

*Spasimir Domaradzki**

Lazarski University, Warsaw, Poland

BULGARIA'S SECURITY AFTER 30 YEARS

Abstract

This paper provides an overview of the Bulgarian security concerns over the last thirty years. Without claiming to be complete and all-embracing, the paper grasps the notion of security from both internal and external perspectives. While deliberating on the main security challenges in the context of the formal membership in the political and economic institutions of the Western world, the paper argues that the most tangible security threats for Bulgaria are internal and are related to the problems of organized crime and state capture.

Keywords: *Bulgaria, security, security challenges, NATO, EU, organized crime, state capture*

BULGARIA'S POST-COMMUNIST SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

A NATO and EU member, Bulgaria seems to be an example of post-communist success story. Leaving the Cold War as the most reliable Soviet satellite for the last thirty years Bulgaria completely reorganized its international security priorities. Even if, in comparison with the countries from Central Europe this process was slower and more hectic, the country joined the process of the great

* spasimir.domaradzki@lazarski.pl

Eastern enlargement of the NATO and the EU. Although the membership in the two organizations is not a prescription for eternal peace, it does have an impact on the country's position in international relations and access to opportunities that the organizations provide. Bulgaria's security priorities were neither self-evident nor predetermined and that was to a large extent a consequence of the specific nature of Bulgarian transition.

Theorists of transition and democratization identified different models. In the context of the third wave of democratization, Samuel Huntington identified three basic scenarios of political transition: transformation, replacement and displacement.¹ Jacek Wojnicki, following Samuel Huntington, defined the Bulgarian process of political transformation as transition, understood as a process of democratization led by the Communist political elites.² Also Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan identified Bulgarian transition as an ideal type of regime change that was largely able to control the transformation process.³

The communist controlled nature of the Bulgarian transformation led to a specific competition between the foreign policy priorities of the two main political players: the former communists now repainted as socialists (since April 1990 Bulgarian Socialist Party – BSP) and the anti-communist opposition largely gathered in the Union of Democratic Forces – UDF). Whereas BSP was fostering a moderate concept of balancing between the East and the West grounded in a wicked form of neutrality, UDF was openly pro-western. This obvious conceptual contradiction together with the frequent shifts in power in the first eight years of transition had a negative impact on Bulgaria's international standing.⁴

1 Transformation meant that the process of political transformation was led by the former communist elites. Replacement takes place when the former opposition leads the process of democratization. Displacement was related to the joint efforts of the former regime and the opposition.

2 Wojnicki, Jacek, *Transformacja systemowa w Bułgarii – opóźniona czy specyficzna?* in: ed. Marzena Czernicka, Jacek Wojnicki, *100 lat relacji dyplomatycznych między Polską a Bułgarią*, Warszawa 2019 p.75

3 Linz, J., Stepan, A., *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation, Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1996, p.295

4 Mihaylova, Nadezhda, *Priorities in Bulgarian Foreign Policy*, Thesis, *A Journal of Foreign Policy Issues*, <http://www.hri.org/MFA/thesis/autumn97/priorities.html>; Stoilov, Georgi, *The Transformation Process in Bulgaria*, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/56342223.pdf> p.195

Furthermore, the country's uneasy specific model of political and economic transition led to an extended economic stagnation. However, the sluggish process towards free market-oriented economy was not the only security concern. The collapse of the communist regime required the redefinition of the basic principles, laws and power relations thus undermining the role of the state apparatus. The rapidly changing political environment, now encouraging political pluralism, exacerbated the relations with the Turkish minority. The establishment of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF) on January 4, 1990 sparked a serious constitutional question with potentially explosive consequences. Although officially the party claimed to be open to all citizens of Bulgaria, MRF represented the interests of the Turkish minority. In July 1991 the new post-communist constitution of Bulgaria was adopted. According to art.11.p.4. the constitution forbids the existence of parties on ethnic, racial and religious basis. Based on this provision, 93 members of the parliament from the Bulgarian Socialist Party (the heir of the former Communist Party) filed a case to the Constitutional Tribunal questioning the legitimacy of the MRF. This act increased the ethnic tensions in the country, reigniting the fresh wounds from the communist led Revival Process.⁵ While issuing a formally non-binding position on procedural grounds, on April 4, 1992 the Constitutional Court acknowledged the importance of the constitutional provision in art.11.p.4 forbidding the existence of parties on ethnic, racial and religious grounds, but rejected the complaint demanding the unconstitutionality of MRF.

