



CENTER FOR
THE STUDY OF
DEMOCRACY

Reports

Pravuzi

Radicalisation

in Bulgaria:

Threats and Trends

32

RADICALISATION IN BULGARIA

THREATS AND TRENDS



**CENTER FOR
THE STUDY OF
DEMOCRACY**

The phenomena of radicalisation today develop and change at high speed, with their extreme forms manifested globally. The destructive dimensions of (violent) Islamist or right-wing radicalisation have become dramatically visible in Europe posing serious challenges to European societies at large. This report aims to address a knowledge gap with regard to how and to what extent internationally observed radicalisation processes are manifested in Bulgaria. Four different forms of radicalisation are investigated, including Islamist radicalisation, right-wing and left-wing radicalisation, as well as football hooliganism. The report provides policy makers and the expert community with a systematic overview of the main risks to which the Bulgarian society is exposed, as well as of the main actors and ideas, the repertoire of actions and the groups at risk associated with radicalisation. The report outlines recommendations for improvement of the policy and institutional response with regard to radicalisation by way of monitoring and prevention measures as well as multi agency collaboration and community engagement.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACAB	All Cops Are Bastards
BHC	Bulgarian Helsinki Committee
BFU	Bulgarian Football Union
BNU	Bulgarian National Union
BSP	Bulgarian Socialist Party
BwC	Bulgaria without Censorship
CCCJD	Central Commission for Combating Juvenile Delinquency
CCB	Corporate Commercial Bank
CEVIPOL	Centre d'étude de la vie politique [Center for the Study of Politics]
CSD	Center for the Study of Democracy
CSKA	Central Sports Club of the Army
CWIHP	Cold War International History Project
ECPR	European Consortium for Political Research
ECRI	European Commission against Racism and Intolerance
EU	European Union
FC	Football Club
For the Homeland – DCI-NL	For the Homeland – Democratic Civil Initiative-New Leaders
CERB	Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria
GURD	Citizens' Union for a Real Democracy
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMRO	Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation
IS	Islamic State
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender
MoI	Ministry of Interior
MP	Member of Parliament
MRF	Movement for Rights and Freedoms
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NFSB	National Front for Salvation of Bulgaria
NMSP	National Movement for Stability and Progress
NSBM	National Socialist Black Metal
RAND	Research AND Development
RPLP/F	Revolutionary People's Liberation Party-Front
SANS	State Agency for National Security
SDI	Sofia Directorate of the Interior
SMC	Senior Muslim Council
TE-SAT	TErrorism Situation And Trend
UBNL	Union of Bulgarian National Legions
UDF	Union of Democratic Forces
USA	United States of America

VMRO-BDM	Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation – Bulgarian Democratic Movement
VMRO-BNM	Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation – Bulgarian National Movement
VMRO-UMA	Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation – Union of Macedonian Associations

INTRODUCTION

Since 11 September 2001, “old” and “new” forms of radicalisation related to religion-inspired, right-wing, left-wing, ethno-nationalist, separatist and single-issue extremism, have undergone dynamic development and are to be found in most European countries. Over the last decade, Islamist radicalisation has become an issue of particular concern for many European governments. Exemplified, until recently, by the terrorist attacks in Madrid (2004) and London (2005) the phenomenon has reached new dramatic dimensions with the violent attacks in Paris from 7 January and 13 November, 2015. The current situation in Syria and Iraq and the emergence of the Islamic State have led to new forms of radicalisation, especially the phenomenon of transnational fighters traveling to and from conflict zones, who are believed to pose serious security threat to many member states. Also worrying for many countries in Europe is right-wing extremism. The terrorist attacks in Norway in July 2011 testified to the highly destructive capacity of this phenomenon. At the same time, lawful manifestations of discontent by movements such as Pegida in Germany bear the potential to escalate into violence.

Preventing and studying radicalisation has become not only European but also a global priority, giving rise to a wealth of publications that explore its motives and causes, as well as the processes whereby individuals and groups come to espouse radical ideas and engage in violent actions. Islamist radicalisation and right-wing extremism have attracted a large amount of research. In the context of resurgence of “old” and rise of “new” forms of radicalisation there is limited understanding of the factors contributing to violence, both among policy makers and academia. Furthermore, there is a lack of consensus in the literature not only on the root causes that lead to radicalisation, but on the very definition and conceptualisation of this phenomenon and its link to terrorism. Policy debates on how to confront different types of radicalisation have been ongoing in many states in the EU. Yet, in many member states decision-makers lack the appropriate evidence to guide policy actions, especially in the field of Islamist radicalisation. Radicalisation has generally been understudied in the countries of Central, East and Southeast Europe although extremism and political radicalism have long existed in most countries in the region.

