Greens failed to reach even 1% of the votes. Then, the winning GERB could not form a coalition, and BSP swooped in to form a government with the indicative support of far-right populist party Ataka.

The socialists installed economist Plamen Oresharski as Prime Minister, but at the same time threw their support behind the controversial appointment of Delyan Peevski as head of the State Agency for National Security (DANS). This compromised BSP's — and its government's — legitimacy as an alternative to the clientelist political model, for Peevski was perceived as one of its major protagonists. Peevski's career in law enforcement and politics, marred by corruption allegations and scandals, had turned him into a powerful business mogul. A member of DPS, his own media empire had been a showcase of oligarchic symbiosis with almost all mainstream political actors, including GERB.

Positioning Peevski at the top of the country's state security agency sent a chilling signal across society, and soon protesters again filled the streets. Only this time, they were different — liberal, well educated, affluent, urban dwellers, concerned with kleptocracy, corruption, and rule of law, and largely anti-communist. An informal entity named Protest Network emerged as a core organiser of the protests, which continued for over 400 days, until Oresharski's cabinet finally resigned in July 2014. The Greens were part of these protests too and closely affiliated with the Protest Network, but yet again failed to enter parliament.

Boyko Borissov received a second term in government, supported by an non-homogeneous coalition. Apart from the ruling centre-right party GERB, it consisted of ABV (a centre-left splinter group of BSP), far-right nationalist.

Patriotic Block, and a newly bundled Reformist Block (RB). The RB was a coalition of small centrist and centre-right parties, including the UDF and its splinter DSB. It had raised the hopes of liberal-minded groups and civil society by inviting their representatives to a "Civic Quota", but eventually very few of them made it to MP and ministerial positions. Among them was Hristo Ivanov, a former Program Director at the NGO Institute for Legal Initiatives, where he had led projects related to judicial reform, the prevention of corruption and promoting the rule of law.

Rights-oriented agendas had not found a rightful place among main political actors either. Ideologically motivated support for the human rights and social justice movements from Liberals and Socialists has been thinning. Following the consolidation and shifting of the former UDF coalition into a rather conservative single party, political Liberalism has been

represented steadily by DPS, whose shortcomings and business mentality we described above. Other Liberal players included the party (National Movement for Stability and Progress, NDSV) of Bulgaria's former monarch Simeon II, who ascended to power as Prime Minister in 2001-2005, followed by a coalition with BSP until 2009, which marked the peak of the party's presence in mainstream politics. DEOS, a boutique neoliberal project with roots in civil society, raised some people's hopes by nominating the first openly gay candidate to Sofia's mayoral office in 2015. But DEOS never gained substantial support and eventually dissolved in 2018.

The participation of RB in Borissov's second government during 2014-2017 was a disappointment as well. Ivanov's reform plans in the justice sector were paralysed, and he was pushed to resign in 2015. RB ministers from anti-communist Right splinters shifted ideologically in a nationalist, conservative direction. At the same time, nationalist, populist and openly opportunistic pro-business parties mushroomed and flourished. In this environment, oligarchs like Peevski cemented their power and control over large sectors of the economy and mass media.

The Greens had persistently identified as in opposition to this political model (and refused to join RB for this reason). Prior to the 2017 elections, they entered into a coalition with DEOS and Da, Bulgaria (DB) — a new formation founded by Hristo Ivanov. Prior to the 2019 European elections, the Greens had only a handful of locally elected representatives and had never been part of the national government.

The coalition failed to enter parliament, but the public resentment of corruption, nepotism and clientelism was growing, so the Greens joined DB and another former UDF splinter — the conservative party and EPP member Democrats for Strong Bulgaria (DSB), founded in 2004 by former Prime Minister Ivan Kostov. The tripartite coalition named Democratic Bulgaria (DeB) secured one place in the European parliament in 2019. However, that place went to DSB leader Radan Kanev, who comes from an explicitly conservative corner of the Right anti-communist scene. As MEP, he joined the EPP, rather than the European Greens, which indicated a centre-right political orientation of the coalition and a weaker role for the Greens.

In 2019, the Greens changed their name formally to Green Movement (GM) and have remained an integral part of DeB. While its participants appear to represent three different political ideologies — green, centrist/liberal and conservative — 1990s-styled anti-communism is the “cement” that holds the coalition together. GM openly supports anti-communist politics²⁸ to counter frequent accusations of being too leftist, particularly by DSB supporters within the coalition.

28 Zeleno Dvizhenie, n.d., Program of the Greens [Programa na Zelenite], accessed on 29.09.2020 from <https://bit.ly/2HOxr3F>

At the same time, GM is also accused of leaning toward right-wing and neoliberal agendas — for instance by the original 1990s Green Party.²⁹ Critical scholars and commentators also perpetuate the 1990s association of the Greens with UDF-style anti-communism and neoliberal policy. For example, listing examples of phony environmentalists, such as the corporate greenwash consultancy Denkstatt, researcher Polina Manolova depicts Bulgarian environmentalism as unchangingly marred in the neoliberalism and anti-communism of the 1990s. In doing so, she overlooks some significant “reshuffling” in the green movement, resulting in a “generational” change, such as the emergence of new activist groups and organisations that tie their environmentalism to anti-capitalism (i.e., Extinction Rebellion Bulgaria and Fridays for Future Bulgaria) and explore new grounds for intervention that integrate environmentalism with social justice and human rights. There is also the liaison between “old guard” Greens and the new Left (i.e., the anti-TTIP/CETA mobilisations). Presupposing a fixed adherence to neoliberalism overlooks the ways the party programs have evolved in relation to it. For example, while in the 2014 pre-electoral campaign the Greens called for the reintroduction of tax-free minimum wage and the abolition of the flat tax³⁰, no such proposal was found in their 2017 election program.³¹

Friction between the civic and political arms of the green movement was observed in Bulgaria, similar to other countries. Unlike the earlier generation of green political actors, GM emerged from a community of strong and sizable environmental NGOs and had a symbiotic relationship with them. In spite of having European legitimacy through joining the European Green Party (and successfully pushing its original Bulgarian member, the Green Party, out of it), GM’s electoral support remained marginal, never reaching the 1% threshold in national elections. This was in contrast to increasing public support for some environmental causes (judged by the number and size of environmental protests since 2007). Such disparity can be attributed to a variety of factors, including post-democratic public distrust in political parties, institutional constraints, favouring incumbents and barring outsiders.³²

Yet, it put the party, conceived as a political arm of the environmental movement, in the unfavourable position of grasping for popularity and financial backing — a position that created certain frustration and even hostility amongst environmental NGOs, some of whom sought to maintain their non-partisan basis. The sui generis relationship with green NGOs was not entirely favourable for the party either. It led to conflicting leadership

29 Green Party Bulgaria, 2019. Why did we quit the European Green party? Party website statement, retrieved on 11.11.2020.

30 Zeleno Dvizhenie, Election platform of the Greens 2014, accessed on 29.09.2020 from https://www.zelenite.bg/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Platforma_Zelenite_2014.pdf

31 Zeleno Dvizhenie, Election platform of the Greens 2017, accessed on 29.09.2020 from https://www.zelenite.bg/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Platforma_Zelenite_2017.pdf

32 The parliamentary parties have built and kept legislative thresholds and pay-walls for the aspirants while ensuring for themselves affluent public subsidies, offices and mass media access etc.

priorities, a blurred identity, overlapping membership and having to bow to “ngoism” — a management and operational style suited for civil society projects or campaigning purposes, but not necessarily for political ones. Over time, this led to a diluted image of the Bulgarian Greens, with media attention and public support “defecting” to the stronger green NGOs, with their expert and non-partisan status.

Gaining confidence over time, and particularly since joining the DeB coalition, GM appears to gradually emancipate itself from the grasp of the green civic movement. In the meantime, BSP evolved from what political scientist Boris Popivanov called a “reluctant neoliberalizer”³³ (a process that culminated with the adoption of the flat tax in 2008) to a neoconservative party, leading the most virulent opposition to women, LGBT and children’s rights today. For example, BSP has been instrumental in the killing of the Bulgarian ratification of the Istanbul Convention in 2019. In the process, the party did not shy away from aligning itself with the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, the far-right, US evangelical churches and other reactionary elements.

The party has also fanned the anti-refugee sentiment in Bulgaria and been active in promoting punitive workfare programs for the Roma (i.e., tying the payment of child benefits to the school performance of Roma children). This turn has been most pronounced since Kornelia Ninova became a leader of the party. She consolidated her power by purging long-standing figures from the party’s left wing and articulated a new ideological direction for BSP by the name of “left-wing conservatism”.

In conclusion, some 30 years after the (now defunct) UDF coalition opposed Communism in the name of human rights, today’s major anti-communist centre-right party GERB is ruling Bulgaria in coalition with united far-right parties that maintain openly anti-Muslim and anti-migrant rhetoric, in a marked departure from the early anti-communist pro-democratic Right that took up the cause of the Bulgarian Turks, who had been oppressed, forced to convert to Christianity and expelled in the late 1980s.³⁴

Green and human rights agendas are confronted by a host of emerging conservative and far-right populist parties that target and deny the rights of refugees, Roma, women, and sexual minorities and that are also openly anti-environmentalist. Meanwhile, mainstream Right and Left players are siding opportunistically with them, alienating environmental and human rights supporters.³⁵ Respective individual MEPs are relatively more responsive. But on a national level, the role of a political party defending

33 Popivanov, B., 2012, *Changing Images of the Left in Bulgaria*, Hannover: ibidem-verlag. See also Mueller, M., 2012, “The Left in Bulgaria”, in Daiber, B., Hildebrandt, C., and Striethorst, A. (eds.) *From Revolution to Coalition – Radical Left Parties in Europe*, Berlin: Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, pp. 276-291.

34 Zeleno Dvizhenie, Election platform of the Greens 2017, accessed on 29.09.2020 from https://www.zelenite.bg/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Platforma_Zelenite_2017.pdf Nikolova, M., 2016, *Islam on Trial: Normalisation of Islam in Bulgaria and the role of intellectuals*, MA thesis, CEU

35 Medarov, Georgi, *Bulgaria’s Kleptocracy Owes to Its Economic Model, Not Just Its Corrupt Politicians*, Jacobin, 30 Jul 2020

the rights of women, minorities (sexual, religious and ethnic), refugees, the weak and vulnerable in society, more broadly put, seems to have been vacated by the mainstream parties.

The social justice movement remains alienated from them as well due to BSP's compromising on their traditional commitments to progressive forces. All of this suggests that there may be a progressive-green political vacuum waiting to be filled. The question is whether the Greens and their centrist coalition partner DB are up to the task.

Anti-government protests of 2020

The anti-government protest wave in Bulgaria in 2020 offered a real-life opportunity to examine the potential for expansion of green politics towards a broader social justice and human rights agenda in the context of social upheaval and mass opposition to the way the country is being ruled, opposition motivated by democratic values and grievances transcending political camps.

The 2020 Bulgarian protests were a wave of daily anti-government, anti-corruption demonstrations that started on July 9. As they were still ongoing at the time of this research, our report cannot encompass them entirely. Neither can it claim utmost objectivity, as the researchers themselves have been personally involved in Green politics and/or the protests.

The conceptualization of protesting by the social sciences began in the 1960s and 1970s, with the growth of protest movements in Europe and America. A considerable body of literature has been accumulated since then. Concepts like “political opportunity structure”, “cycle of protest”, “repertoire of contention”³⁶, “transformation” and “mobilization”³⁷ have been developed and employed for analysing collective action.

This case study draws on research of past protest cycles in Bulgaria³⁸ as well as of protest mobilisations and movements globally.³⁹ It applies the Protest event analysis (PEA) as a method for content analysis and the reconstruction

36 Tilly, C., 1995, *Popular Contention in Great Britain, 1758-1834*. Harvard University Press

37 Zald, M and McCarthy, J. D. 2009 [1987], *Social Movements in an organizational Society: Collected Essays*, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers.