This “Solomon” judgement framed the nature of the Bulgarian ethnic model. On one hand the constitution forbids the existence of ethnic parties in Bulgaria, but on the other, the MRF became the most constant factor in Bulgarian politics. More importantly, MRF became the most efficient political enterprise in the country that since 1992 plays consistently important role in Bulgarian politics.⁶ Secured by the disciplined votes of the Turkish minority, the party is the third largest in Bulgarian politics with the most stable

5 Roszkowski, Wojciech, *East Central Europe, A Concise History*, Instytut Studiów Politycznych Polskiej Akademii Nauk, Instytut Jagielloński, Warszawa 2015, p.408; Христов, Юлиан, Как се опитаха да забранят ДПС през 91-ва и не успяха, *Offnews*, 18.10.2014, https://m.offnews.bg/news/Razsledvane_68/Kak-se-opitaha-da-zabraniat-DPS-prez-91-va-i-ne-uspiaha_405116.html

6 Домарадски, Спасимир, ДПС, политическата култура и европейските либерали, *Терминал* 3, 23.6.2019, <https://terminal3.bg/dps-politicheskata-kultura-i-evropejskite-liberali/>

political electorate. Notwithstanding the dire economic conditions of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria,⁷ the party largely serves the political interests of its now honorary president Ahmed Dogan and the emanation of political pathologies in Bulgaria, Deyan Peevski.

The process of violent dissolution of Yugoslavia had also a negative impact on Bulgaria in several dimensions. The UN sanctions on Yugoslavia disrupted the economic exchange⁸ and Bulgaria demanded a UN compensation for the damages. The ethnic and religious lines of Yugoslavia's break up spread the odium of inevitable conflicts, hence making the MRF case a communist orchestrated step in a dangerous direction.⁹ However, the most serious and durable consequence of the war in Yugoslavia was the consolidation of the Bulgarian organized crime.¹⁰ The Yugoslav sanctions on oil and arms opened a vast and demanding black market. The newly emerging force groups (групировки), consisted of now jobless wrestlers, heavy lifters, sambo and other sportsmen. Joined by criminals after the amnesty in January 1991 when almost 4000 people were released¹¹, former members of the Secret Service and highly positioned members of the Communist party framed the content of Bulgaria's organized crime. The force groups promptly replaced the shrinking post-communist state in providing security at a price. While they also entered into a constant struggle for control over the main channels of drug trafficking they also established strong transborder connections with the organized crime in the former Yugoslav republics that can be considered as a grim example of regional integration that lasts for over thirty years in the Balkans. Among the endless examples of these dependencies

7 Already in 2002, an Alfa Research Survey revealed that the main differences between the majority and ethnic minorities in Bulgaria are social. According to the survey only 20% of ethnic Bulgarians were living below the poverty line, compared to 45% of the Turks and 75% of the Roma. Българския етнически модел, представен от вицепремиера Емел Етем в Берлин, Дойче веле, 30.11.2005, Permalink: <https://p.dw.com/p/AsyD>

8 Slavov, Slavi, T., 2007. „Innocent or Not-so-innocent Bystanders: Evidence from the Gravity Model of International Trade About the Effects of UN Sanctions on Neighbour Countries,“ The World Economy, Wiley Blackwell, vol. 30(11), pages 1701-1725, November. Славов, Слави, От местопрестъплението: България – съучастник или жертва? Капитал, 21.12.2007, https://www.capital.bg/politika_i_ekonomika/bulgaria/2007/12/21/409846_bulgaria_-_suuchastnik_ili_jertva/

9 Как ДПС оцеля през 1992-ра!?, Новата реалност, <http://www.novatarealnost.bg/?p=1916>

10 Бучков, Петър, Югоембаргото и контрабандната търговия, in: eds. Сугарев, Едвин, Христов, Христо, Бучков, Петър, Корупционната България, История на българската корупция в годините на преход към демокрация, Том 1, 1989-1997, с.331-356, Available also online at: <http://corruptionbg.com/Jugoembargoto-i-kontrabandnata-turgoviq>

11 <https://parliament.bg/bg/parliamentarycommittees/members/169/steno/ID/663>

the case of Sreten Josic (aka Joca Amsterdam) is an exemplification of the rotten interconnectedness between formal political elites and organized crime in the region.¹²

EXTERNAL CHALLENGES

Another fundamental security concern in Bulgaria remained the former Soviet influence in the country. The intensive relations between Moscow and Sofia, making the latter the most reliable Soviet ally,¹³ could not vanish instantly. Within the rapidly changing transformation reality Moscow maintained a multi-layered mechanism of influence. Politically, Moscow was securing its interests through the former communists of the Bulgarian Socialist Party and through the MRF. Privatizing the Bulgarian oil industry and being the main partner in the Nuclear Power Plant of Kozlodui, Russia skillfully used these leverages to pressure on the government.¹⁴