The terrorist act in Bourgas, Bulgaria on 18 July 2012 was a stark demonstration that the country and its citizens are vulnerable to acts of international Islamist radicalisation. The first such incident to be perpetrated after the 2005 London underground bombings ended a period of relatively low-level jihadist activities with little or no impact on European security. It sounded a wake-up call not only to national authorities, but also to European and allied governments and to the public at large. The terrorist attack in Bulgaria called for an update of the national policy approach to counter-terrorism and the 2008 National Counter-Terrorism Plan. In response to the changing external security environment, the Bulgarian

government has adopted a number of security measures to better monitor, prevent and respond to potential terrorist threats and radicalisation processes, and to counter more effectively the transit of transnational fighters through its territory. While the government response so far has been mainly focussed on better equipping security agencies to enforce counter-terrorism measures and controls, a new national strategy and action plan drafted in 2015 envisage also the designing of “soft” policies and measures for early identification and prevention of radicalisation before it turns to violence, including through multi-agency and community engagement.¹ While this is undoubtedly a development in the right direction, any soft policies and measures need to be designed on the basis of monitoring of groups at risk and investigation of the complex social dynamics and motivating factors that serve as drivers to potential radicalisation; such monitoring and investigation are not currently performed. This need was voiced by Mr. Gilles de Kerchove, the EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator at a round table hosted by CSD in January 2015. Mr. Kerchove stressed the importance of prevention and the need to develop local capabilities at the front-line to recognise early signs of radicalisation processes with the engagement of civil society and local communities.

Although the security threats in relation to international and home-grown Islamist radicalisation are on the increase in the EU,² no in-depth studies have yet been conducted with regard to how Bulgaria might be exposed to such risks. So far, there has been no known involvement of Bulgarian citizens in acts of violent Islamist radicalisation or in Islamist terrorist attacks at home or abroad. However, a worrying trend of symbolic approval of the acts of international Islamist organisations has recently been registered among segments of some isolated and marginalised Roma communities. Logistical support which transiting transnational fighters have received from members of some local Muslim communities is even more alarming. Right-wing extremist groups and individuals are rather vocal when engaging in both lawful (demonstrations and marches) and illegal (violent) acts ranging from hate-filled rhetoric and verbal harassment to unprovoked attacks against foreigners, minority members as well as Muslim or Jewish places of worship. Since the late 1990s, football hooliganism has increasingly become a major channel for manifestations of violence, xenophobia, ethnic and religious intolerance, as well as extremist and radical attitudes.

Although there is no universally accepted definition of (violent) radicalisation there is a wide consensus among scholars that this is a context-bound phenomenon with sociological and political drivers playing as much a role as ideological and psychological ones.³ Radicalisation is understood in a broad way as “the process whereby individuals come to hold radical views in relation to the status

¹ *Стратегия за противодействие на радикализацията и тероризма 2015 – 2020 г. Проект.* Available at <http://www.strategy.bg/PublicConsultations/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&Id=1771> (accessed on 28.08.2015).

² This trend is identified in the last EU TE-STAT Report: Europol (2015), *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report*. European Policy Office, available at: <https://www.europol.europa.eu/content/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-2015>

³ European Commission’s Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation (2008) *Radicalisation Processes Leading to Acts of Terrorism*, p. 7.

quo.”⁴ A radical stance is characterised by a “growing readiness to pursue and support far-reaching changes in society that conflict with, or pose a direct threat to the existing order.”⁵ Scholars often distinguish between violent and cognitive radicalisation. While cognitive radicalisation is associated with the process of adoption of radical ideas per se, violent radicalisation occurs when an individual takes the additional step of employing violence to further the views derived from cognitive radicalism.⁶ According to US intelligence experts,⁷ radicalisation is “the process of adopting an extremist belief system, including the willingness to use, support, or facilitate violence, as a method to effect societal change.” A broader definition of violent radicalisation refers to the phenomenon as the “process of socialisation leading to the use of violence.”⁸

The present publication considers radicalisation to be a complex relational process, which implies the identification of its transformative stages and drivers that may or may not lead to violence. The following notions are viewed as key to studying the radicalisation process as a differentiated and nuanced one:

- There is often a close association between radical or extremist views and attitudes, on the one hand, and the use of violence, on the other, although these two do not necessarily go together. Individuals and groups may espouse radical and extremist views without necessarily deploying aggressive tactics in action. At the same time, involvement in violent acts is not necessarily premised on or driven by adherence to radical beliefs and frames of thinking, but it may be motivated by personal or group loyalty or peer pressure.
- Radicalisation is best understood as a dynamic, multi-stage and multifaceted phenomenon that occurs at the sequence of individual vulnerabilities (biographical exposure) and the interactions with an enabling environment, and is therefore always a context-specific phenomenon.
- When analysing factors of radicalisation, it needs to be asked why, when and how individuals and groups decide to enlist in organisations that advance radical views; and why, when and how some of these individuals (alone or with others) engage in violent acts that (may) involve physical destruction or threat to the safety and lives of human beings. In searching the answer to these questions one should consider the micro (individual), meso (social milieu/group dynamics) and macro (broader societal and political environment) levels of analysis.

Focusing on Bulgaria, this publication addresses knowledge gap regarding the main risks and forms that radicalisation takes in the country in the context of internationally growing radicalisation challenges. The publication explores the manifestations of four different forms of radicalisation – right-wing and left-wing radicalisation, Islamist radicalisation and football hooliganism. Analysis is provided

⁴ Bartlett, J., Birdwell, J. and M. King (2010) *The Edge of Violence*, London: Demos, 2010, p. 1.

⁵ Dalgaard-Nielsen, A. (2010). “Violent Radicalization in Europe: What We Know and What We Do Not Know,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 3(9), 797:814, p. 798.

⁶ Vidino, L. and J. Brandon (2012) *Countering Radicalisation in Europe*, ICSR, King’s College, London, p. 9.

⁷ Allen, C., “Threat of Islamic Radicalization to the Homeland,” Testimony before the U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs, 14.03.2007, p. 4.