38 See Krasteva, A. (2014). Civil protests, e-democracy, new mobilisation [Граждански протести, е-демокрация, нови мобилизации], *The quality of democracy in Bulgaria*, edit. Kanev, D. and Todorov, A., East-West press, Sofia; and Smilov, D. and Vaisova, L. (2013). *Protests - analysis and positions in Bulgarian media in summer 2013* [Протестът - анализи и позиции в българската преса лято 2013], East-West press, Sofia

39 See Kittel, B. and Karl-Dieter O., 2018, “Dissecting the Conditions of Political Protest. An Exploration of Interaction Effects in the Explanation of Political Protest”, *Sociological Inquiry*, DOI: 10.1111/soin.12233; Castells, M., 2012, *Networks of Outrage and Hope*. Polity Press; Carothers, T. and Richard Y., 2015, *The Complexities of Global Protest*. Carnegie Endowment for Peace; and Krustev I., 2014, *Democracy Disrupted. The Politics of Global Protest*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

of the dynamics of the contention on the basis of text sources (media reports, responses on social networks, participatory observations, protest actors' own websites and manifestos, etc.) and semi-structured interviews with protesters and observers. After revealing the key characteristics of the protest movement, the study attempts to evaluate its effects, in particular, on green policies and green political actors in Bulgaria.

The Bulgarian protest movement of 2020 was the culmination of long-standing grievances against endemic corruption and state capture, particularly associated with prime minister Boyko Borissov and his GERB party, which has been ruling the country almost uninterruptedly for 11 years now.

Events that sparked the explosion of the anti-government protests included:

- Green demonstrations in June over possible amendments to the national Biodiversity Act, which, according to the protestors, could gravely harm the protected zones. A wave of green protest demonstrations in various locations country-wide also contested the controversial construction of a hotel under the guise of a retaining wall in the protected area of Alepu on the Black Sea coast.
- On 7 July 2020, DB/DeB leader Hristo Ivanov disembarked on an illegally enclosed beach surrounding the waterfront mansion of Ahmed Dogan — founder and honorary chair of the nominally liberal DPS party, perceived as a shadow mastermind and pioneer of clientelism, nepotism and influence peddling in Bulgaria's politics. On the shore, Ivanov got brutally pushed back by security guards who later turned out to be in the employ of the National Security Service (NSS). The confrontation was live-streamed by Ivanov's crew and caused a public outcry, followed by a mass "beach-going" demonstration.
- A raid on the Presidency of Bulgaria by police and prosecutors on 9 July outraged the public as a blatant breach of the constitutional immunity of the institution. Generally perceived as an attack, ordered by Borissov against his vocal critic, President Rumen Radev, the raid was met by a spontaneous gathering of people in front of the Presidency building, giving rise to the protest movement that followed.

The location of the protest events on a daily basis was the capital city of Sofia. The protest wave also spread to some major district centres — Plovdiv, Russe, Stara Zagora, Burgas, Yambol, Sliven, etc. — as well as beyond the territory of Bulgaria to cities across Europe with a large Bulgarian diaspora, such as London, Brussels, Barcelona, Berlin, Cologne, and some cities in the U.S., Canada and even Australia. Smaller stand-alone rallies and protest events were organised in some villages and towns in Bulgaria where the local communities, emboldened by the protest wave, have stood up against institutional inaction and demanded measures for addressing infrastructure, environmental and social issues.

Independent media portal Mediapool estimated that on 17 July 2020, the demonstration in Sofia exceeded 15,000. According to Balkan Insight's estimation "at least 50,000 people were protesting concurrently each night" in the second half of July. The number of demonstrators varied day to day. In regard to the number of demonstrators, ruling party and government supporters have used vague and changing figures to downplay the importance and size of the rallies. In the autumn and winter of 2020, numbers significantly dwindled, particularly after the government introduced stricter restrictions of public gatherings in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Notable episodes in the course of the daily protests included:

- On 10 July, the ruling GERB party summoned its rank and file countrywide for a counterdemonstration in Sofia. A stand-off between protesters and the buses with counter-protesters followed. The police used excessive force, a few protesters were beaten up, some were taken to the emergency hospital, and 18 were arrested. Undefined "disciplinary measures" were announced by the Ministry of the Interior after the investigation found that the police had "violated the fundamental rights of the citizens" during the incident.
- On 15 July, demonstrators were numerous, stretching across several of Sofia's largest boulevards. The tension escalated after 10 p.m. when young men – considered to be provocateurs by the protesters — attempted to break into the parliament's office building and threw fireworks, bottles, stones and red paint at the police. New arrests followed.
- On 20 July, the protesters blocked the National Assembly building and also, briefly, the city's metro system, as the parliamentary debate on the no-confidence motion, submitted earlier by the opposition Bulgarian Socialist Party, began in parliament. The next day, Borissov and his government survived the no-confidence vote by 124 to 102 MPs.
- 24 July saw a major reshuffling of Borissov's cabinet, meant to calm down the protesters. A few days later, the justice minister resigned, as did the head of the Central Electoral Commission.
- 29 July marked the largest protest gathering in central Sofia in years, drawing between 100,000 and 120,000 demonstrators. About 20 intersections were blocked, and permanent sit-ins were set up, the key one being on Eagle Bridge, with protesters there vowing to stay until the government resigned.
- On 5 August, a party conference of GERB was held, and a crowd of protesters attempted to block the ruling coalition's representatives from leaving the premises. An assault on a Free Europe journalist and several other violent incidents made the headlines.
- On 14 August, the prime minister called for a Grand National Assembly and a new constitution. His move was immediately exposed by the protesters as a procrastination maneuver in view of the time required to convene the constitutional assembly.

- 2 September was the Day of the first “Grand National Uprising”— a name invented by the protest organisers to mock the Grand National Assembly, designed by Borissov. Roadblocks were set up in Sofia and across the country — on the Danube Bridge, the Veleka Bridge near Sinemorets, and the Bulgarian-Romanian border checkpoint at Silistra. There were violent incidents in Sofia involving journalists, and 35 protesters were arrested. The police and gendarmerie used tear gas, pepper spray and a water cannon.
- Four more large protest events were organised under the name of Grand National Uprising: on 10 September, 22 September (National Independence Day), 3 October (the eve of the announced Debate on “The Rule of Law and Fundamental Rights in Bulgaria” in the European Parliament), and one more on 16 October.
- On 8 October, the European Parliament adopted a resolution slamming Bulgaria over rule of law shortcomings and expressing “unequivocal support for the people of Bulgaria in their legitimate demands and aspirations for justice, transparency, accountability and democracy...”⁴⁰ In spite of resistance mostly by EPP MEPs loyal to their Bulgarian member GERB, the EP Resolution was passed, presenting a showdown moment and perceived as a victory by the anti-government protest’s participants.

Anti-government demonstrations were being held daily in smaller numbers at the time of writing this report.

Protest tactics are “learned cultural creations”, as Charles Tilly⁴¹ emphasizes. The Bulgarian protest movement of 2020 employed “learned” repertoires: classic street demonstrations and rallies, sit-ins and blockades at key traffic junctions in Sofia and on some national motorways (e.g., E-79 highway near Blagoevgrad) and intercity roads (e.g., Stara Zagora). Protest camps – a worldwide prominent feature of the post-2010 social movements⁴² — were set up for a few days as well, the key one being on Sofia’s Eagles Bridge.

Boycott tactics were also applied against the gas stations owned by Mareshki – the leader of the small Volya party whose votes in parliament made it possible for GERB to file a proposal for a new constitution (abandoned later). Petition-writing and en masse letter-writing to European institutions, international organisations, foreign embassies and parliaments has also been launched.

One letter-writing campaign was addressed to the deputies in the German Bundestag so as to pressure the ruling CDU/CSU — fellow EPP member and close ally to Borisov’s party — to distance itself from him.

40 European Parliament resolution of 8 October 2020 on the rule of law and fundamental rights in Bulgaria, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2020-0264_EN.html

41 Tilly, *Popular Contention*, p.42

42 McCurdy, P., Feigenbaum A., and Frenzel F., 2016, “Protest Camps and Repertoires of Contention”, *Social Movement Studies*, Volume 15, 2016 - Issue 1 Pages 97-104

In addition to these tactics, the Bulgarian protesters came up with a number of inventions: the “Citizens’ Panorama” outside the building of the Bulgarian National Television (BNT) while it was broadcasting the weekly political show “Panorama”; the “Citizens’ coffee-drinking” in front of the prime-minister’s private residence in Bankya; the rally-concert “Future for Bulgaria - future for the young”; the “Mass Writing of a Constitution” and “Feel the people’s love” gatherings in front of the parliament; and the “Wish-writing contest” in front of the Bulgarian National Bank on the birthday of the alleged oligarch Delyan Peevski. One day, protesters threw flat caps at the Palace of Justice, referencing the Prosecutor General Ivan Geshev’s trademark headgear.

Here follow some examples of the most frequent chants and slogans of the protest and also of some rare ones:

Resign, thug! Judicial reform! Mafia out! Stop lying! Early elections! Machine voting! We are sweeping up! Time to flush the toilet! No to fear! Borisov behind bars! Geshev resign! No to party privileges! Prosecute Borisov! I am not paid to protest - I hate you for free! I want a future in Bulgaria! We want to work in Bulgaria for the Bulgarians! EU, stop funding our mafia! I go out to protest in order not to go out as an emigrant! Grannie, they are lying to you, I am protesting not to bring them [the communists] back to power, but for a better life! We want clean air! My children are not going to pay your debts! Pumpkins are for eating, not for governing! etc.

Protesters explored innovative digital paths for contentious action, too. The so-called “peopleless protests”⁴³ online using hashtags, pins, badges, etc. have been employed to criticize and ridicule government figures such as the Minister of Justice Danail Kirilov. The latter was targeted for his frequent gaffes and questionable professional expertise.

The protests have remained largely peaceful. The demonstrators have not engaged in violence or destructive activity. The most violent action seems to have been the throwing of tomatoes and eggs at government buildings and ruling parties’ headquarters. What is more, on a couple of occasions, the demonstrators effectively prevented violence: e.g., upon identifying the presence of provocateurs, the protesters formed a human chain to block them. When this happened on 17 July, the police removed their riot shields in gratitude to the protesters. No “acts targeting other individuals, property, businesses, other rioting groups or armed actors”⁴⁴; no “fighting back against police” with a few exceptions; no vandalism or destruction of property; and no looting have been reported.

⁴³ Authorship of the term is attributed to human rights activist Yunus Berndt and Europe Must Act

⁴⁴ Acts qualified as violent in the “Demonstrations & Political Violence in America: New Data for Summer 2020” Report by the US Crisis Monitor run jointly by ACLED and Princeton University.

On behalf of the government, excessive force has been used in several instances and especially on 2 September 2020, when the police deployed a water cannon, tear gas and pepper spray, “marking the end of the relatively peaceful phase in protesting that made Bulgaria such an outlier in Europe in this regard”, as one international news outlet commented.

Demands of the protest

Due to the grassroots nature of the protest activities and the participation in them of various actors, their demands and messages were not always coordinated. A primary demand was for the resignations of Prime Minister Boyko Borissov and Prosecutor General Ivan Geshev for systemic corruption and their deep ties with powerful elites. The protesters demanded that rule of law be upheld, and freedom of speech guaranteed. They have been pressing for fair elections — especially for machine and remote voting, as well as for judicial reform that would, inter alia, restrict the currently unlimited powers of the prosecutor general.

As the protest episodes unfolded, additional resignations were demanded at times, including those of the mayor of Sofia, Y. Fandakova, for her failure to cope with the pressing problems of the capital city, and of the general director of the public television BNT, E. Koshlukov, for censorship and lack of objectivity. The protesters have also demanded the honorary chairman of DPS, Ahmed Dogan, and media mogul Delyan Peevski, seen as chief perpetrators of state capture, out of their powerful positions.

Confronted with repeated criticism by government-friendly media and the ruling coalition for not being able to present any reform plan or strategy for the future, the protesters asserted that doing away with the current corrupt model of governance was their first priority. As one of our interviewees noted: “Bulgaria needs a lot of reforms, but right now those resignations are the most needed so as to open up a way forward”. Plans and policy platforms would be addressed at the next (snap) elections that would produce a new governing majority.