The strong political connections and complete economic dependence on Russian natural resources were further strengthened by the skillful use of the half a century old Soviet propaganda of brotherhood relations. When, after the economic crisis caused by the Zhan Videnov's government in 1997 popular protests led to his resignation, the new government of Ivan Kostov made a decisive turn towards the West. Until that time, Sofia was sending dubious signals towards the West, on one hand claiming to be part of the pro-western oriented Central and Eastern European countries and on the other, providing more and more examples of corruption, gang wars and state capture, thus recalling much more the Russian, than the Central European model of transition.¹⁵

The decreasing Russian influence in the period 1997-2001 was also a consequence of the Russian economic crisis, the change

12 Эксперти: Сретен Йосич няма да прости за екстрадицията му от България, Darik News, 28.4.2009, <https://dariknews.bg/novini/sviat/eksperti-sreten-josich-nqma-da-prosti-za-ekstradiciqta-mu-ot-bylgariq-351954>

13 To the extent that Bulgaria itself proposed to become another Soviet Republic.

14 Krassen Stanchev, *Russia's State Owned Companies and Contemporary Bulgarian Political and Economic Landscape*, s.9-36 w: ed. Jan Muš, *Russia in the Balkans, Threat or Opportunity?*, Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej, Rok 13 (2015) Zeszyt 5., Instytut Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej, Lublin 2015, s.23 http://www.iesw.lublin.pl/rocznik/pliki/Rocznik_2015-226.pdf, Domaradzki, Spasimir, Rosja na Bałkanach w nowej Zimnej Wojnie, in: ed. Supińska, Agata, *Lepiej nie będzie? Europa w dobie przesilenia. Ośrodek Myśli Politycznej*, Kraków 2018, pp.141-160

15 See footnote 1 infra.

in the Kremlin and the war in Chechnya. Nevertheless, as soon as the process of consolidation of power by President Vladimir Putin was accomplished, Russia returned to its active policy towards Bulgaria and its politics. In party terms Moscow not only continued to use BSP and MRF politicians but engaged anew in a war for the Bulgarians' hearts and minds. Another political project Attack (Атака) with a radical nationalist and anti-western narrative was launched in 2005. Since then, the party, despite the provocative behavior of its leader Volen Siderov, scores well enough to secure its presence in the Bulgarian and European Parliaments.

Political parties and energy dependence are not the only mechanisms of Russian influence. For almost half a century Bulgaria's army was completely dependent on Soviet military equipment. In the post-communist reality when bilateral relations deteriorated, the Bulgarian army dependence on parts and maintenance of the Soviet era equipment was frequently used to blend strategic needs with political concessions. The outcome of this uneasy cooperation is dire for the combat readiness of the Bulgarian forces.¹⁶ This problem is particularly acute in the context of jet fighters. The shortage of parts and the advanced service time of the airplanes led to a permanent shortage of airplanes and a need to cut flight hours.¹⁷ The declining military capabilities of the Bulgarian air forces were further weakened by continuous political disputes about the new airplanes. Eventually, in July 2019 the Bulgarian government approved the purchase of eight F16's. The new jet fighters will not only modernize Bulgaria's defense capacities but will also improve the country's cooperation capabilities with its NATO allies. Having in mind the noticeable decrease of Bulgarian participation in NATO exercises caused by the outdated equipment and infrastructure¹⁸, the purchase is a tangible step improving country's hard security and decreasing Russia's political leverage. Paradoxically, the first new airplanes will not be delivered before 2023.

16 The reasons for the deterioration of the Bulgarian army are manifold and include the post-Cold War disarmament, the implementation of necessary military reforms in accordance with the NATO pre-accession demands, and the de-prioritization of the military expenditures.

17 Доклад за състоянието на отбраната и въоръжените сили на Република България, 2015. с.17-18, available online www.strategy.bg

18 Докладът за състоянието на Въоръжените сили чертае мрачна картина във ВВС, Aeropress, 24.4.2019 <https://www.aeropress-bg.com/news/bulgaria/6139>

Another serious and at the same time extremely harmful aspect of Bulgaria's security dilemmas concerns the creation of a second Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) in Belene. Originated in the 1980ies the construction of Belene NPP is an inevitable part of Bulgaria's post-communist reality. Although the project was frozen several times, also by prime minister Borisov in 2012, it already costed Bulgarian taxpayers more than 3 bln Eur¹⁹. The costs include two reactors produced by the Russian Atomstroyexport that Bulgaria was compelled to purchase for 600 mln Eur in 2016. Importantly, the project's reactivations are usually preceded by renewed relations with Russia. Since 2016 the project was halted and started again. Lately, along with Russia, also the Chinese CNNP expressed interest in the construction of the powerplant.