⁸ European Commission’s Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation (2008), p. 5.

of their organisational structures and actors, their ideas and ideology and the motivations and root causes that explain their genesis and manifestations (non-violent and violent). In addition, a critical review is provided of the policy approaches, the legal and the institutional frameworks to monitor, tackle and prevent radicalisation in Bulgaria, including identification of existing gaps. This analysis is intended to guide further investigation of indicators and risk factors as the knowledge base for the design and the pilot application of a radicalisation monitoring tool.

I. POLICY APPROACHES TO COUNTERING, MONITORING AND PREVENTING (VIOLENT) RADICALISATION

1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the policy environment, the terminology and concepts used, as well as the strategic and conceptual documents that set out government policy, instruments and measures that are used in countering radicalisation and extremism in Bulgaria. Across Europe, radicalisation that might lead to violence has been increasingly recognised as a significant threat to democratic systems, human rights, citizen's security and social cohesion. While terrorism is not a new issue in Europe, many large scale 'softer' policies were rolled out in the past decade, especially in older EU member states after the rise of militant Islamism and the attacks on European soil. Instead of focusing exclusively on the immediate prevention of attacks, these policies focus on identifying and reversing the radicalisation process which often precedes the use of violence. Meanwhile, EU member states' perspective on the threat posed by radicalisation has widened to include the more traditional threats of right- and left-wing extremists, and nationalist separatists. Counter-radicalisation is approached through the prism of security, human rights or social policy, or through a more holistic integrated approach. The density of specific counter-radicalisation policy programmes and measures is proportionate to the level of threat and the scope of radicalisation processes in societies, while the focus could be on one or more types of radicalism depending on historical circumstances and the changing external environment.

In Bulgaria, radicalisation and violent extremism as potential threats to society have been only recently raised in policy debates and entered the political agenda, mainly in the light of global and EU-wide responses to so called home-grown Islamist radicalisation, the activities of terrorist organisations such as Islamic State (IS) and al'Qa'ida, and the issue of foreign fighters for whom Bulgaria has become a transit zone, both to and from conflict zones in the Middle East. Other forms of violent radicalisation, although having been in existence longer (such as right-wing extremism and football hooliganism), have received considerably lower attention.

Furthermore, the terrorist attack on a passenger bus with Israeli tourists that took place in 2012 in the city of Burgas prompted a thorough review of the preparedness of government institutions to prevent and cope with the consequences of terrorist activity in Bulgaria. As a result, the Bulgarian government has stepped up its efforts to strengthen its legislation and institutional framework in responding to potential terrorist threats, and also to counter more effectively the transit of foreign fighters through its territory. Besides strengthening of the *Criminal Code*

provisions on prosecuting acts of terrorism, the institutional framework was also further developed through enhancing information exchange, coordination and intelligence gathering in the area of counter-terrorism. However, the Bulgarian government and public institutions are yet to develop a more comprehensive understanding and knowledge of radicalisation that might lead to violence, the risks it poses to society, and how to counter it. The policy response so far has been focussed on fending off and preparing to respond to potential terrorist activity, while approaches to addressing factors and processes conducive of such violence are yet to be developed.

In Bulgaria, radicalisation (as defined in this report) has been traditionally perceived as limited to small groups of people or individuals and has been predominantly approached from a national security standpoint, and hence handled mainly by security and intelligence services. Measures have included imposing increased monitoring and repressive measures by the security structures and the judiciary over individuals, groups and organisations whose activities are perceived as posing a risk to national security or facilitating the radicalisation of local Muslims (see further the chapter “Risks of Islamist radicalisation”). Other radicalisation-related phenomena such as hate crime, racism, discrimination and xenophobia have been partially addressed within a broader scope of policy themes such as crime, education, protection of human rights, diversity, social policy, and integration.

The crime of terrorism is defined in the *Criminal Code* (see further the chapter “Legal framework and institutions”). The terms ‘radicalisation’, ‘extremism’, ‘political violence’ and ‘religious violence’ are not well established in the Bulgarian policy or legislative framework, although the latter two are incriminated. The *Criminal Code* includes a number of provisions that can be used for prosecuting radicalisation-related crimes, such as crimes against the republic, crimes against equality of citizens and the crimes against religious denominations. Radicalisation and extremism have not been defined separately as they are not subject to any specific policy, although occasional references to these terms can be found in some documents related to security or social policies, as well as in parliamentary debates. The concepts of radicalisation and extremism are utilised within the policy and operational domain of the intelligence and security services and are embedded in their statutes although not specifically defined. Countering football (sports) hooliganism falls traditionally within the portfolio of the Ministry of Interior (Mol) and is regulated by a separate law.