These claim-making tactics has won the protesters the name of „двуетапници” – “two-stagers”. In fact, the “two-stage” concept has been crucial for providing a univocal basis for collective action of otherwise diverse groups, holding more or less divergent visions of the needed reforms and how to put Bulgaria on the path to a brighter future.

“As long as the resignation of the government and Chief Public Prosecutor Ivan Geshev remains the common goal of the protesters, they must display unity. If we want to win back our state, we cannot succeed by following separate paths. ... Regardless of who ends up governing in the future, a constitutional majority must be achieved to ensure that there is no new

Geshev. In order to topple the government as well as to make decisive reforms possible after the elections, a broad coalition of protesters is needed, even if it does not result in a government coalition”, wrote journalist Vesselin Stoynev, a columnist at Deutsche Welle.⁴⁵

Locally, demonstrators have demanded resignations of key administrative staffers such as the management of the Regional Inspectorate for the Environment and Water in Plovdiv. They have also demanded government measures and solutions to long-pending infrastructure, environmental and social problems. A number of professional guilds (truckers, hoteliers, restaurateurs and barkeepers) have protested against certain government restrictions related to the coronavirus pandemic that have impacted their businesses particularly negatively.

“EU, stop funding our mafia”, “EU, are you blind?” and similar calls to European institutions displayed a European dimension of the protest themes and claims. Brussels’ unawareness of the true situation in the country, or worse, Brussels’ “complicity” with the autocratic regime of Borissov and the misuse of EU funds, has been criticized by the protesters. EU institutions have “wilfully closed their eyes to what is happening in Bulgaria”, Hristo Ivanov told Politico, and also, “This level of state capture in Bulgaria was only made possible by the easy drug of EU funds”.⁴⁶

The protest called upon the European parliament and the European Commission to be the custodian of the European treaties and to guarantee at least minimal standards of the rule of law in the member states. To show their dissatisfaction with the role of the EU, on the 19th day of the demonstrations, people took the protests to the European Commission building itself.

Protest actors and identities

Five major groups of political actors have been involved in this protest wave:

- the voters/citizens, individually and forming public interest groups and new political challengers (extra-parliamentary opposition);
- the national government / ruling majority of GERB party and the United Patriots;
- President Rumen Radev, taking a strong anti-government and pro-protest stand;
- the mainstream parliamentary opposition (BSP and partly DPS submitting a no-confidence vote in parliament); and

⁴⁵ Stoynev, V., 2020, “How to take back captured Bulgaria”, DW, accessed on 20.09.2020 from <https://bit.ly/34q2gsn>

⁴⁶ Oliver, C., 2020, “EU’s credibility is at stake over Bulgaria, says reformist leader”, Politico, Accessed on 20.09.2020 from <https://www.politico.eu/article/bulgaria-hristo-ivanov-eu-credibility-at-stake/>

- international and supranational actors (EU institutions, foreign states' governments, embassies, etc.).

We will try to briefly characterize members of the first group, comprising the protesters themselves, in view of the goal of this research, i.e., to identify political actors⁴⁷ and possibilities for expansion of green policies beyond environmentalism.

The Bulgarian protest 2020 has brought together a heterogeneous multitude of protesters: people from all walks of life and from across the political spectrum, activists, civil society organisations, politicians and frustrated citizens. It represented a mobilisation from below that is typically conceptualized as “movement politics”.⁴⁸

Many young people took part as well. Many Bulgarian emigrant-workers and students who had returned home because of the coronavirus emergency measures in the countries of residence, played a central role in the intensity and quality of the protest mobilisation. Being young or better informed, they fit Inglehart's description of a post-material protester “having evaluative priorities towards individual self-expression to the detriment of the needs for survival”.⁴⁹

The protest structure has comprised primarily networks of informal groups, semi-formal and formal organisations, and individuals. The protests have been polycentric and self-organising, with the help of digital technologies.

The “Poison Trio”: Attorney Nikolay Hadjigenov, PR specialist and businessman Arman Babikyan, and artist Velislav Minekov are all prominent anti-corruption public figures who form a small non-formal group, unaffiliated with any political party. They were among the initiators of the first protest event on 9 July in Sofia and over time established themselves as the lead organisers of the daily protest gatherings, speeches and events. The initial demands of the Trio, besides the resignations of the current government and the Prosecutor General, included the convening of the Grand National Assembly and the making of a new constitution.⁵⁰ These latter goals, however, were later given up, as the government, embracing these ideas, has turned them into a time-buying-plan for its own rescue.

Democratic Bulgaria (DeB) coalition: This group, made up of the liberal DB party, the more conservative right-wing DSB party and the Green Movement (GM) and co-chaired by the leaders of the first two parties, Hristo

⁴⁷ BSP is not commented on here as part of the opposition as this was done in the first part of this project.

⁴⁸ For this we are using here the words “protest”, “protest wave” and “protest movement” interchangeably.

⁴⁹ Inglehart, R., 1977, *The silent revolution: Changing values and political styles among Western publics*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

⁵⁰ Markov, Stefan, *Bulgaria Protests*, Arman Babikyan: In *Poison Trio*, we have the confidence to be in politics! The square is the alternative to impudent power. Novinite.bg Sept 16,2020

Ivanov and Atanas Atanasov, has been instrumental in igniting (especially with the aforementioned Rosenets beach campaign) and sustaining the protest wave. Set up for the European and the general local elections in 2019, the coalition has been able to reach limited electoral success until the protests began (one seat in the European parliament, a 12-strong group in the municipal council of Sofia and a few more councilmen in four to five cities). With the protest wave, the coalition (and especially DB) has come to real prominence; its image has been boosted, with its popularity rising to 10% in the opinion polls. Program-wise, the centrepiece of DB has been judicial reform, and GM has been trying to incorporate as many climate, green economy and environmental protection policy ideas as possible into the common political platform.

There Is Such a People: This fledgling populist catch-all party, established by Bulgarian showman and TV broadcasting company owner Slavi Trifonov, has been supporting the protests by reporting live every night from the protest site. Fans of the party have been among the active protesters. The leadership, however, unlike most other challenger parties, has not joined the rallies personally. Regardless of this fact, the party has been catapulted in the opinion polls to a remarkable 15% of public support, making them the third contender immediately after the two biggest parties – the ruling GERB and the opposition BSP. TSP has not yet announced any formal detailed political program, but it has been made clear by now that they stand for reform of the electoral system, an increase in the number of elected positions (and reduction of the number of MPs), remote and electronic voting, e-government, improved referendum legislation and use of direct decision-making, protection of “family values” and further integration into the EU. Trifonov and his party will be a factor to reckon with in the next legislature, possibly a kingmaker. As TSP has not displayed much of any expertise in nor orientation on green policies so far, it is highly likely that they will reach out to environmentalists and green political actors to fill in this void. This may eventually pave the way to coalition-building based on particular issues, provided that the Greens (or their current coalition partners) overcome their intellectual “detestation” of the showman’s style and fans.

Izpravi se, Bulgaria (Stand Up, Bulgaria) and Maya Manolova: These actors are among the more pronounced identities in the protest movement. Manolova, an ex-BSP lawmaker and national Ombudswoman, set up this nongovernmental⁵¹ organisation in 2019 to support her campaign as mayor-elect of Sofia. A seasoned politician and mediator, she has since been able to bring over 20 advocacy groups and local initiatives, including environmental ones, under the umbrella of Stand Up, Bulgaria. Manolova has been positioning herself as a non-party defender of social

⁵¹ Almost no member of the public doubts that the organisation will be the vehicle for Manolova’s next election campaign.

and environmental rights, pledging to “fight against monopolies and over-construction and for living wages, a fair business environment, the easing of the administrative burden on citizens and the securing of fair elections”⁵². In view of her controversial track record as a legislator and BSP figure, as well as a protest-critic in the previous protest cycle of 2013⁵³, it is unlikely Manolova will be seen by GMP as an eventual coalition partner. An issue-based collective action or coalition with her and her organisation, however, might be (theoretically) possible. An interesting nuance here is that while Manolova and the current coalition partners of the Greens (in DB) have different constituencies, she and the Green Movement could have some overlap, and therefore, Stand Up, Bulgaria can be considered a sort of a political competitor for the Greens.

BOETZ (Fighter)⁵⁴: This association serves as one of the centres of the protest’s polycentric formation; its members have been exposing facts and documents about high-level political corruption, along with the whistle-blowers from the NGO Anti-Corruption Fund and leading investigative site Bivol.

Sistemata ni ubiva (The System Is Killing Us): An association of parents and legal guardians caring for children with disabilities, this group has been another prominent protest participant and organiser. Having extensive experience with social protest, they were able to develop their own repertoire of actions within the protest movement (e.g., organised a march on PM Borisov’s home in Bankya, attempted to drive a van into Sofia’s central square, etc.). As for the possibility of partnering with the Greens, we should note here that the Green Movement party is not unfamiliar with the grievances of this disadvantaged minority and has a track record of working in partnership with another organisation — The Independent Living — serving the same minority. So, a coalition between The System Is Killing Us and the Greens cannot be ruled out, regardless of the fact that the former has already established closer ties with Manolova’s Stand Up, Bulgaria.

Pravosudie za vseki (Justice for Everyone): A National Citizens’ Initiative, this reformist movement of legal experts and citizens aims to introduce key changes in the judiciary system so as to guarantee its impartiality and effectiveness. They have coordinated the “Justice Without a Cap” protest event in Sofia and joined a couple of environmental protests in the Black Sea area. The movement has already established some cooperation with the Greens, including shared protest mobilisations in the last three to four

⁵² Constituent declaration [Учредителна декларация]. Accessed on 23.12.2020 from <https://izpravise.bg/%d0%bf%d1%80%d0%be%d0%b3%d1%80%d0%b0%d0%bca/>

⁵³ As a member of the ruling majority back then, she asserted that the protesters had been paid; she thus used the same denigration strategy, that is being employed by the current government.

⁵⁴ An acronym for “Bulgaria United with One Purpose”.

years. Some nuances in their design of the judiciary reform, compared to the reform concept of “Da, Bulgaria” — the coalition partner of the Greens— could be problematic, albeit to a negligible extent.

Vazrazhdane (Revival): A far-right, nationalistic and Eurosceptic party, this largest extra-parliamentary political actor (1.1% of the national vote, 2017) has been especially active in the protests. Their members have been asserting their party identity with branded T-shirts and banners, ignoring the protesters’ consensus on keeping the protest non-partisan. Meanwhile, Sofia’s prosecution authority has been trying to dissolve Vazrazhdane over discrepancies of party documentation.

The anti-capitalist bloc: Various left-wing activists who united together and joined the protests in Sofia hoping to push their message in a more progressive direction. The Bloc wrote and distributed leaflets linking corruption to capitalism, urging participants to drop homophobic slogans and observe the anti-epidemic measures. Their posters with explicit anti-capitalist content led to frictions with right-wing protesters on a couple of occasions, but overall, the leaflets found a receptive audience. In Varna, the Left was represented by the Autonomous workers confederation, a network of radical labour unions who regularly attended the protests, bringing the much-needed perspective of labour rights violations into the protest discourse on justice via leaflets, open assemblies and other means.

Protest outcomes

By the end of 2020, the Bulgarian protest movement had not been able to accomplish its primary goals: Neither the government nor the prosecutor general have resigned, and snap elections do not seem feasible. Regardless of this, the protests can be appreciated for the widespread mobilisation they engendered.

In the short term, the protests worked to the degree that they scared the authorities into making some changes: Ministers were sacked and replaced, and the heads of the National Security Agency and the Central Election Commission were also replaced. Economic stimuli for large social cohorts were introduced – a salary hike for some state employees, bonuses for over two million pensioners, an increase in unemployment benefits, top-up payments to frontline medics. A BGN 210 million program for the construction and renovation of schools, kindergartens and nurseries has been announced. Financial aid for businesses most severely hit by the lockdown has been earmarked as well, and the GERB majority in the city council of Burgas withdrew their decision for privatizing the Rosenets road that ignited the first protest action.

In the midterm, the protests may prove efficacious in striking a crucial blow to the waning legitimacy of the ruling GERB party and their allies. This is yet to be seen at the upcoming parliamentary elections in Bulgaria in 2021.