Last, but not least, energy corridors aiming the transfer of natural resources also played important role in Bulgaria's security. Just as any country from the region, Bulgarian authorities see the construction of pipelines on their territories as a "golden chicken". Bulgaria was considered to be the main partner in the construction of the South Stream pipeline on the bottom of the Black Sea. The project was eventually halted by the president Putin, who blamed the European Union for his decision. This time, thanks to a deal between the European Commission and Russia, Bulgaria did not had to pay a 70 mln dollars cancelation fee to its Russian partner.²⁰ Adding to this picture the fact that the whole Bulgarian oil industry is in the hands of Lukoil frames the scope of Russian influence in the country. A 2019 journalist investigation of Bivol, highlighted that *"In Bulgaria the company [Lukoil – SD] practically holds a monopolistic position and no one demands from it anything. Company's domination spreads over the whole capacity for import and refinement of crude oil, as well as storage, transportation and export of oil products. The main oil harbor near Rosenec is practically a Russian enclave with no representatives of the Bulgarian authorities, including customs officers."*²¹ Lukoil controls 95% of the taxed oil storages in the country.

19 <https://www.banker.bg/upravlenie-i-biznes/read/aec-belene-ot-giol-do-strategicheski-proekt>

20 Gotev, Georgi, EU-Gazprom deal clears Bulgaria of South Stream cancellation claims, Euractiv, 15.3.2017, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy/news/eu-gazprom-deal-clears-bulgaria-of-south-stream-cancellation-claims/>

21 Стоянов, Димитър, „Лукойл България“ – Държава в държавата, Биволь, 6.12.2019 <https://bivol.bg/lukoil.html>

In the early XX century in the heart of Sofia a monument of the Russian Emperor Alexander II was erected. Along with the sculpture of the emperor, the monument depicts milestone events that led to the Bulgarian independence. However, since the first days of Bulgarian selfrule in 1878, Bulgarian-Russian relations usually clashed as was the case during the Bulgarian unification of 1885 and the First and Second World Wars. During the Cold War the communist authorities embraced the myth of brotherhood and the blind following of Moscow was the highest state interest. After an early period of hesitation after the end of the Cold War Bulgaria made its geopolitical choice towards the West. Together with the collapse of the Soviet Union Moscow lost its dominant position in Bulgaria, but it never lost its ability to influence the political process in the country. From Russian perspective, the leverage on Bulgarian politics is necessary not only for internal, but also regional purposes. For this reason, Russia applies a rich palette of economic and political interests. Over the last fifteen years a noticeable growth of Eurosceptic, pro-Russian and nationalist political parties is visible in Bulgaria. Thus, Russia pulls the strings of the representatives of the Turkish minority, the socialists and the nationalists holding a mixture of tools of potential destabilization.

Interestingly, the prominent role of MRF in Bulgarian politics encouraged Turkey in 2015 to attempt an internal coup within the movement in order to increase Turkey's power projection in the country. The rapid and radical reaction of the honorary president of MRF Ahmed Dogan, who swiftly jettisoned the then president Lutfi Mestan prevented the movement from shifting its external political patronage.²²

BULGARIA'S MEMBERSHIP IN NATO AND THE EU

Bulgaria joined NATO together with six other countries in 2004. The membership in the Alliance was a step forward on the road towards the West, which at that time considered NATO and the EU as the two rails of the same track. On several occasions prior to the formal membership Bulgarian authorities sided with

22 Among others Ahmed Dogan claimed that he will not allow MRF to become a Turkish fifth column. See: Изхвърлиха Местан от ДПС, председателски съвет временно поема партията, DarikNews, 24.12.2015, <https://dariknews.bg/novini/bylgariia/izhvyrliha-mestan-ot-dps-predsedatelski-syvet-vremenno-poema-partiata-1539313>

the Alliance. In February 1994 Bulgaria joined the Partnership for Peace initiative and subsequently contributed to the NATO led missions in Bosnia and Kosovo. During the NATO bombings of Yugoslavia Bulgaria opened its sky for NATO airplanes. Each of these actions was a part of an expected behavior in the context of future membership in the Alliance.