2. NATIONAL STRATEGIES AND ACTION PLANS

References to radicalisation in policy documents appear mainly in the context of terrorism and national security. The **National Plan for Combatting Terrorism 2008**⁹ is among the first strategic documents referring to radicalisation-related trends although these are viewed fairly narrowly in the context of counter-terrorism. Although the Plan is outdated and has been replaced by a new draft strategy and action plan for countering radicalisation and terrorism, it deserves mentioning as it is the first conceptual document outlining policy objectives and measures to be undertaken towards countering terrorism and radicalisation-related trends. The Plan recognised that the main threat from a terrorist attack being organised and carried out on Bulgarian territory, albeit not immediate, stems from potential actions of single individuals, groups or organisations, Bulgarian or foreign citizens, or “radical elements infiltrated through the channels of illegal migration.”¹⁰ It did not provide a definition of terms such as radicalisation, extremism or radical ideas, but one of its objectives included “preventing the penetration, and countering the influence of radical ideas and their distributors among groups and communities of the Bulgarian population as a basis for terrorist recruitment.”¹¹ The measures envisioned were mainly focussed on exerting greater control and monitoring by security services over foreign citizens from “risk states” residing in the country, migrants and international protection seekers, as well as the activities of local religious foundations.¹² Analysis and monitoring of terrorism-related trends – including anti-constitutional, nationalistic and other organisations, the ethno-religious situation in the country, Islamist fundamentalism, as well as social tensions – are within the remit of the State Agency for National Security (SANS). No differentiation was made between violent and non-violent radicalisation and extremism, as is the case in more recent strategic documents.

The majority of measures included in the Plan were directed towards the prevention of, protection from and response to potential terrorist attacks and subsequent crisis management, and are therefore mainly focussed on operational control, deterrence, better intelligence gathering, information exchange and preparedness. Prevention of radicalisation or countering its root causes were not addressed in the document. There are no publically available assessments or monitoring reports of the implementation of the Plan. **This narrow security-focussed approach to radicalisation threats and how they should be tackled, as well as the lack of clarity and sufficient understanding of key concepts has evolved significantly in more recent strategic documents** discussed below.

In 2013, the **National Security Consultative Council** chaired by the President considered the continuing crisis in the Middle East and the resulting migration pressure on Bulgaria as major factors generating increased risks for national security, including the potential infiltration of persons supporting radical or extremist ideas

⁹ Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria (2008) *Национален план за противодействие на тероризма. Приет с Решение № 745 на Министерския съвет от 26.11.2008 г.* Available at <http://www.strategy.bg/StrategicDocuments/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&Id=497> (accessed on 08.05.2015).

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 2.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 5.

¹² *Ibid*, p. 5-6.

or affiliated with terrorist organisations through the migration flow.¹³ The Security Council at the Council of Ministers adopted a number of emergency measures to deal with the migration pressure, which also included addressing the risks related to terrorism and radical extremism. Again, these included mostly reactive measures and no further analysis of internal radicalisation or proposals for 'soft' preventative measures have been made.

In 2015, a more comprehensive conceptual approach was put forward, which places much greater emphasis on prevention policies and better understanding of radicalisation processes as outlined in the **Draft Strategy for Countering Radicalisation and Terrorism 2015 – 2020**¹⁴ (hereafter referred to as the Draft Strategy).^{15,16}

The development of the strategy is to a large extent an attempt to echo the evolving understanding of radicalisation also at the EU level, and the adoption of a number of EU policy documents which served as its basis.¹⁷ Therefore the philosophy of the strategy in terms of the underlying understanding of the radicalisation concept and how to address it is fundamentally different than the earlier national plan discussed above. The prevention and countering of radicalisation has received the due attention and space in the entire first part of the Draft Strategy, while the second part is dedicated to preventing, countering and responding to terrorism.

Opinions and comments provided during the public consultation process indicate that there is a lack of agreement on the definitions of violent radicalisation, which is in line with the lack of any universally accepted definition in international academic and policy debates on the issue. It provides a useful first attempt at defining key terms¹⁸ (see Box 1), differentiating between violent and non-violent

¹³ Ministry of Interior (2013) Доклад на Министъра на вътрешните работи Цветлин Йовчев на заседание на Консултативния съвет за национална сигурност, 20.11.2013 г. Available at <http://www.mvr.bg/NR/rdonlyres/32924394-C30B-4C6E-B0C2-EEBDD103A43E/0/DOKLADKSN201113FINAL.docx> (accessed on 03.10.2015).

¹⁴ Стратегия за противодействие на радикализацията и тероризма 2015 – 2020 г. Проект. Available at <http://www.strategy.bg/PublicConsultations/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&Id=1771> (accessed on 28.08.2015). According to an earlier draft of the strategy from the end of October 2015, it was planned to cover the period 2015 – 2025.

¹⁵ It was developed by a cross government working group led by the Ministry of Interior and comprised of participants from a wide range of institutions, including the MoI, SANS, the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, the Presidency, the National Security Council at the Council of Ministers, Military Information Service, the Ministry of Justice, the National Intelligence Service, and the Center for the Study of Democracy.

¹⁶ The Draft Strategy was published for public consultations which were closed in September 2015 and at the time of writing the document awaits approval by the Council of Ministers.

¹⁷ European Commission's Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation (2008); European Commission (2014) *Preventing Radicalisation to Terrorism and Violent Extremism: Strengthening the EU's Response*. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions [COM(2013) 941 final], Brussels, 15.01.2014. Available at http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/e-library/documents/policies/crisis-and-terrorism/radicalisation/docs/communication_on_preventing_radicalisation_and_violence_promoting_extremism_201301_en.pdf (accessed on 17.06.2015).

¹⁸ Стратегия за противодействие на радикализацията и тероризма 2015 – 2020 г. Проект, р. 3.

radicalisation, although it remains to be seen whether the proposed definitions would be retained in the policy practice. The definition of terrorism mirrors the one provided in the Bulgarian *Criminal Code*.