The protest wave has gained legitimacy, succeeding in the most important metric: convincing people in and outside the country of the righteousness of its demands. Public support for the protest movement has climbed to 66% in the polls⁵⁵. Influential voices in culture, media, academia and the arts came forward and threw their weight behind the calls for change.

More legitimacy has also been added to the protest movement by the international community, primarily the European Parliament, which sided with the Bulgarian protesters and flagged concerns about the state of the rule of law, freedom of speech, etc. in Bulgaria. This has increased the pressure for altering the business-as-usual mindset of the mainstream political parties and could be seen as a major coup for the protest movement.

The protests have provided a breakthrough in the sorry state of freedom of speech and self-expression in the country⁵⁶. By the end of July, the “Poison Trio” had counted about 400 different speakers on the protest rostrum⁵⁷. Voices and issues that have been disregarded or underrepresented on mainstream media or even misrepresented on pro-government media outlets, were broadcast live and reported by some independent broadcasting companies and bTV – the television channel with the largest viewership. “Protests are a grab of attention”, noted Turkish-American researcher Zeynep Tufekci⁵⁸. Having grabbed attention nationally and internationally, this protest movement has succeeded in forcing a conversation and framing issues of broad interest to the Bulgarian (and European) public. The major achievements of the Bulgarian protest movement were clearly summarised by journalist Roumiana Chervenкова for Capital newspaper as follows: “[the protest] ended the political timelessness, disempowered the propaganda machine and turned the eyes of the EU to Bulgaria.”⁵⁹

Last but not least, the protest has brought about a boost of civic self-confidence, turning around a trend of alienation that has dominated democratic civil society. Social capital has been created as a result of the collective protest action, proving that Bulgarians are well able to protest and defend their collective interests against empowered elites.

A couple of interviewees have identified the feeling of being politically important and efficacious as their best benefit from participating in the protests. And this brings us to the micro level of the protest impact – the bonding and solidarity among participants during collective action.

55 Over 60% of Bulgarians Support Protests - Alpha Research Poll, Bulgarian News Agency, 4 Aug, 2020

56 By being an EU Member State, Bulgaria has slid from 51st place in the Freedom of Press index in 2007 to 111th and is the last among EU Member States. The coronavirus pandemic has been exacerbating the situation.

57 Estimate of A. Babikyan, given in an exclusive interview for DIEM diem25.org, 16 Aug, 2020

58 Tufekci, Z., 2020, “Do Protests Even Work?”, The Atlantic, <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2020/06/why-protests-work/613420/>

59 Chervenкова, R. Three important effects of the protest [Три важни ефекта от протеста], Capital, 04.09.2020. Accessed on 23.12.2020 from https://www.capital.bg/politika_i_ikonomika/bulgaria/2020/09/04/4110033_tri_vajni_efeakta_ot_protesta

The protest movement 2020 empowered and exhilarated those who participated, and this impact might last the longest. The protest has raised public awareness about fundamental issues of democratic governance and boosted political consciousness, which may eventually lead to a higher turnout in the upcoming elections next year.

On a negative note, this heightened political consciousness did not result in heightened sensitivity for the many socio-economic problems plaguing the “poorest EU member state”, as Bulgaria is proverbially known. We do not expect the protest to be able to demand, at the same time, both GERB’s resignation and a more active social policy, as this would be a performative contradiction. Rather, it would have benefited them to adopt such demands, if even to simply secure the backing of the large trade unions and give the protests greater relevance to the working classes. Alas, the protests failed to articulate any social demands for the “second stage” (the period after the resignation). The Trio were content to demand only judicial reform and constitutional change. This, above all else, was a tactical mistake, as in addition to hurting the movement’s long-term chances of leaving the confines of the educated middle classes, who normally take interest in such matters and are minuscule in number, it played right into the hands of GERB who easily “stole” the demand for constitutional change and promised to fulfil this within its mandate in order to buy time until the general elections. In that sense, had the protest leaders articulated some social demands, it would have been more difficult for GERB to integrate them as well and turn them against the protesters.

The Greens’ gains

Public support for the Greens and green politics can be identified as a positive outcome from the protest movement 2020 for the Greens. Factors that brought this about were the role of green activists and party members in this protest wave (and also in many preceding ones) and the intensified interaction within protesters’ groups. A significant factor for the Greens’ re-legitimization has been an international one: From the very start of the protest movement, the European Green Party declared that they “equally support Bulgarian citizens, our member party Zeleno Dvizhenie and their coalition “Democratic Bulgaria” in their efforts to put an end to corruption in the country and restore democratic standards”⁶⁰. EGP condemned the use of excessive force against the demonstrators and kept voicing its stances in the most eventful moments of the protests, remaining for quite some time the only European level player that firmly stood by the Bulgarian anti-corruption protesters. In addition, green MEP Daniel Freund has travelled to Sofia to personally attend a protest gathering and make a speech from the protest rostrum.

⁶⁰ Protests in Bulgaria: European Greens stand for Democracy and the Rule of Law, the European Green Party, 16 Jul 2020, www.europeangreens.eu

Not directly related to the protests, but worth noting, is the gain in legitimacy on the level of public discourse regarding green policies in Bulgaria. A factor at play here has been the debate inside European institutions and by the broader public surrounding the Green Deal — a set of policy initiatives by the European Commission meant to make Europe climate neutral by 2050. The Green Deal has put the green policy agenda, and especially climate, centre stage. The most recent €750-billion coronavirus recovery package of the EU also has a distinctly green tinge, and its timing coincided with the Bulgarian anti-corruption protests. So, it helped to neutralize and calm down the outcry over and denigration of delayed green-transition measures, such as the phasing out of electricity production from coal-fired power plants in Bulgaria. Such rhetoric has been used intensively by right-wing populists in the country to turn public opinion against green policies and green political actors.

The nation-wide protests have also emboldened some local environmental initiatives that have not been successful previously. We are referring here to resident mobilisation in diverse neighbourhoods (e.g., residential areas like Mladost in Sofia) and localities (Ruse, Nova Zagora, Trud, Studena, Polikraishte, etc.) that emerged to counteract the effects of some environmental and social crises at the community level long before the outset of the protest wave. This type of civic activism has been on the rise lately and can be seen as a new cycle of (urban) social mobilisation.

The national protest wave has provided grassroots activists with a window of political opportunity for turning around the attitudes and behaviour of those in power. A number of local initiatives restarted or stepped-up their pressure on authorities, demanding action for solving issues of air pollution, waste mismanagement, delayed road repairs, loss of urban greenery, etc. To cite a few examples, we can point out the cases of the village of Trud and the town of Nova Zagora, where citizens have been protesting against air pollution for the last two to three years to no avail. Air quality has become politicised over the last couple of years in Bulgaria. Repeated anti-smog campaigns in the aforementioned locations, but also in Sofia, Ruse, Burgas and other towns, have been able to mobilise sections of the public and disseminate environmental awareness. These, as a rule, have been met with institutional inaction.

But the new protest mobilisations in Trud and Nova Zagora, as part of the bigger protest movement, have been able to finally catch the government's attention. The health minister and other top officials paid visits to these communities, and an administrative procedure was enacted in September 2020 to penalize the polluting industry in Trud and stop its operations until it fully adheres to health and environmental standards.

Another sizable grassroots mobilisation encouraged by the national anti-corruption protests has been the launch of a local resistance campaign

against the opening of a new gold mine in the municipality of Bolyarovo. The gold concession contract has been signed centrally without informing or consulting the local community, leaving even the mayor of Bolyarovo unaware of the fact; he was forced to learn about it from mass media. The community got mobilised for a petition drive, applying the mechanism of the Local Citizens Initiative (as per the Act on Direct Participation). The initiative aimed to bar the concessionaire from the site by the Bolyarovo City Council — the authority competent to decide on the issue of local land use and construction permits — passing a resolution to this effect.

The grassroots initiatives in Trud, Nova Zagora and Bolyarovo have been in contact with representatives of the Green Movement party, which provided expertise and guidance to these communities.

We should underline here that grassroots mobilisations such as the aforementioned — against air pollution and other public misdeeds or mismanagement of the commons — apparently cut across the usual divisions and created an opportunity for Bulgarian political environmentalism to broaden its societal legitimacy and step up its political efficacy outside the big urban centres. Long before the current protest wave, there were instances when the Green Movement party and environmental NGOs reached out to public interest groups locally (e.g., the Dobrich anti-fracking initiative and the gold-mining ban referendum in Radomir and Tran), but this cooperation never grew beyond a somewhat incidental and case-by-case character. Capitalizing on those partnerships should be taken seriously and accelerated.

Chances for this may be diminishing with the emergence of a more experienced and proactive political actor – Manolova and her platform Stand Up, Bulgaria. She seems to have succeeded in bringing a number of local clean air initiatives and environmental referendum committees into the orbit of her new populist project as a result of the protest movement.

The protest movement of 2020 and its value-driven demands provided a sound basis for interaction and solidarity between its diverse participants – including the Greens. The social ties created during this collective action can facilitate subsequent coalition work. It is common knowledge, conclusively corroborated by research, that interpersonal and organisational ties attract individuals to participate in movements and advance further coalition-building.

Through shared members and extended social networks in the protest movement, the Greens (and the same is valid for the other groups) have been provided with the opportunity to realize that they have common interests with other movement organisations and that their stances and programs share common or similar elements. This applies mostly to the judicial reform and anti-corruption movements whose demands were

central to the protests. Yet, the protest experience of networking and solidarity can also create ideological incentives for the formation of cross-movement coalitions and new pre-election (re)groupings in the near future.

Costs for green actors and policies

The protest wave has not been greatly beneficial for the Green Movement party from the perspective of its identity and broadening its social base. The party and its members, attending the protest as common citizens, have not been able to assert and openly promote a Green political identity. Some loss of identity had already been signalled by hard-core party members when GM joined the right-wing party DSB and liberal DB to form the Democratic Bulgaria coalition to take part in the European and local elections in 2019. The risk of “melting down” in a coalition setting, against which previous research⁶¹ has cautioned, is quite valid for the Greens. This risk is exacerbated by the subordinate position of the Greens in the coalition leadership, the newly boosted image of DB as a result of the protest dynamics, and some thin coalition ethics.

While disadvantageous to the green political party in regard to asserting its identity, the protests have provided ample opportunities for the promotion of non-partisan entities such as Stand Up, Bulgaria, Justice for Everyone, BOETZ and other organisations.

In conclusion, the protest wave 2020 has positively impacted Bulgarian civil society and political actors by challenging the status quo and aiming to achieve re-democratization and reform. With regard to the Green Movement, the protest dynamics have also produced some unfortunate results: some fading of the green identity and some loss of potential partners and supporters to a more proactive political player, along with a weakened stance on some environmental issues (and the affected public) seen as the exclusive domain of the Greens.

To be able to resist or even reverse such trends, the Green Movement will need to overcome deficits in identity and social base. To this end, the case study identified the following recommendations:

- Building on 12 years of electoral experience, the Green Movement party has been gradually transforming from a single-issue movement into a real political party addressing a host of political issues. The new coalition setting has been helping it fill in missing sectors and policies, a process that needs to be accelerated.
- A more proactive opening up to social rights and human rights groups would be a good way for the Greens to extend their policy portfolio and social base.

⁶¹ Krastanova, R., 2012., The Green movement and the green parties in Bulgaria: between system integration and system change, Friedrich Ebert Foundation

- Offering solutions to hot-button social issues will eventually bring in more supporters from social strata outside the normal spheres the Greens currently rely upon — the middle class, academia, the capital city and some localities having specific environmental problems. A further expansion of the Greens' social base should also strive to extend to people traditionally outside the culture of dissent.
- Adding issues and extending its policy portfolio should go hand in hand with reframing existing policies and messages. Social mobilisation (like the local protests described earlier) seems to be the most potent in the area of anthropocentric issues⁶² such as air pollution. A recommended concept, to be based on policy framing and claim-making, would be an environmental justice encompassing a much larger environment "where we live, work, play, learn ..." and containing the idea of fairness also in terms of social issues.
- The current protest, though motivated by values, should not mislead us into imagining that post-materialism prevails in Bulgarian society. The country continues to be the poorest in the EU with a significant number of citizens living under the poverty line, which implies that pure environmental protection and conservation will remain a second-order societal priority for a long time. A satisfactory compromise between the goals of protecting the environment and improving the standard of living of a sizable part of the population will be needed. A way to reconcile these is to develop e/ quality-of-life messages and ethics.
- The Greens should attempt to make clearer to the public the direct link between economic, environmental and health issues and to demand a safe, clean community and workplace environment. Similarly, they should strive to expose the connection even more clearly between the deterioration in quality of life (environment) and unregulated economic development, exploitation, poverty, the misuse of public resources and political corruption.
- The Green Movement will need to develop strategies to respond to the threat of losing green voters to seemingly more credible political players in view of the fact that environmental issues and policies are increasingly being taken on by mainstream parties (especially now that solid funding plans have been made by the EU in this arena).