The NATO membership was followed by the EU 2007 enlargement. Following the “NATO and EU first” approach to defense policy, Sofia assumes the exploitation of opportunities stemming from the two organizations. However, the membership in NATO and the EU did not prevent the further dismantling of Bulgarian military capabilities. Along with the already discussed equipment problems of the Bulgarian army, the country’s defense capabilities were debilitating over the last three decades. The Bulgarian army shrunk to 1/4 of its Cold War contingent and the defense budget consistently decreased reaching less than 1,5% of the GDP.²³ Although this declining trend was in line with the treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, in terms of military expenditures Bulgaria followed the general trend among EU member states to devote less and less on military defense. Two years after joining the Alliance, US military facilities were established that are largely used for the US military operations and as a training camps.²⁴ In the context of the US and NATO demands and the increasing security challenges on NATO’s eastern flank in Ukraine and Syria, in 2017 the Bulgarian government adopted a program for increased spending that will meet the 2% of GDP by year 2024 or almost 3 bln Eur.²⁵ The army is in need of new equipment and along with the military airplanes, the army wants to invest in new vehicles for the land forces and new vessels for the NAVY.

Despite the grim current condition of the Bulgarian military, the membership in NATO offers both military and political benefits. The access to western technologies and equipment provides for a tangible reorganization of the country’s military capabilities.

23 Non paper, Bulgaria in NATO and in European Defence, 2020, available at: https://www.bbn.gov.pl/ftp/dok/07/BGR_Bulgaria_NATO_European_Defence_2020_2014.pdf

24 US troops set for Bulgaria bases, BBC, 28.4.2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4951726.stm>

25 National Plan for Increasing The Defence Spending To 2% of the Gross Domestic Product Until 2024, https://www.mod.bg/en/doc/programi/20180202_National_Plan_EN.pdf; Bulgaria Marks 15 Years Since Joining NATO, 29.3.2019, Novinite.com <https://www.novinite.com/articles/196131/Bulgaria+Marks+15+Years+Since+Joining+NATO>

Bulgaria is part of the NATO air policing and actively supports the NATO open door policy. The NATO enlargement on the Balkans is a political advancement of Bulgaria's priorities recognizing the growth of members as an increase of regional stability.

Interestingly, the membership in NATO and the EU is not considered by Bulgarians with equal sympathy. While overwhelmingly Bulgarians support European integration with over 61% of the population, only 47% of the respondents expressed readiness to support NATO allies if need be.²⁶ This trend is supported also by a recent Pew Research Center NATO perception survey in February 2020. The results show that Bulgarians are among the least enthusiastic members of the Alliance and at the same time are largely convinced that in case of a Russian attack on other NATO ally, Bulgaria should not send military forces.²⁷

Simultaneously, Bulgaria joined the EU Permanent Structured Cooperation launched in December 2017 that pushes forward the military dimension of the European integration. The initiative is particularly attractive due to its aim to boost the cooperation between member states in shared capability projects and enhancement of operational readiness. Thus, it creates an opportunity for a joint response to defense shortages and new organizational approach. So far Bulgaria participates in joint projects on naval monitoring, underwater capabilities, logistics hubs and unrestrained movement of allied troops.²⁸

Concluding, membership in NATO and the EU has framed Bulgaria's regional security considerations. The NATO membership not only required a deep reconsideration of state security priorities, but also swiftly eliminated the perspective of hard security concerns with the neighboring countries, from which all are members of the alliance with the exception of Serbia. The EU enlargement perspective of the former Yugoslav republics also

26 Dimitrov, Martin, Pro-EU Bulgaria Has Little Faith in NATO, *Balkan Insight*, 5.3.2018, <https://balkaninsight.com/2018/03/05/pro-eu-bulgaria-has-little-faith-in-nato-03-02-2018/>

27 Fagan, Moira, and Jacob Poushter, NATO Seen Favorably Across Member States, *Pew Research Center*, 9.2.2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/02/09/nato-seen-favorably-across-member-states/>

28 Марков, Александър, Какво е ПЕСКО? България в общата европейска обрана, 16.1.2018, <https://news.bnt.bg/bg/a/kakvo-e-pesko-blgariya-v-obshchata-evropeyska-otbrana>. See also: Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO)'s projects -Overview, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/41333/pesco-projects-12-nov-2019.pdf>

overlaps with Sofia's interests in the region. Nevertheless, historical policy remains an area that can have a negative impact on the European perspective of Northern Macedonia.

MIGRATION, INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM AND BULGARIA

Following a larger trend in the XXI century international relations, the contemporary security challenges that Bulgaria faces relate to migration, terrorism, cyber-attacks and hybrid warfare. Being one of the countries on the so-called Balkan route, Bulgaria was among the first countries to erect fences on the borders with Turkey in 2013. Migrants crisis become one of the key political issues in the country that fueled the rise of anti-immigrants and nationalist sentiments. The Bulgarian authorities found themselves trapped between the constitutional obligation to defend national borders and on the other, the dominant EU approach towards migrants that was defined after Angela Merkel's invitation as "willkommen" policy.²⁹ While still queueing for membership in the Schengen zone, Sofia was unwilling to join the Central European countries that openly opposed the European Commission proposal for migrants relocation based on quota principle.³⁰ At the same time, Bulgaria's transit role encouraged human trafficking that accompanied the inapplicable EU regulations.