Box 1. Definitions of key concepts and terms

Radicalisation is a process of adopting extreme opinions, views, beliefs and ideologies, to the extent of fierce rejection of all alternatives. It is characterised by a decisive readiness for imposing one's views and principles over the rest of society, through rejecting the constitutional foundations of democracy and non-respect for fundamental human rights. Very often it leads to adopting the ideology of violence.

Radicalisation which leads to violence is a phenomenon where individuals or groups of people adopt opinions, views and ideas, which might lead to acts of terrorism.

Violent extremism is a phenomenon where individuals or groups of people support or carry out ideologically motivated violence to achieve their ideological goals.

Deradicalisation is a process most often realised through a system of programmes and measures aiming at reducing the extremity in views and to reintegrate into society those people who are already radicalised.

Disengagement is a process where an individual gives up active participation in a radical group or activity. This process of change does not necessarily mean that this person has given up on their political or ideological views.

Terrorism is any action of criminal nature accompanied by an act of violence which deliberately endangers the lives and safety of the public, and the security of important infrastructure in order to create fear and insecurity in society and to destabilise democratic institutions as a means of achieving concrete political or ideological goals.

Source: *Draft Strategy for Countering Radicalisation and Terrorism 2015 – 2020*, p. 4-5.

The distinction between radicalisation more generally and radicalisation that leads to violence is a step in the right direction, given the frequent misuse of this concept in public debates as being closely related to, or de-facto a precursor to terrorism. Furthermore, the definitions are broad enough to encompass different forms of radicalisation such as politically or religiously inspired, among others. These definitions are in line with EU-level policy discussions and contemporary understanding of radicalisation processes.¹⁹

Radicalisation in the Draft Strategy is understood as “a manifold, dynamic and complex process, which is a threat to national security”, but also as a process of “polarisation and violation of social cohesion, which needs to be addressed at an early stage through a multidisciplinary approach”, as “it is preventable and

¹⁹ European Commission's Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation (2008).

reversible in its early stages.”²⁰ The Draft Strategy therefore envisions “a broad set of measures aimed at preventing radicalisation based on ideological and political beliefs, countering the recruitment of radicalised individuals into terrorist structures, as well as for deradicalisation and social reintegration of former supporters of antidemocratic doctrines, which use violence as a method and/or participants in terrorist activity.” The document acknowledges that a multidisciplinary approach is needed that goes beyond traditional law enforcement methods and engage a wide range of state actors and civil society organisations, the private sector and local communities.

The document further notes that although Bulgarian society does not accept in any form extremist ideologies and decisively rejects all forms of terrorism, the risk of individual members of society or foreign citizens present on the territory of the country engaging in terrorist activity cannot be ruled out. Therefore, the strategy points to the need to develop sustainable skills and knowledge among government institutions and the civil society for identifying and countering the push and pull factors of radicalisation. The main objectives of the Draft Strategy follow the structure of the EU Counter Terrorism Strategy 2005²¹ and the Revised EU Strategy for Countering Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism²² and include:

- Prevention of violent radicalisation of individuals or groups in society.
- Countering the proliferation of terrorist and radical propaganda as well as terrorist recruitment.
- Preventing and countering terrorism on and from Bulgarian territory.
- Criminal prosecution of organisers, perpetrators and facilitators of activities related to radicalisation or terrorism in Bulgaria and any other country.
- Minimising the consequences of terrorism.
- Building public trust, as well as pro-active approach in countering radicalisation and terrorism.

The first part of the Draft Strategy dealing with counter-radicalisation recognises the need to “build expert and analytical capacity” to produce analyses, assessments and deepen knowledge on the factors of radicalisation, its nature and spread in society.²³ This is then expected to serve as the basis for the development of targeted prevention measures and programmes. Further emphasis is put on developing mechanisms for cooperation and active engagement of multiple stakeholders (government agencies, civil society, religious and ethnic communities, etc.) in these efforts, developing and implementing jointly tailored programmes to countering radicalisation in its diverse forms and at the local level, aimed at overcoming vulnerabilities among individuals and groups, as

²⁰ *Стратегия за противодействие на радикализацията и тероризма 2015 – 2020 г. Проект*, p. 2.

²¹ Council of the European Union (2005) *EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy*. Council of the European Union, Brussels, 20.11.2005. Available at <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/doc/srv?!=EN&f=ST+14469+2005+REV+4> (accessed on 21.04.2015).

²² Council of the European Union (2014) *Revised European Union Strategy for Countering Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism*. Council of the European Union, Brussels, 19.05.2014. Available at <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9956-2014-INIT/en/pdf> (accessed on 13.05.2015).

²³ *Strategy for Countering Radicalisation and Terrorism 2015 – 2020, Draft*, p. 8.

well as at countering extremist ideas and propaganda, including through delivering counter-narratives. The development of mechanisms and indicators for identifying and monitoring radicalisation risks early on and applying targeted interventions is also envisioned where well trained and educated “front line officers” are expected to play a key role. Countering hate speech, racism and xenophobia, educating young people and developing critical thinking from early age, stimulating inter-ethnic and inter-religious dialogue and tolerance are among the other areas of priority.