Relevant actors and target groups

This study canvassed human and social rights groups and green actors with the aim of exploring possible grounds for collaboration between them. The list is not exhaustive. We take the Green Movement party as the main representative of green politics, albeit not the only one, and localize common ground between the party and rights-oriented actors.

There is a vibrant progressive, inclusive, and social- and human-rights activist scene, even if it is politically underrepresented (they shun BSP, and BSP is

⁶² Though mobilisation is not totally ruled out in selected biocentric areas e.g. protection of primeval forests.

not interested in them, targeting instead the nationalist vote). Recently, we have seen a pronounced growth of such activities in Bulgaria carried out by both extra-parliamentary parties and civil society organisations. Many of these also take a stance on environmental issues and climate change, and it is this shared concern with the Greens in Bulgaria that makes for promising grounds on which to develop and deepen future cooperation between them.

Here is a short and non-exhaustive list of actors relevant to our study, candidates ripe for a future left-green coalition.

- Two social centres are currently in operation in Sofia: Fabrika Avtonomia and Solidarity Centre; Fabrika Avtonomia often provides space for discussions on environmental topics or for activists to organise protests. The Solidarity Centre caters to the needs of the homeless and refugee community in Sofia and organises the anti-war food-bank drive “food, not bombs”.
- A loose civic initiative that started out as a Facebook group called “Friends of refugees” is active in promoting refugee rights and welfare, as well as poverty relief among refugees.
- There are also left-wing organisations in research, journalism and publishing such as KOI, a left-wing NGO; Baricada, a publishing house that maintains an eponymous news portal and provides leftist analysis of current events; and DVersia, a left-wing theory and analysis mag. All three listed organisations have written on environmental issues, collaborated with green NGOs or activist groups, and taken part in environmental protests or otherwise supported the movement.
- LevFem is a socialist-feminist collective active since 2018 that is also active in publishing and organising, specifically in the movement of Bulgarian nurses and the protests against domestic violence.
- There are other feminist, women’s rights organisations or unions as well, such as the Bulgarian Fund for Women and the nurses’ trade union.
- Students for Equality is a Sofia University-based group that focuses on women and LGBT rights; its members also attend environmental protests.
- Solidarna Bulgaria (SB) is a progressive NGO that is active on several fronts: anti-CETA/TTIP, tax justice, municipalization of privatized utilities, workers’ rights, and a just transition for coal-mining regions.
- Dokumentalni.com is a foundation specialising in the translation and popularization of progressive documentary films, many of them on environmental topics.
- ARC is an independent trade union with branches in Sofia and Varna whose members partake in the green/climate protests and have wholeheartedly supported the nurses’ strikes.
- The Bulgarian branch of Fridays for Futures draws on the global movement started by Greta Thunberg, organising weekly sit-ins in Sofia (before the coronavirus outbreak).

- The Podkrepa trade union is hardly a new player; it started out as the right-wing, anti-communist workers' organisation. However, in recent years, they have moved decisively to the left in practice. It is thus important to work out some understanding with them on the issue of the decommissioning of coal plants, which is an explosive issue that could subvert all efforts at bringing together green and social rights groups. Deepening collaboration with them would be useful for the Greens in terms of coming up with a socially just transition from fossil fuels to renewables.
- The Bulgarian Prisoners' Association, founded and run by Jock Palfreeman, is an NGO that doubles as a trade union; the BPA is the first organisation to defend the rights of prisoners and provide legal aid and representation to them.
- Za Zemiata is an environmentalist NGO and one of the earliest critical voices against neoliberal globalisation in Bulgaria.

We can list the following examples of fruitful cooperation between social-rights and green actors. They point to the (rudimentary) existence of shared concerns and grounds for cooperation, which need to be developed further — which is what this policy paper seeks to do. To this end, however, the historical baggage of Bulgarian environmentalism (namely, its deep anti-communism) needs to be overcome.

- The left-wing magazine *Diversia* published an issue dedicated to climate change and the ecological crisis, to which renowned members of the green movement like Vera Petkanchin and Toma Belev contributed articles.
- Solidarna Bulgaria (SB) collaborated with the green NGO Za Zemiata in organising the anti-CETA/TTIP protests in 2016.⁶³
- KOI published several booklets on the perils of concessions and free trade agreements, which are also topics of interest to green NGOs such as Za Zemiata.
- The Green Movement party voiced unequivocal support for the Istanbul Convention against domestic violence.⁶⁴
- Unlike the European Greens, the Green Movement party voiced support for the annual LGBT pride parade in Sofia, in marked opposition to its coalition partner Da, Bulgaria, which shies away from such “explosive” topics to maintain the fragile balance between conservatives and liberals within the party. For example, when the leader of Da, Bulgaria, Hristo Ivanov, publicized his personal support for the 2019 pride parade, he sent shockwaves throughout the party's rank-and-file, leading to some resignations. To this day, the party refuses to issue an official position apropos the gay rights movement.

⁶³ Za Zemiata, 2016, “More than 450 European and Canadian civil society organisations are calling on lawmakers to reject CETA”, accessed on 21.09.2020 from <https://bit.ly/2JhLrYV>

⁶⁴ Zeleno Dvizhenie, 2018, “Opposition to the Istanbul Convention - cheap populism in favor of violence: Position of the Greens”, accessed on 28.09.2020 from <https://www.zelenite.bg/18189>

We reached out and succeeded in getting representatives of most of these organisations to fill our survey out. Then we conducted four interviews with representatives of the Green Movement party: Toma Belev, Borislav Sandov, Todor Todorov and Hristo Ivanov (the leader of its coalition partner Da, Bulgaria).

Defending rights as common ground

Despite speaking from a politically marginal position, most survey responses actually give very feasible and workable ideas on how to achieve a synergy between rights-based and green political organisations. In this and the following sections, we present the data collected from interviews and an online questionnaire, as well as some of the conclusions drawn from it. We start by identifying the common ground between the agendas of green and rights groups.

Almost all respondents agree that it is important for green politicians to support and promote all rights covered by the survey: individual human rights and freedoms, ethnic rights, women's rights, LGBTI+ rights, migrants' rights, and social and economic rights. According to respondents, it is most important to support: individual human rights and freedoms (19 answered that it is extremely important, while nine said it is important) and social and economic rights, including the right to healthcare and education (20 indicated it is extremely important, while six said it is important). Fewer respondents find that LGBTI+ rights are important to support, with nine indicating them as extremely important and 12 as simply important.

Among other rights that should be supported and promoted by green politicians, the respondents mentioned prisoners' rights, the connection between ecological and social justice, animal rights, indigenous people's rights, rights of people with a disability, rights of future generations, socio-cultural rights, the right to civic participation and direct democracy, the right to peace, the right to control over capital, the right to information, the right to a favourable environment, and the right to taking part in decision-making.

When asked to provide examples of green politicians or policies that extend towards human and social rights they hold as exemplary and would like to see generalised in Bulgaria, the respondents give a wide array of names and cases. The responses provide a promising map of where possibilities to expand green policies may lie.

For example, a female, Paris-based respondent who identifies as a socialist singled out the German green politician Ska Keller as an example because she stands for "economic and social justice", making her more left than the Bulgarian Greens. The respondent also invoked the French Green MEPs for

their support of food sovereignty, while the French chapter of the Friends of the Earth, together with Oxfam France and a few other green groups, joined forces with trade unions, tax-justice organisations and left-wing media to form a common front against the coronavirus pandemic and the right-wing handling thereof. Another respondent listed the successful struggle of the German green movement to phase out nuclear energy.

As a good example from Bulgaria, the Paris-based respondent lists the involvement of a local green NGO with the question of energy poverty. (This is a persistent issue for a whopping 40% of Bulgarians.⁶⁵)

The thrust of the argument is that the Greens should expand their strictly green focus and integrate other issues to do with social justice. Another left-wing respondent similarly stresses the issue of “social justice”, which incidentally reveals the implicit liberal bias in our research design: the listed possibilities for integrating progressive groups and shared issues between them overwhelmingly derive from the “rights” framework, as opposed to justice. The responses thus provide not only a direction for expanding green policies but also a useful correction for future studies, including our own.

In line with this, a respondent who also identifies as left-wing wants to see a connection between social and environmental justice established, stressing this “not from the point of view of rights but of justice”. The same person backs this with examples from the common front against CETA/TTIP and GMO between left-wing and green organisations such as Solidarna Bulgaria and the Za Zemiata NGO (the Bulgarian chapter of the Friends of the Earth). More should be done for the promotion of small-scale organic agriculture, which will benefit both nature and those engaged with work in what is an extremely corporate and concentrated agribusiness in the country, added the respondent. Similarly, another respondent invoked the support provided by Green organisations to municipalities with coal-dependent economies to divest from coal. The respondent identifies politically as “moderate right” but understands the need for the Greens to seriously consider viable alternatives to coal so as to avoid transferring the social costs of the transition to renewables on the workers. We consider it quite promising that a self-identified leftist and rightist converge on this issue. It points to directions of possible collaborations in the framework of “justice” transcending narrow left and right loyalties.

A respondent who is active on the feminist and gay-rights fronts in Bulgaria gave the local branches of Fridays for Future and Extinction Rebellion as examples of model Green politics because unlike other green organisations and initiatives, these two stress more the connection between social and green causes. They also seem to point to a “generational shift” between “old” and “new” green actors, with the latter being oriented more explicitly towards the left and issues germane to social justice.

⁶⁵ BNR, 2019, “Nearly 40% of Bulgarians live in energy poverty”, accessed on 17.10.2020 from <https://bnr.bg/vidin/post/101193407/posokite>

Six respondents approved of the support the Greens expressed for the annual Gay Pride parade and consider it a successful example of “reaching out” beyond strictly green topics, making it the most commonly quoted example of green support for human rights. One of them also invoked the legal defence provided to Jock Palfreeman by his lawyer, a member of the Green Movement party, as well as the involvement of party activists in the struggle, led by “our green lawyers”, for the decriminalization of marijuana in medical research and usage. Also, respondents listed engagement with Roma organisations and Roma rights (three responses). Another respondent links Green politics with defending the rights of prisoners, drug users, refugees and sexual minorities.

A respondent who identifies as a “social anarchist” gives the example of the support by the Greens given to civic initiatives for citizens to participate directly in decision-making and educational initiatives, stressing a democratic-participatory area where more attention by Green organisations is needed. Another respondent, a self-identified “moderate right-wing democrat”, similarly invokes the support Greens have given to local referenda.

Yet another respondent points out that Green politics is already embedded in “larger than that” issues: “the fight against tourism overdevelopment and extractivism already includes defending the rights of local people to clean air and water, as well as to a beautiful environment”. This is an excellent thought to pursue because unlike the traditional Left/Right divide, green politics present us with a more open-ended political terrain, capable of reaching across wide areas of issues due to their seemingly “natural” compatibility with clusters of rights that impinge on “socio-economic” issues, e.g., opposition to overdevelopment and the right to clean air. (It must be pointed out that toxic air is often attributed to the heating activities of poor people and the Roma, which can feed into existing racist sentiments against them.)

Taken as a whole, these responses indicate that not only nature but the most oppressed groups in society are taken as the “natural” constituencies of Green politics and politicians (Roma, prisoners, drug users, sexual minorities, and communities whose way of life is threatened by development and extractivist projects). This presents an excellent opportunity to push for coalition-building with such groups, who would normally be represented by leftist actors, except in Bulgaria where the traditional Left has moved to the conservative Right. Such a push would hinge on the deepening of the Greens’ knowledge of minority rights and social issues. As one respondent who defines their politics as “just green” said, “[the Green Movement actors] do not know sufficiently about social rights”.