Despite the different sub routes of the Balkan route, the main migrant flow never went through Bulgaria and despite its land border with Turkey the country was anywhere close to the acuteness of the migrant crisis faced by Greece. The more frequently used sub routes led from Greece through Northern Macedonia and Serbia. Since 2018 Albania, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina traced the new path.³¹ Thus, the migrant crisis has a dubious impact on Bulgaria and its security. On one hand, the country was able to

29 Calamur, Krishadev, Willkommen: Germany's Policy on Migrants, *The Atlantic*, 8.9.2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/09/willkommen-germanys-policy-on-migrants/404158/>

30 As of March 2018 Bulgaria, hosted 60 people within the refugee quota relocated from Greece (10) and Italy (50). България е приела досега 60 мигранти от квотите на ЕС, *Дневник*, 14.3.2018, https://www.dnevnik.bg/evropa/2018/03/14/3146400_bulgariia_e_priela_dosega_60_migranti_ot_kvotite_na_es/

31 Annibale, Federico, The New Balkan Route, 25.7.2018, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2018/07/eu-migrants-refugees-balkan-route-frontex-dublin-schengen>

perform relatively better than its neighbors in terms of securing the border. On the other, there is growing concern that the sealing of the border was accomplished with noticeable violations of human rights. As Ivaylo Dichev points out, migrants avoid Bulgaria, because of the rumors about beatings, pillages and repressions.³²

Since 1990ies terrorism remains the main international security concern. 9/11 was a turning point in the world history and the US declared war on terror directed against Islamic radicalism become a global phenomenon. Bulgaria is among the countries in Europe with highest percentage of Muslims. However, unlike the Western European countries Bulgarian Muslims are autochthonic and represent a variety of different groups. They are mostly Sunni and Alevi and they can be found among ethnic Turks, Roma, Tatars and Bulgarians.³³ Muslims are predominantly concentrated in the least developed south-eastern and north-eastern parts of the country.³⁴ 2016 Report on the radicalization in Bulgaria of the Center for Research of Democracy (CRD) acknowledged that social marginalization, poverty and isolation of certain communities make them vulnerable to radical ideologies.³⁵ Since the early 1990ies radical islamist organizations were setting up their footprint in Bulgaria. In 2004 Kapital daily traced the activities of Al Waqf al Islam foundation in Bulgaria where they built mosques and preached wahhabism.³⁶ In November 2014 a mosque in Pazardzhik was raided by law-enforcement units. Five years later the arrested imam and another thirteen people were sentenced for inciting religious

32 Дичев, Ивайло, Защо се радваме, че в България не идват мигранти?, Дойче Веле, 6.3.2020, <https://www.dw.com/bg/%D0%B7%D0%B0%D1%89%D0%BE-%D1%81%D0%B5-%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B4%D0%B2%D0%B0%D0%BC%D0%B5-%D1%87%D0%B5-%D0%B2-%D0%B1%D1%8A%D0%BB%D0%B3%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%B8%D1%8F-%D0%BD%D0%B5-%D0%B8%D0%B4%D0%B2%D0%B0%D1%82-%D0%BC%D0%B8%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BD%D1%82%D0%B8/a-52661684>

33 Трѐва, Евелина, Мюсюлманите в България – изследователски проблеми и приноси, Български фолклор, XLIII/2017, 4, pp.415-440.

34 The trends seem to be constant over the last ten years since two surveys of the Institute of Market Economics (2012) and the National Statistics Institute (2018) reach similar conclusions. See: Картографиране на бедността в България, Национален Статистически Институт, World Bank Group, София 2018, Регионални профили: показатели за развитие, Институт за Пазарна Икономика, София 2012

35 Радикализация в България, заплахи и тенденции, Център за изследване на демокрацията, , Анализи 32, София, 2016, p.30

36 Кой плете мрежата на радикалния ислям в България, Капитал, 14.8.2004, https://www.capital.bg/politika_i_ikonomika/bulgaria/2004/08/14/227487_koi_plete_mrejata_na_radikalnia_isliam_v_bulgariia/

hatred, intolerance and violation of state laws to effective terms in prison.³⁷ In light of the two cases, a reasonable concern appears about the possible further process of radicalization in Bulgaria. Kaloyan Konstantinov offers an apt explanation to the Bulgarian phenomenon, claiming that the specific nature of the MRF and the Grand Mufti have an important and positive contribution for the Bulgarian ethnic peace. Notwithstanding the toxic party model applied by MRF and the Grand Mufti self-rule, Kaloyan Konstantinov points out that the former provided a path for political development thus framing the most sustainable alternative to armed resistance.³⁸ The presence and activity of homegrown religious Islamic leadership and political party practically diffuses potential radicalization.