In parallel, a **Draft Plan for Implementing the Strategy for Countering Radicalisation and Terrorism 2015 – 2020** was developed, setting out a number of measures, a timeframe for their implementation and responsible institutions.²⁴ It envisions an elaborate set of measures along the following objectives:

- Developing an efficient **regulatory framework** for prevention of radicalisation and terrorist recruitment, including measures related to streamlining the legal provisions relating to terrorism and radicalisation-related crimes, developing problem-oriented programmes with territorial focus for prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism.
- Building a system for **monitoring and coordination**, including mechanisms for information exchange and partnerships among various government and non-government stakeholders in the analysis, identification and prevention of radicalisation trends and risks, including at the local level.
- Improving the organisation and activities of the **specialised government agencies** in countering radicalisation and terrorism (such as the MoI and SANS).
- Enhancing **administrative capacity**, including targeted trainings for front-line officers and other government employees and experts.

Radicalisation is also mentioned in the **National Strategy for the Integration of Roma (2012 – 2020)**.²⁵ The Strategy’s objectives under the fifth priority area “rule of law and non-discrimination” include:

- Increasing the institutional and public sensibility and intolerance towards acts of discrimination and hate speech. Undertaking measures under high level of priority for the prevention of ethnically motivated radicalisation, especially in young age.
- Increasing the capacity of law enforcement bodies in countering crimes and acts of discrimination, violence and hate based on ethnicity.²⁶

The strategy and the action plan attached to it include a wide range of measures aimed at ensuring tolerance-based multi-ethnic relations, fostering cultural pluralism, social inclusion and equality.

²⁴ *План за изпълнение на Стратегията за противодействие на радикализацията и тероризма (2015 – 2020 г.). Проект към 05.10.2015.* The plan is subject to direct approval by the Council of Ministers.

²⁵ *Национална стратегия на Република България за интегриране на ромите (2012 – 2020).* Available at <http://www.strategy.bg/StrategicDocuments/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&Id=726> (accessed on 02.10.2015).

²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 16.

A 2002 **Strategy on Community Policing**²⁷ and a number of subsequent policy documents laid out the basic principles for community-oriented work of the police. However, radicalisation-related issues have not been specifically problematised within this concept, although emphasis is put on police work in multi-ethnic communities. The implementation of the community policing model is largely perceived as a mere formality by local police units and is not used effectively in the day-to-day police work.

Ensuring non-discrimination and equality of individuals, countering hate crime, racism and xenophobia are issues partially addressed in a few other strategic and conceptual documents, such as the **National Strategy on Migration, Asylum and Integration** (2011 – 2020) and **National Strategy for Integration of Refugees in Bulgaria** (2014 – 2020).

A range of other strategic policy documents on countering crime, youth crime, youth and child development, etc., which did not contain any specific references to radicalisation and extremism were reviewed.

3. THREAT ASSESSMENTS AND STRATEGIC ANALYSES

Threat assessments, situation reports or other analytical documents by government bodies on trends in radicalisation that might serve as basis for policy decisions and public debate – if they exist – have not been made public. The National Intelligence Service (NIS) releases annually an assessment of the external security environment, reports on its activities, sets priorities and drafts prognoses. In its 2014 report, NIS identified international terrorist activities, refugee flows and illegal migration as main sources of risks and threats for security, specifically relating to terrorism and violent radicalisation.²⁸ It foresees an increased terrorist threat for the country following the changing external security environment. A similar assessment of the internal and external security environment provided by SANS and the NIS is included in the Draft Strategy.²⁹ This is one of the few documents that discusses the internal threats and risks related to radicalisation. Although the Strategy adopts a broad understanding of violent radicalisation and aims at countering all its forms, the risks named in the document are mainly relating to trends of **Islamist radicalisation** – external as well as home-grown (see further the chapter on Islamist radicalisation). This assessment sketches only the broader external and internal risks and threats affecting Bulgaria while providing no detail of the actual scope and nature of radicalisation processes in society. It mentions

²⁷ Стратегия „Полицията в близост до обществото“ Утвърдена със заповед на Министъра на вътрешните работи № Ів 907/30.10.2002. Available at <http://police.ngo-rz.org/strategy/strategy.pdf> (accessed on 21.09.2015); Главна дирекция „Национална полиция“ (2011), *Полиция в близост. Стратегически насоки за развитие на интегрирания модел „Полицията в близост до обществото“ 2006 – 2010 година*. Available at http://gdnp.mvr.bg/Policiata_v_blizost/default.htm (accessed on 21.09.2015).

²⁸ Национална разузнавателна служба (2015), *Предизвикателствата на 2014 година. Насоки, приоритети и резултати в дейността на НРС през 2014 г.* Available at <http://www.nrs.bg/zanas/priority> (accessed on 18.07.2018).

²⁹ *Стратегия за противодействие на радикализацията и тероризма 2015 – 2020 г. Проект*, р. 4-5.

that there are indications of polarisation in society along ethnic and religious lines which – when combined with economic inequality, poverty and social isolation, the easy access of extremist propaganda via the internet – become factors creating vulnerabilities and breeding ground for potential home-grown radicalisation.³⁰

Similar assessments of trends and risks of **right- and left-wing extremism** are even scarcer. The issue is rarely discussed in parliamentary debates, if at all. In its annual report for 2011 the Council of Ministers³¹ citing SANS noted that various groups and organisations subscribing to far right, radical or neo-Nazi views are becoming more active. They seek to recruit young people at the age of 14-20 years, including through universities and schools under the pretext of delivering patriotic lectures on historical events. According to SANS, these groups are involved in distributing anti-Semitic and racist propaganda, often drawing on national patriotic rhetoric, and resort to violence against members of the public as a main method for achieving their goals. The assessment does not name any specific organisations or groups, and does not provide any more specific information/data on the scope and nature of these trends. There are no publicly available government reports mapping the extremist actors and the number and types of violent actions performed by them. Shortage of statistical data is another problem that seriously hinders better understanding of the scope of radicalisation trends and the threat associated with them (see further below).