This conclusion is also shared by some respondents on the Left, such as an NGO-based ecologist who said that regret the Greens not taking a strong stance on the burning issue of the Global Migration Pact, for instance.

In short, adding the component of “social justice” or “social rights” has the potential of transforming the Greens into the genuine party of the oppressed, connecting the protection of nature with the various socio-economic issues that are in no shortage in Bulgaria. This is a crucial opportunity to explore in to wrest away Green politics from its “liberal middle-class” trappings and make it into a mass-party able to contest power.

Respondents were also asked to identify cases and examples of support for green policies by human and social-rights organisations. Most responses centred around cleaning campaigns organised by the Greens and attended by other kinds of organisations. One interesting example was the cleaning of a park by Roma activists. Public spaces and their cleanliness is a fruitful issue for Greens and Roma-rights activists to explore together because the lack of public space and adequate sanitation in highly populated and decrepit Roma neighbourhoods is a burning problem that no establishment political party has hitherto taken to heart to solve.

A respondent acknowledged that people who work in human and social rights normally attend protests organised by the Greens, e.g., in defence of the Pirin Mountains or the seaside. So, the issue here is how to make, for example, social rights as popular with the Greens as green causes are for social justice activists. Another respondent illustrated this by listing the following organisations that have backed or taken part in green initiatives/protests: Marginalia (a human rights online magazine), the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee (BHC), Amaliye (a Roma foundation), Equal Access, Integro, The Bulgarian Women’s Fund, the National Children Network, the Roma Conference, the Gender Foundation, the Center for Independent Living, the Listen Up Foundation, the organisation of Bulgarian Jews Shalom, Voice, Action, and Bilitis (LGBT organisation). LGBT organisations in general have actively supported the protests for the Pirin Mountains, Strandzha National Park, and the beaches of Irakli and Karadere, argued a centre-right economist and member of the Green Movement party who otherwise refuses to deal with professional human rights organisations and accuses them of not caring enough about green causes.

One respondent noted that the left-wing Solidarna Bulgaria movement stands not only for social but also for environmental causes. According to her, the trade union federations also work in this direction, albeit in less vocal ways.

Synergies and further practical steps

Survey respondents were asked which green organisation they would collaborate with. Somewhat predictably, left-wingers are adamant that they want to work with anti-capitalist, anti-greenwashing, anti-corporate, “genuinely green”, anti-authoritarian and intersectional forces. One of the left-wing respondents (an economist) laments that the green organisations she has dealt with are not interested in social rights and social justice. We can dub this group of respondents “the Uncompromising”. This is not just a left-wing issue. As one respondent identifying as “moderate right-wing” says, she prefers organisations that have proven their integrity and consistency over the years, as well as “effective economics and reasonable environmental goals”, pointing to the moderate political stance of the respondent.

Za Zemiata, Greenpeace, Green Movement and the WWF draw more responses, but also BlueLink, Za da Ostone priroda coalition, Green Balkans, Fridays for the Future, the anti-fracking movement, and one vote for the Association of Parks in Bulgaria. We can call the cluster of respondents behind these groups “the Loyalists”, as most of them already belong to or work with these organisations. Most of the concrete examples of organisations are given by this group of respondents, who also tend to be people with a long experience in activism and public advocacy. A typical example is this respondent justifying their choice of Greenpeace and Za Zemiata by saying “we already work well together.”

Some people prefer to form situational coalitions around specific topics, as opposed to starting from the organisation and then forming the topic. We can call them the “Flexible coalition builders”. As one respondent said, she would work with “most [organisations] in a clear and targeted campaign”. Another pointed out they seek an organisation that combines both green and human-rights topics but did not come up with a specific example. A third respondent highlighted openness to dialogue: “I’d work with anyone, but as a profile, I consider it more appropriate to cooperate with organisations that have a positive approach, offer concrete solutions to problems and have the ability for dialogue. I would like to highlight Greenpeace Bulgaria and WWF Bulgaria as good examples that I have worked with.”

Others seek to reach out to the organised labour movement in order to form such a situational coalition working on a specific topic but fail. Here it is instructive to recall the experience of a renewable energy expert from the Green Movement with the major Bulgarian trade unions on the European Green Deal and the transition away from coal. He argued that it is impossible to implement any just transition without involving the affected workers through their representatives but also resents their “retrograde” position in regard to coal. Namely, instead of helping devise a plan for

suitable employment and development of the coal-dependent regions, the unions fight the inevitable closure of the mines to the detriment of their social base, he said.

The respondents were asked to list human-, minority- and social-rights organisations they would work with. Most of them declare themselves open to collaboration with human-rights actors, spanning Roma, LGBT and social rights. Predictably, the support for social rights and social justice tends to come from the rather more inflexible and uncompromising corner, associated with left-leaning actors. An exception is the response from the Paris-based socialist who understands the limits of pure anti-capitalist politics and looks to mainstream liberal organisations, like BHC, in her politic practice.

Some disheartening responses come from the people we have grouped as a hybrid category between the first two: the “Uncompromising loyalists”. These hard-liners primarily expressed a preference for more mainstream liberal organisations, but some are also leftists. It is impossible to say at this stage what can bridge “uncompromising” fractions, rooting for human rights and social justice, respectively. Put differently, how can we make social rights/social justice and human rights speak to each other? Overcoming this “Rights/Justice rift” is the task at hand. Perhaps the path ahead could be in framing environmentalism itself as rights and justice? (Right to clean air, etc)?

We have grouped together some of the responses gathered in the following table:

The Uncompromising	The Loyalists	Pragmatic Coalition-Builders
"I would work only with social rights defenders."	"I work mainly with Roma organisations"	"Anybody, no limit."
"Those who take into account economic inequalities."	"I cannot say that outside the Green Movement I have a large selection of organisations whose work on the protection of human rights I like 100%."	"We have cooperated with various human rights defenders, but they have been for the most part anti-capitalist. Even if we support some liberal human rights organisations, it depends on the specific case. Such are, for example, BHC, some Roma and minority organisations."
"[I'd work with] anyone who does not put the rights of business and the economy before the people."	"We normally work with the Helsinki Committee, Access to Information."	"It depends on the specific issue."

"With organisations that are consistent and principled."	"Human Rights Lawyers, BHC".	"With anyone working for causes that are close to me based on availability of time and opportunities."
"Active and struggling, those who take clear positions".		"The problem is that there are too few people for the many issues at hand."
"[Only with organisations that] recognize the intersectionality approach and support it."	"Those that represent, are associated with, or protect specific target local groups and communities."	"BHC, organisations from the LGBTI sector, organisations defending the rights of refugees and immigrants, liberal foundations such as Friedrich Naumann, Citizens' Council."
"With organisations that are based on an understanding of the effects of the climate crisis, capitalism and social inequalities."	"Bulgarian Centre for Non-Profit Law, Union of Judges in Bulgaria."	
"Cross-cutting and as anti-authoritarian as possible."	"BHC, BOLD, BFZ, Ravni BG, Access to information, Amalipe, Integra, Shalom, Glas."	
	"With the BHC and all those who accept their causes."	"I would get involved in working with Roma (Gypsies), especially related to school activities. I would collaborate on projects related to material poverty and social patronage."

Table: Respondent quotes on who they look to work with

We asked respondents what further synergies are possible between the green and human- and social-rights policies. Some evaded the question by saying that these are basically the same thing or naturally belonging together. As this moderate-left, Da, Bulgaria voter put it, "They are bound by definition". Another respondent who identifies as "green" said, "I do not differentiate between green and human rights policies. For me, they are one". A third one – a moderate left-winger – also found common ground, rooted in "mentality": "Almost the whole spectrum of interactions is possible due to the close mentality (social commitment and empathy) and even

ideological basis." In a similar vein, another respondent, a moderate right-wing, Da, Bulgaria voter, said that "I consider green policies to be basic and thus possible and even mandatory for interaction and integration with all other policies".

As optimistic as this sounds, it does not give us the tools to overcome the distance between both sides on the rights-justice divide and forge unity between them. Political work is needed for that to happen.

Some people believe no such unity is possible, either because of polarization, e.g., "The horizon [for cooperation] is not big, I have no expectations due to the strong party polarization", or because of principle, e.g., "They are possible only in a personal capacity, mixing them harms both".

Luckily, most respondents believe there are sound grounds for further synergies between green politics, human rights and social justice, but some work needs expanding in order to develop them. As one respondent who identifies as a Communist said, "More intensive work on revealing the intersections and areas of mutual interest of the different movements [is needed]; organising communities based on the understanding of cross-cutting causes; recognition of unified ecosocial goals". However, what will be the basis for such work?

Some perceive this cooperation in negative terms, i.e., protecting civic freedoms via the shared interest in the rule of law. This is not just an opinion shared by liberals. Take, for example, the input of a "moderately left" LGBT activist who envisioned: "Cooperation in monitoring legislative initiatives and ensuring the rule of law as a mechanism for protecting the fundamental interests of both groups." This suggestion inheres firmly in the narrow liberal rule of law framework, which, although important, does not mobilise large segments of Bulgarian society.

People who identify as left-wing would like to see the Greens take on more serious social issues like poverty, unemployment, exploitation and inequality. As one person says: "It would be ideal for the Greens in Bulgaria to become more left-wing and to engage in more issues in the economic and social spectrum, and for this purpose, I do not rule out a coalition with the left either in elections or joint campaigns, protests and other [activities]. Of course, this would mean that the Greens are openly anti-capitalist and put both people and nature before profit."

While open anti-capitalism is perhaps unlikely, there is a promising way to deepen cooperation. It lies in gentle tweaks in the ideological framework. As another respondent said, what is needed is "bringing to the fore the link between social and environmental justice, not in terms of rights but in terms of justice". So, adopting a justice-based approach alongside the rights-based one, can break open new terrain for political configurations that enables cooperation between green and progressive activists.

Economic issues are not just a fetish of the extreme Left. This respondent, for example, a centre-Left DB supporter, also identified the economy as promising ground for expanding the influence of the Greens, especially in marginalised areas: “These two groups of policies are inherently linked. Where there are apparent contradictions (for example, between economically marginalised groups, especially in remote areas, and green policies), the way forward is through building (with the help of the state) opportunities for a green economy and jobs.”

Finally, we asked about practical steps on how to go about the development of cooperation and synergy-building. Our respondents gave very specific and useful recommendations. Going local is one such important possibility to consider in order to counterbalance the large urban centres where the Greens are predominantly based (and represent). For example, a moderate-right respondent argued that “at the local level, the field of interaction is endless in the guise of ecosystem and social services and their combinations”. In a similar vein, this respondent (with “green views”) proposes exploring several fields of overlapping concerns starting with 1) going to “the regions”. He continues: “2) working at the intersection of “green” and “human” rights issues - for example, refugees and climate; 3) joint actions for peace; 4) building a permanent common platform for debates; 5) common causes for the future - unconditional basic income, fighting for a world free from GMOs, de-growth, etc.” Similarly, the Greens need to strengthen their foothold in different “geometries” or, as one hard-right respondent put it, in “schools, blocs, local referendums, NGOs, parties, etc.”

The call to “go local” also surfaced in our interviews with relevant actors. Todor Todorov, an energy expert at Za Zemiata (the Bulgarian chapter of Friends of the Earth) lamented the Green movement’s marginalisation and argued that the best antidote would be to go to places outside of big urban centres and learn more about local problems. He accused the party activists of moralising the locals, for example, using old polluting cars instead of inquiring into the reasons why they cannot afford new cars. He illustrated what needs to be done with his own NGO’s work with two villages near an open-pit lignite mine, which is buying out the houses to expand operations at ridiculously low prices.