In 2012 a terrorist attack on a bus with Israeli tourists was conducted at the Burgas airport. Although no official organization has taken the responsibility for the attack in which 7 people were killed, including the suicide bomber and the bus driver, the traces indicate the involvement of Hezbollah.³⁹ Gambling tourism from Israel is one of the main activities during the tourist low season in Bulgaria. Although there were no new terrorist attacks on Bulgarian soil, the CSD report claimed that the country is now more exposed to international terrorist organizations than prior to the attack. Other potential terrorist threats are related to the uncontrolled migration, returning ISIS fighters from the region and the graduates from radical Islamic religious schools.⁴⁰

BULGARIA'S INTERNAL SECURITY CONCERNS

While the state security is considered in its internal and international dimensions, it is usually contextualized from state centric perspective. In democracy, the state aggregates the sum of political,

37 Пазарджишкият съд постанови 8,5 г. затвор за Ахмед Муса, 10.12.2019, БНР, <https://www.bnr.bg/post/101202377/pazardzhishkiat-sad-se-proiznasa-po-deloto-za-radikalen-islam>

38 Константинов, Калоян, Да мразиш мюсюлманите в България без никога да си ги срещал. Offnews, 13.3.2019, <https://offnews.bg/analizi-i-komentari/da-mrazish-miusiulmanite-v-balgaria-bez-nikoga-da-si-gi-sreshtal-699166.html>

39 Europol supports investigation into terrorist attack at Burgas Airport, Bulgaria, 5.2.2013, Europol, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/newsroom/news/europol-supports-investigation-terrorist-attack-burgas-airport-bulgaria>; Hezbollah linked to Burgas bus bombing in Bulgaria, 5.2.2013, BBC, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-21342192>

40 Радикализация в България, op.cit. p.30

economic and social processes and is usually juxtaposed against security threats that are exogenous to the state institutions and its interests representing the will of the majority. Liz Campbell highlights the importance of a careful approach towards considering the organized crime as a national security threat. She accurately acknowledges that the elevation of organized crime as a security concern requires the adaptation of the state practices "...including the allocation of greater resources, the creation of specific state entities, the alteration of police operations, and a deeper involvement of intelligence agencies".⁴¹ While agreeing with Campbell's argument, I find it inapplicable in the Bulgarian case due to its embedded dichotomy between the organized crime and the state. Is it an applicable concept when it concerns a country, in which the formal state institutions and informal organized practices have blurred with each other to the extent that the pervasive statement in Bulgaria claims, that "many countries have mafia, but in Bulgaria the mafia has its own country".⁴² The moment in which the mafia takes complete control over the state institutions Campbell's state/organized crime dichotomy disappears. The state institutions capacity is steered to secure the private interests of the power holders.

The uniqueness of the Bulgarian organized crime after 1989 is so impressive that Misha Glenny starts his wonderful book "*McMafia journey through the global criminal underworld*" with the events that led to the death of Ilya Pavlov⁴³ – the eighth richest man in Central Europe according to the Polish Wprost magazine in 2002. Pavlov is only one of the many mafia bosses killed in Bulgaria over the last three decades. The emanation of Bulgaria's reality remains the current Prime Minister Boiko Borisov. A former bodyguard of Todor Zhivkov and an owner of private insurance company in the early 1990ies, he climbed the ladder from being secretary general of the Bulgarian police to a three-time Prime

41 Cambell, Liz, 2014, „Organized Crime and National Security: A Dubious Connection?“, New Criminal LawReview, vol. 17, no. 2, pp. 220-251. (p.221) <https://doi.org/10.1525/nclr.2014.17.2.220>

42 I have heard this argument many times and a quick google search reveals an extensive list of usage of this term. Among others see: Николай Колев – Босия: У нас мафията си има държава. 6.7.2006, <http://obshtestvo.net/%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B%D0%B0%D0%B9-%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%B5%D0%B2-%D0%B1%D0%BE%D1%81%D0%B8%D1%8F-%D1%83-%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%81-%D0%BC%D0%B0%D1%84%D0%B8%D1%8F%D1%82%D0%B0-%D1%81%D0%B8-%D0%B8%D0%BC/>

43 Glenny, Micha, McMafia, A Journey Through the Global Criminal Underworld, Alfred A. Knopf, New York 2008.

Minister of the country. The leaked cables from the US Embassy in Sofia described him as “implicated with serious criminal activity and maintains close ties to Lukoil and the Russian Embassy”.⁴⁴ These general observations touch upon the tip of the iceberg, but they are informative about the scale and the depth of the problem of state-capture in Bulgaria.