In 2014, a National Counter-Terrorism Centre (NCTC) was established at SANS. Its extended mandate in 2015 included the drafting of situation reports not only on terrorism-related threats, but also in relation to trends in radicalisation and violent extremism. So far such analyses have been released very scarcely by the intelligence services as the issue is considered a matter of national security. Although the Draft Strategy recognizes that the security and intelligence structures need to become more open to society in order to inform and involve various government and civil stakeholders in counter-radicalisation efforts, the issue is highly political and it remains to be seen if the NCTC would be able to establish a practice of publishing evidence-based analyses drawing on systematic methodology, following the examples of other countries such as Germany or the Czech Republic. It would need to develop substantial analytical, methodological and human capacity to achieve this task.

4. MONITORING RADICALISATION TRENDS AND AVAILABILITY OF DATA

So far, radicalisation trends have been monitored mainly by SANS using overt and covert means (use of agents and informants, surveillance, etc.) and on the basis of information received from foreign intelligence services. SANS also monitors the activities of high-risk extremist groups and organisations operating in the country, although there is no publicly available information on which groups are considered high-risk. Incoming migrants and foreigners seeking international

³⁰ Ibid, p. 6.

³¹ Министерски съвет (2012), *Годишен отчет за изпълнение на политиките и програмите на Министерския съвет за 2011 г.*

protection are screened at the point of entry by Border Police (and those classified as high risk also by SANS) for indications of previous affiliation with terrorist groups and involvement in violent activities abroad such as fighting for IS in Syria (including for possession of terrorist/extremist propaganda material). Border guards have received training in this respect and use a system of indicators to recognise risk signs, but more needs to be done to further train and educate first-line officers, given the increased risks of transit of foreign fighters through Bulgarian territory.

Trends and risks associated with football hooliganism and related violent acts are not systematically analysed and evaluated by the authorities. The MoI is well specialised in monitoring and countering such acts from the perspective of safeguarding public order and safety, and countering anti-social behaviour and related crimes. Operational data on violent and high-risk actors, as well as acts of football hooliganism are gathered and recorded in the databases of the regional police directorates, but some interviewees expressed concerns that this data is not entered systematically into the centralised criminal statistics database, and is not used sufficiently for horizontal analyses and policy planning. This means the response to football hooliganism is likely to remain largely focussed on law enforcement/operational efforts and deterrence methods. An in-depth analysis of related risks, trends, factors and vulnerable groups based on data gathered by police or other institutions would enable the gradual development of a long overdue prevention policy approach.

Monitoring of the internet and identification of websites with extremist, terrorist or racist and discriminatory content is carried out by a specialised unit on cybercrime within the Directorate General for Combatting Organised Crime, MoI. Internet monitoring is also used by SANS as a complementary tool for their intelligence and operative work.

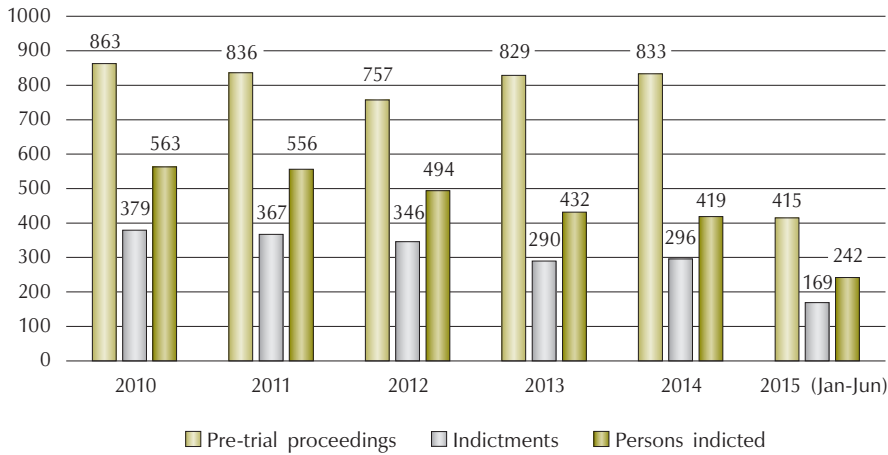
Overall, there are no publicly accessible indicators or methodological tools for monitoring radicalisation trends and risks, or any early-warning systems for flagging up potential radicalisation signs early on. A more systematic approach is necessary. At the same time, several obstacles impede the systematic collection and analysis of reliable data on radicalisation-related trends, actors and crimes. These include the lack of consistent body of legal and policy definitions of criminal offences with extremist background (including on hate crimes and crimes with discriminatory motives). There are also no mechanisms for collection of such statistical data based on clear indicators. This is evident in the discrepancies in the data provided by the MoI and the Prosecutor General's Office on radicalisation-related crimes. Table 1 shows the number of pre-trial proceedings and indictments filed by the prosecution as well as the number of indicted persons in relation to radicalisation and terrorism-related offences over the past five years. With respect to the large number of cases of serious bodily injury investigated and brought to court by the prosecution, no differentiation has been made between cases with racist or xenophobic motives and those with general hooligan motives. Some high-profile incidents reported in the media in recent years of violence against persons with racist/xenophobic motives indicate that more attention needs to be paid to registering and analysing the incidence of such acts in a more systematic manner.