The NGO is fighting for the locals to receive adequate compensation, but Todorov thinks the Party is the one that should be actually doing this to build a social base for itself beyond the educated middle-class professionals in urban centres who typically vote for them. He believes there is a lot of unexplored potential there because many Bulgarian localities suffer daily the toxic pollution from power plants burning garbage — these are people who do not need awareness-raising campaigns about pollution. They live it, making them potentially susceptible to the Greens’ message objecting to the privatisation of profits and the socialisation of pollution. However, he

also said that the widespread poverty in Bulgaria has inclined the majority of people towards leftist ideas, which means that if the Greens are to reach these people, they have to not only go local and take local problems to heart but emphasize social justice in their program. He expressed disappointment that in Bulgaria no real leftist political party exists to “capture” and represent this constituency that would benefit the overall political development of a country whose political spectrum is heavily skewed to the Right.

Toma Belev, the head of the Bulgarian Parks Association and one of the most renowned environmentalists in the country, also pointed out the importance of “going local”. During our interview, he mentioned the now infamous case of the coronavirus outbreak in a Dospat factory churning out toys for Ferrero Rocher where 25 women got infected and the owner blamed the outbreak on a “patient zero” worker with “lax morals”. Belev insisted that unless party activists go to these workers, start fighting for them and change their conditions, they have no chance of transcending their marginal urban constituencies. As he puts it, “the locals need to see and like your politics, locally. They need to be touched by it somehow; otherwise, it is just vote shopping.”

In addition to “going local”, respondents suggested engaging in “structured strategic partnerships” (a liberal centrist) and “joint events, research and publications” (a centre-right person). To this end, one respondent with green views suggested using BlueLink as a common ground: “BlueLink can be a wonderful platform for activists of the two fields to meet and connect. In this way, they could work together and support each other.”

One possibility that looms large is dialogue and joint actions (such as protests and workshops): “At the very least, both sides can reach out and take action together. For example, in the new issue of Dversia mag, we invited Borislav Sandov, Vera Petkanchin and Toma Belev to write articles to start a more serious dialogue with the Greens and make them more left-wing”, said the Paris-based socialist. Others propose “Discussions on overlapping principles, occasions, goals, opponents” (a socialist sociologist, longing for a party of labour), “meetings and live conversations, not the formal two- to three-hour meetings with five panellists who talk gibberish. No webinars and other such electronic garbage” (This opinion, expressed by a right-of-centre green voter, was voiced before the outbreak of COVID-19!), “joint training, seminars, strategic planning sessions” (a liberal centrist). Others proposed:

- “events/spaces/platforms that unite the themes and show the shared things between them, including common challenges” (a female green voter);
- “demonstration of activities for practical interaction between them” (a moderate-right instructor);
- “joint events, research and publications” (a right-of-centre economist);

- “meetings, discussions, general campaigns” (a liberal-left, Da, Bulgaria voter);
- “very wide range. But it should start with meetings of activists from both directions to motivate and recognize that they belong to the same “party”, said a moderate-left environmentalist;
- “joint campaigns and initiatives, horizontal integration of green policies in all sectors” (a moderate-right democrat);
- “workshops, formal memoranda of cooperation and membership in joint organisations” (a moderate-left lawyer).

In our interview, Toma Belev also recommended more meetings, debates and discussions between “normal” civic organisations, which, according to him, are not that many. By “normal” he means authentic third-sector organisations and initiatives that work in and defend the full spectrum of human and social rights. Not “GONGOs” (NGOs funded and directed by the state). Not the standard trade unions (such as KNSB and Podkrepa whom he perceives as very far away from ordinary workers’ concerns). Belev already partakes in such informal coalitions between civic organisations, for example, by having supported the struggle of mothers with children with disabilities, the fight for the new paediatric hospital in Sofia, and anti-TTIP/ CETA protests (albeit from a ‘rule of law’ perspective, because he resents the emergence of parallel legal courts dispensing services to corporations which otherwise profit from Bulgaria’s corrupt legal system) as well as judicial reform and media freedom protests. (“Without [these two] my own work becomes impossible”, he says.)

More than party-building, he perceives the third or civic sector as the most fruitful ground for the expansion of the green policy space and the popularization of environmentalism. As such, this requires constant vigilance on part of concerned citizens, and he expressed disappointment that vigilance and activism are not so popular among the Left. He mentioned again the Dospat corona-debacle, more specifically, the leaked labour contract in a similar factory that ties the earning of the minimum salary to overtime and attendance. Belev said that state institutions are not functioning effectively when such abuse of workers is allowed to happen, but neither is civil society, because our job should be to constantly alert the institutions when the bosses overstep their rights and even sue them (that is why it is so important to have a functioning judiciary system).

The listed responses show that regardless of the widely diverging political positions, the organisation of discussions or seminars is intuitive for people on either side of the left-right spectrum.

The respondents also gave a host of other useful tips on how to forge a synergy between green and rights/justice actors. A very important point came from a left-of-centre liberal software developer, proposing the “translation of motives and causes into the language of the other party

and formulating them within the framework of its priorities is the way to rapprochement between any two groups of people.” Also, outreach: “Seeking greater public support for a common vision for development rather than dividing society into “minority or social groups”, proposed a moderate-right project manager.

Some respondents insisted on specialization: “Paradoxically, in my opinion, cohesion can also come about through individual groups and movements achieving a greater identity and competence — Greens deal with green things, rights groups focus more clearly on their goals — and seeking intersection points, not diffusion”, ventured a green journalist. Consider also this opinion by a hard-right lecturer: “I think that there are no special differences between these types of organisations, but it is also logical that they have some specialisation and that the Helsinki Committee is not very active, say, in protests against construction.”

On the other hand, specialisation can be a limit for some. Avoiding green “zealotism” is important for a moderately left lawyer. For example, a professional politician (member of the Green Movement) among our respondents lamented the lack of trust and desire for cooperation with formal politics on the part of so-called civil society actors. As she put it: “If there is a discrepancy somewhere, it is on the part of non-politicized human rights defenders, who generally think that politics is a dirty business and treat politicians with distrust, even hostility. The connection breaks unilaterally. As a politician on the other side, I try in every way to explain that there are honest and responsible politicians, there is meaning in politics and that politics is actually the only way to reach the real management and legislative levers through which to bring change.”

Anti-racism looms as a possible common ground between Greens and other progressive actors. Two suggestions to turn anti-racism into a terrain on which to wage a common struggle came from respondents identifying as left-wing. The first expected “public condemnation of racism”, while the second said that “environmental organisations should sharply oppose the propaganda that the Roma are to blame for the toxic air, who allegedly pollute because they are poor and burn cheaper fuel. More broadly, environmental but also human rights organisations should stop blaming abstract individual consumers (for air pollution, plastic pollution, etc.) and deal with the real culprits — big business, the oil industry, transnational corporations.”

In addition, some respondents urged paying more attention to economic inequality and material deprivation. Predictably, these suggestions come from the Left: “To raise the issue of social inequalities and the severe deficit of justice of the masses on all sides” (left-winger, PhD). A left-wing respondent working in translation criticized what she perceives is the self-marginalization of the Greens via their neglect for economic issues

and their explicit allegiance to the so-called “identity politics” of marginal groups: “[Green politicians] must first understand that a person needs to be alive, fed and sure about their physical survival. Then they can be gay, gypsy, trans, etc. Until then, they will continue to try to hang out with some marginal group and wonder, being so fashionable, why they continue to be political marginals.”

To recap, the respondents are optimistic about the possibilities for expanding Green policy via cross-pollination with other progressive groups. However, some political work needs to get done to achieve this end. The suggestions span from common training devices like seminars, research projects and workshops to joint actions such as protests. A big potential for expanding not only the scope of green policy but also its influence lies in taking economic poverty and inequalities seriously, especially those plaguing geographic and social margins of the country. Instead, the Greens tend to prioritize “justice” understood in the narrow legal sense of the rule of law and anti-corruption. While this is undeniably important, it is an issue that is far removed from the day-to-day problems of many Bulgarian citizens barely making enough to survive.

Given that in Bulgaria no mainstream party takes poverty and inequality to heart, including BSP, which has become a party of big business, this is an opportunity the Greens should consider exploring. The issue is all the more pertinent given that the effort to wean our economies off fossil fuels is part and parcel of what the Greens stand for, so a just transition to renewables must be put at the centre of their program. Here, justice needs to be refocused in the twin sense of environmental and social justice. This is not just a moral concern but a deeply pragmatic one. If the Greens are to extricate themselves from their political marginalization and association with the numerically small educated, professional and urban middle class, they need to devise a strategy on how to reach out and appeal to the masses to finally start winning elections.

Hristo Ivanov, one of the leaders of the Democratic Bulgaria coalition, whom we interviewed, warned against too much “leftification” of the green agenda. He defined politics as the “art of presenting particular interests as common”. In this view, politics depends on coalition-building and therefore has to stay as pragmatic as possible and should not veer too much away from the political centre. Ivanov included in this danger of radicalization the tying of green policy to minority radicalism, presumably topics like queer or anti-racism activism. As he put it, “The Left is not growing electorally, it has not found the key to a bigger boom”. (However, this is equally true about the kind of politics he represents.)

Given the small size of such activist groups, this is indeed sensible advice. However, at some point during the interview, Ivanov positions himself and his party firmly in the “minoritarian” corner (perhaps, in line with their

electoral results), albeit not in terms of identity politics but the *raison d'être* of the party. He says that their main objective is the rule of law, which is by definition a topic that does not mobilise enthusiastic crowds: "Our focus is on political rights and the rule of law. [Because] there is no one else to deal with it, there are no votes to be won from it, it is easier to promise to raise salaries and pensions." It becomes a bit unclear how to resolve the tension between his call to "stay in the pragmatic centre" for the purposes of effective coalition-building and the (self-sacrificial) dedication to explicitly unpopular causes.

Echoing this, Borislav Sandov, the co-leader of the Green Movement party we interviewed said that while he believes the party should expand the scope of its policies to include more social justice issues, he does not believe it will help it electorally because voters who are drawn to such issues normally vote for BSP out of habit. During our interview, he firmly positioned the party in the centre, denying the relevance of traditional Left and Right distinctions. He admitted, however, that the majority of party activists and supporters tend to be on the Left.

Unfortunately, the insistence on centrism seems aloof to the "populist wave" that still has not exhausted itself completely despite the electoral setbacks in the UK and the U.S. in the last year. This is not to call for the full embrace of the national-populist agenda but for a "return to the political" on progressive terms. It would greatly help the cause of Democratic Bulgaria, for instance, if instead of arguing that increasing the pensions distracts from the fight for the rule of law, they find a way to forge a durable ideological link between civil and social justice and thus rally the majorities around rule of law and just redistribution. Speaking of pensions, this could happen by targeting the widespread practice of employers of stealing social insurance contributions from workers by forcing them to sign minimum-salary contracts and paying the rest of their salaries "under the table". The theft of social insurance contributions directly impacts both current and future pensions by starving the funds for such payments. Why should theft of property by large companies and the daily indignity suffered by workers not concern the party? Is wage theft not a matter of justice as well?

Political cooperation

To establish the potential for actual political cooperation, we asked respondents to list politicians they have collaborated successfully with in the past. They then had to state who they would choose to cooperate with again in the future.

Even though we asked for individual politicians' names, some people also invoked political parties. From these, the Green Movement party and Da, Bulgaria collect the most responses. From the political figures, Toma Belev

crops up (3 times), Borislav Sandov (3 times) and Radan Kunev (2 times). Hristo Ivanov was mentioned once as well as Velizar Shalamanov (Da, Bulgaria), Evgeni Kanev, Yuliana Nikolova, Andrey Kovachev (GERB), Nikolay Nenchev (BZNS), Vladislav Panev (GM), Nikolay Kamov (ex-BSP), Ivaylo Kalfin (ABV, ex-BSP), Tomislav Donchev (GERB) and Traicho Traikov (RB).

While some of the respondents prefer working with parties, others espouse a more flexible approach and tend to collaborate with “free-thinking personalities from parties across the spectrum: from Georgi Pirinski [BSP] to Martin Zaimov [a right-winger], as well as with the Greens, especially in earlier times”, says a journalist in his 40s who refuses to identify politically but would vote for a green/left party if he could. A respondent identifying as right-wing is similarly “flexible” in having collaborated with diverse politicians, including from the ruling party.