The process of state-capture is not immediate. Anna Krasteva claims that post-democratic transformation has a fluid temporality.⁴⁵ It is a lengthy process of slow but persistent dismantling of embedded constitutional checks and balances, growing influence over the judiciary and centralization of powers.⁴⁶ Anna Krasteva adds also the alienation of citizens from the democratic project.⁴⁷

All these tendencies are constant in Bulgarian politics. From the unlimited power of the Attorney General, through the persistent corruption and the mockery of anticorruption efforts, the toothless judiciary and the informal interests of formally political competitors. Already prior to Bulgaria’s membership, the EU was aware of the unfinished democratization homework and established the weak, but important Cooperation and Verification Mechanism (VCM). This mechanism is important source of information about the applied rituals of political symbiosis between manifestly undemocratic and uncontrolled national political system and official EU values.

From this perspective, the last thirty years have caused much more serious internal than external security threats for Bulgaria. The country is at the bottom of all possible rankings concerning well-being, wealth, health and demography, not only among the EU countries. The misfortunate standings in various international rankings pushed local journalists to seek comparisons with countries

44 The next cables go into details concerning his criminal activities, which included among others drug trafficking and money laundering. https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06SOFIA647_a.html

45 Krasteva, Anna, Todorov, Antony, *From Post-Communism to Post-Democracy: The Visible and Invisible Political Transformations Southeastern Europe*, Brill, vol. 44 issue 2, 2020. (in print)

46 Domaradzki, Spasimir, *A Patchy Democracy, Bulgaria’s Peacemeal Efforts to Cope with the Last Thirty Years*, *Visegrad Insight*, 20.1.2020, <https://visegradinsight.eu/patchy-democracy-politics-bulgaria/>

47 Krasteva, Anna, *Post-democracy: there’s plenty familiar about what’s happening in Bulgaria*, 20.11.2019, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/bulgaria-post-communism-post-democracy/>

from Central Asia and Africa as similar examples of governance.⁴⁸ There is probably no more telling data, about the consequences of the Bulgarian political model for the last thirty years than demography. For the last thirty years the country's population decreased from almost 9 000 000 to 7 000 000 without wars, secessions and serious natural disasters, making the country among the fastest shrinking nations in the world. Recognizing the disastrous social, economic and political consequences in the country, Jurgen Roth starts his book "the New Bulgarian Deamons" claiming that Bulgaria is ruled by disheartening hopelessness.⁴⁹

CONCLUSIONS

While offering a brief overview of the main security concerns over the last three decades, this paper attempted to capture the most serious challenges that the country faces today. Paradoxically, Bulgaria's membership in the EU and NATO offers an effective shield from external threats. What seems to be much more pertinent and dangerous is the nature of the Bulgarian political model of state capture, which not only has devastating consequences for the country's integrity, political participation and social cohesion, but also positions the country at the periphery of the process of European integration. There is a burning need for a new transition from the recently defined post-democracy to democracy, if the country is to improve its political system, economic well-being, social cohesion. Without them, a grim future is ahead that will have implications not only for Bulgaria, but also for the region.

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48 Как мафията окупира държавата – факти и цифри – I част, 28.1.2017, <https://frognews.bg/glasat-na-jabata/glasat/kak-mafiata-okupira-darjavata-fakti-tsifri--chast.html>

49 Юрген Рот, Новите български демони, Издателство Слънце, 2008

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Спасимир Домарадски*

Лазарски Универзитет, Варшава, Пољска

БЕЗБЕДНОСТ БУГАРСКЕ – 30 ГОДИНА ПОСЛЕ

Резиме

Рад пружа преглед безбедносних изазова у Бугарској у последњих тридесет година. Без претензија на свеобухватност, аутор приступа схватању безбедности из унутрашње, али и спољне перспективе. Док анализира главне безбедносне изазове у контексту формалног чланства Бугарске у политичким и економским институцијама западног света, рад такође аргументује да су најважније претње сигурности за Бугарску управо интерне, те се односе на проблеме организованог криминала и заробљавања државе.

Кључне речи: *Бугарска, безбедност, безбедносни изазови, НАТО, ЕУ, организовани криминал, заробљавање државе*

* spasimir.domaradzki@lazariski.pl

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