Three respondents say they have collaborated with BSP, two with DPS “before the real defenders of rights and liberties were kicked out of the party”, but the general inclination seems to be towards small extra-parliamentary parties. Five respondents admit to having no experience with such collaboration, while three are open to collaborate with anyone who is not on the far-right, who cares about nature and who stands on the left and/or supports trade unions.

To recap, here are the relevant actors our respondents collaborate with. For parties, then it is Da, Bulgaria or the Green Movement mainly. The established parties tend to be shunned as a whole, but respondents do not mind working with “free-thinking individuals”. And some would like to see the creation of a green-left political party.

When asked to identify politicians they would collaborate with in the future, responses could be grouped in the same taxonomy as in the previous two sections. The group of “the Uncompromising” spans left-wingers as well as centrists. One left-winger said she would work with politicians she “considers leftists. BSP is not, for example. So far, we have only supported Vanya Grigorova’s candidacy for the European parliament”. Another simply said “with left politicians” without specifying. A third respondent on the left said he would work with politicians “who follow the model of the Portuguese party PAN or the Spanish Pacma”. It is unclear how this is workable in the Bulgarian context inasmuch as no political party or politician subscribing to the positions of this marginal Portuguese party exists.

The Uncompromising tend to select politicians in a purely negative way: “[I’d work with] all who are not far-right or pro-corporate” (a left-winger) or “all parties except United Patriots” (a liberal). This negativity ensures a degree of flexibility, unlike the total positive identification with specific, foreign actors that provides little sensitivity for local specificities.

The Loyalists predictably selected politicians they already work with. “From among the existing parties in Bulgaria, the only opportunity for cooperation I see is with Da, Bulgaria and DSB within Democratic Bulgaria,” a Green Movement voter says. Another, a liberal centrist working for a human rights organisation, had specific political actors in mind: Grozdan Karadzhov, Ivan K. Ivanov, Velizar Shalamanov, Evgeni Kanev, Yuliana Nikolova, Andrey Kovachev, Borislav Sandev. Radan Kanev’s name crops up in the response of a third (a centre-right, Green Movement voter).

Responses by the more pragmatic coalition-builders predominate and that’s good news. One respondent said they like politicians “advocating for human rights, economic equality and the environment”. Another: “I would help green politicians develop a program for a green economy; I would also collaborate with mainstream politicians on topics that are important to me. Especially valuable are contacts with local authorities.” Still others said, “Anyone who works for nature in Bulgaria.”

The potential for collaboration here is sought in shared themes and concerns, i.e., in the preference for politicians of any colour who “are inclined toward [green] the changes in the energy sector and to saving the resources of the planet”. However, it seems evident that there is ground for cooperation over primarily green causes, and it is unclear how and if that could include any related issues.

A moderate-left, Da, Bulgaria voter espoused similar flexibility as above, albeit centred on human rights and social justice: “[I’d work] with anyone who is intolerant of inequalities and defends human rights and vulnerable groups.” The question is how to bring representatives from the above two together. We find a hint in the words of a respondent with “moderate lefty views” who grouped the climate and migration crises together: “With all those who prioritize the goals of the Climate Convention and the Convention on Biological Diversity. With all those who accept the Charter of Human Rights and all the new UN documents on rights and migration.” Also, this one from a centre-right sports instructor: [I would work with] those that respect the environment, human rights, minorities and the social inclusion of disadvantaged people.”

Or as this moderate-left voter for Da, Bulgaria says, “In principle, I think I can cooperate with anyone. The goal must be to achieve set goals. In this sense, we need to start cooperating with politicians from the ruling parties.”

But sometimes the stances are too general to be viable, e.g., “Cross-cutting engaged with as much anti-authoritarian attitude as possible” (moderate-left anarchist) and “with those for whom the transition has ended unsuccessfully and understand that a new attempt to normalize the country must be launched” (a centre-right Green voter). Or too

moralistic: “Anybody, as long as they are guided by politics, not interests” (liberal-left respondent) and “Young, unpolluted, moral, competent, dedicated” (a respondent identifying as green).

Conclusions

An ideological package of environmentalism and human rights, conceived as part of Bulgaria's pro-democracy movement of the late 1980/early 1990s appears to be split up amongst and outsourced mostly to civic organisations and groups. Notably, social rights have been largely excluded from the package since the beginning, being commonly framed and perceived as belonging to the political domain of BSP. Some 30 years later, neither human nor social rights are enjoying stable political representation in their most natural respective political families.

Mainstream political parties have embraced clientelism, and economic dependencies outweigh ideological principles in political decision-making. Traditional parties on the right, left and centre of the spectrum were willing to compromise with ideological principles in favour of a convenient money-making neoliberal agenda.

With nationalist, populist and openly opportunistic pro-business parties popping up and gaining electoral support, GERB and BSP also shifted toward a national, conservative direction. Thus, the role of a political party defending the rights of women, minorities (sexual, religious and ethnic), refugees, the weak and the vulnerable in society, more broadly put, remains vacant.

For their part, social rights are even less mainstream than the rights of ethnic, sexual minorities and women's rights, and as a result, are under the relentless attack from government, business lobbies and employer associations.

Environmentalism has founded a political home at GM — now part of the extra-Parliamentary DeB coalition, which appears relatively open to embracing human rights, although also prone to sliding into a neoliberal and conservative direction.

This project intervenes at a dramatic juncture of recent Bulgarian history, as the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic sweeps through a country rocked by daily anti-government protests since July. Despite overwhelmingly targeting corruption, the protests' trigger partly lies in the dismal environmental record of the ruling centre-right/far-right coalition, as a series of environmental scandals erupted in the run-up to the protests, contributing to the release of pent-up discontent in wider society. Alas, three months of daily marches have not secured the government's resignation, and the possibility of this becomes more distant as time goes by.

Often compared to the 2013 summer protests because of the pronounced anti-corruption demands, the 2020 protests are actually different in their composition. Forces that stood on the opposite ends of the barricades in 2013 today protest together, namely, leftists, liberals and Greens. Nevertheless, the 2020 and 2013 protests do share something significant: the exclusive focus on corruption (understood in a narrow legal frame) and a gaping absence of social (or redistribution) demands. This we find to be a detriment to the protest movement not because we believe that every protest has to address social injustices but purely for tactical reasons. Demanding the impossible often yields decent results. For example, the winter protest of 2013, which erupted over abnormally high utility bills, did manage to topple the first GERB government not because it demanded their resignation – far from it — but because it voiced demands that were impossible to fulfil (from the point of view of the ruling elite's economic-liberal worldview), such as the thorough nationalization of the energy grid. In contrast, the summer protest of 2013 asked for a government resignation alone and did not get it.

Integrating social issues in a purportedly “civic” protest can also be useful in the sense of expanding the repertoire of the protest. For example, early into the 2020 protest, the organisers defined it as a “national strike”, but no such thing exists in the Bulgarian Labour Act. The lack of liberal strike legislation hampers *every* protest — carrying out a protest would be far simpler and take far less time if a real national strike could actually be called instead of taking to the streets after work, ensuring that the protest does not disrupt anything and anybody (save for the short-lived road closures, of course, but these were dealt with quickly by the police).

Finally, integrating social demands and expanding the narrow legal frame of justice in which the Greens (and their coalition partners) operate makes sense also from an electoral point of view. The 2020 protests understandably gave the Green-DaBG coalition a boost. In a poll conducted in early September of 2020, the coalition was the fifth parliamentary force with almost 10%⁶⁶, while exactly a month later, this result had halved.⁶⁷ It seems that the boost has been short-lived, and the two parties have reached their electoral limit and cannot transcend their “natural” liberal, urban, middle-class constituencies.

Taking a look at recent opinion polls points to a way to overcome the “natural” limits of the liberal-green coalition. For example, in a poll conducted by

66 Dimitrov, D., 2020, “Trend: Five parties will certainly enter the next parliament” accessed on 20.10.2020 from https://www.capital.bg/politika_i_ikonomika/bulgaria/2020/09/10/4112230_trend_v_sledvashtiia_parlament_sus_sigurnost_shte/

67 Paunovski, G., 2020, “Gallup: Seven formations have a chance to enter new parliament”, accessed on 29.10.2020 from: https://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2020/10/21/4129647_shans_za_vlizane_v_nov_parlament_imat_sedem_formacii/?fbclid=IwAR1U8hUG-LTRnO3wQSWP-eC3VpU7bvpDI9Ooi2OA9WoZnGIY-5tgw3CAIU_sledvashtiia_parlament_sus_sigurnost_shte/

Open Society in 2018, poverty and unemployment top the chart of socially significant problems, while corruption is a distant third.⁶⁸ The poll found corruption to be an issue mainly for educated professionals, but even for them, it is on par with poverty.⁶⁹ A year earlier, a poll found that poverty, unemployment and the lack of affordable and adequate healthcare were highlighted by respondents in a nationally representative survey as the gravest problems the Bulgarian state and society are facing, with corruption a distant fourth.⁷⁰ Significantly (and thankfully), cultural issues such as “the refugee crisis” came last in the list, despite the prominent place refugees occupy in all major and minor mass media as well as political parties’ rhetoric. This points to the radical rift between ordinary people’s concerns and those of their putative representatives, explaining the declining turnout in every election. In late 2020, polls probing public opinion understandably yielded different results, with healthcare and pandemic-induced unemployment attracting the most attention. It would have been an opportune moment for the Greens and their partners to take some of these topics up after the dissipation of the anti-corruption protests in 2020, but this has not happened yet.

The general elections in March 2021 will show if a genuine green political breakthrough is possible or the tired over-representation of centre-right and right-populist forces (in their limited coalition permutations) will be repeated yet again.

Our respondents and interviewees put forward useful suggestions on how cross-pollination between human rights, social justice and green policy could occur. Debates, workshops, common campaigns and research projects could help forge an activist “ethic” between green and social justice campaigners. The protest of 2020 provided such *ad hoc* grounds for common mobilisation (at least before it turned into the anti-masker charade of local COVID-denialists). However, more durable and sustainable structures for cooperation need to be established rather than relying on the effervescence of spontaneous eruptions of social anger. Although not mentioned by the respondents, it is apposite to think of a physical space where activists and political figures could meet and discuss.

Finally, a word about the protests and the promises and opportunities they portend. Such protests, no matter how inspiring, herald the tragedy of the failure of what they are coming to replace. Because when such outbursts occur, it means that the mechanisms, organisations and institutions that

68 Open Society Sofia, 2018, “The most important problems facing the country according to public opinion”, accessed on 25.20.2020 from <https://osis.bg/?p=3292>

69 Open Society Sofia, 2018, “For whom is corruption a problem?”, accessed on 25.20.2020 from <https://osis.bg/?p=3295>

70 bTV, 2017, “The main problems facing Bulgaria: low wages, unemployment, poor health care”, accessed on 25.20.2020 from <https://btvnovinite.bg/bulgaria/obshtestvo/osnovnite-problemi-pred-balgarija-niski-dohodi-bezrabotica-losho-zdraveopazvane.html>

address problems on a daily basis do not work and people accumulate unaddressed grievances until they finally erupt. In the end, protests double as a pressure valve and things return to the old way until the next time, as the 2013 winter protests showed. No matter how much we support protests like the ones in 2020, they are at once good and bad news for their supporters. They announce the presence of civil energy but also the lack of mechanisms and institutions for representation and improvement of the situation of the people. This position paper seeks to fill this institutional gap, which leads to such periodic and sporadic outbursts, by strengthening the democratic representation of the majority and addressing its problems by way of forging a progressive political coalition that perceives the common sources of social and environmental ills and addresses them in the name of both social and environmental justice, and human rights.

Expanding the Green Policy Space to Human and Social Rights in Bulgaria

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BlueLink is a non-partisan foundation registered in the public interest under Bulgaria's Non-Profit Organisations Act to foster free information exchange on the internet in support of civil society, democracy, shared European values and environmental protection. BlueLink serves its purpose through digital networking, watchdog journalism and research.



The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung is the oldest political foundation in Germany with a rich tradition dating back to its foundation in 1925. Today, it remains loyal to the legacy of its namesake and campaigns for the core ideas and values of social democracy: freedom, justice and solidarity. It has a close connection to social democracy and free trade unions.