Table 1. Number of pre-trial proceedings, indictments and persons indicted for radicalisation-related crimes 2010 – 2015

	Pre-trial proceedings	Indictments	Persons indicted	Pre-trial proceedings	Indictments	Persons indicted	Pre-trial proceedings	Indictments	Persons indicted	Pre-trial proceedings	Indictments	Persons indicted	Pre-trial proceedings	Indictments	Persons indicted	Pre-trial proceedings	Indictments	Persons indicted
	2010			2011			2012			2013			2014			Jan-Jun 2015		
Type of crime as per the <i>Criminal Code</i>																		
Spread of fascist propaganda or other anti-democratic ideology or forcible change of the constitutional order (Art. 108)	2	1	1	3	2	2	3	1	1	5	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	0
Terrorism (Art. 108a)	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Homicide with hooligan, racist or xenophobic motives (Art. 116, Par. 1, Item 11)	13	14	23	14	8	9	7	9	16	11	7	9	5	7	19	4	1	2
Serious bodily injury with hooligan, racist or xenophobic motives (Art. 131, Par. 1, Item 12)	863	379	563	836	367	556	757	346	494	829	290	432	833	296	419	415	169	242
Crimes against the equality of citizens, including incitement to racial or ethnic discrimination, violence or hate (Par. 162)	4	1	1	21	2	3	7	2	3	13	3	4	11	1	2	7	0	0
Participation in a crowd gathered to commit racist or ethnic violence (Par. 163)	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Desecration of religious temples (Par. 164)	17	1	1	15	1	5	14	0	0	9	0	0	16	2	3	3	1	2
Use of violence and intimidation to prevent others from practicing their religion (Par. 165)	1	0	0	0	6	6	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Establishment of a political organisation on a religious basis/use of religion for anti-state propaganda (Par. 166)	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Source: Prosecutor General's Office.

Figure 1. Pre-trial proceedings and indictments for serious bodily injury with hooligan, racist or xenophobic motives (2010 – Jan-June 2015)



Source: Based on data from the Prosecutor General's Office.

Police statistics on registered crimes with extremist or hate background are even less transparent when it comes to differentiating between general acts of hooliganism and those with extremist or discriminatory background.

Table 2. Number of radicalisation-related crimes registered and cleared by the Ministry of Interior, number of perpetrators (2013 – 2015)

	Year	Registered crimes	Cases cleared up	Perpetrators
Crimes against the equality of citizens and crimes against religious denominations (incl. incitement to racial or ethnic discrimination, violence or hate (Art. 162-166))	2015 (Jan-Sep)	16	4	5
	2014	26	7	17
	2013	16	2	7

Source: Ministry of Interior, 2015.

Reports by non-governmental organisations on the spread and nature of hate crimes, hate speech and the government response,³² however, point out various problems in registering, investigating and prosecuting such crimes by the MoI, the prosecution and courts. These include lack of trust in the police and non-reporting of such crimes, incorrect registration of hate crimes as hooliganism by the police, and legislative gaps (no legal provisions on hate crimes with homophobic motive). One of the reasons for these issues is that hate crimes based on ethnicity, nationality and religion were incriminated only 2011 and law enforcement officers and prosecutors need further training and practice in their application.

5. COUNTER-RADICALISATION POLICY MEASURES AND PROGRAMMES

Although a system of institutions with powers to counter radicalisation and related trends does exist in theory (see further the chapter “Legal framework and institutions”), it is difficult to assess how effective and comprehensive it is. Among other reasons, this is because – except for security/intelligence agencies – the phenomena discussed in this report are not recognised as priorities in the work of the institutions mentioned.

The measures envisioned in the Draft Plan for Implementing the Strategy for Countering Radicalisation and Terrorism (2015 – 2020) are indeed ambitious and cover several essential elements required for a comprehensive and multidisciplinary approach to counter-radicalisation. However, previous experience of other EU member states shows that counter-radicalisation measures are most effective when the existing institutional framework and well-established channels of cross agency collaboration are adapted to the objectives of this specific policy area, rather than creating new arrangements and institutions and burdening the government administration with additional responsibilities.³³ The idea is to integrate counter-radicalisation as much as possible in the day-to-day work and regular responsibilities of those institutions and civil servants that are most likely to come into contact with potentially radicalised individuals. In many other countries well-established mechanisms of community policing, crime prevention, integration and social inclusion are mostly adapted and utilised also for counter-radicalisation purposes. Although this approach is not always unproblematic,³⁴ as front-line officers such as teachers, health and social workers have been used to inform the police about individuals at risk, the existence of mechanisms for cooperation between various

³² Amnesty International (2015), *Missing the point. Lack of adequate investigation of hate crimes in Bulgaria*, London, Amnesty International; Институт „Отворено общество“ (2013) *Обществени нагласи спрямо езика на омразата в България*. Available at http://osi.bg/downloads/File/2013/Hate_speech_report_interactive_BG.pdf (accessed on 10.10.2015); Amnesty International (2012), *Changing Laws, Changing Minds. Challenging homophobic and transphobic hate crimes in Bulgaria*, London, Amnesty International.

³³ Radicalisation Awareness Network (2014) *Preventing Radicalisation to Terrorism and Violent Extremism: Strengthening the EU's Response*. RAN Collection Approaches, lessons learned and practices. First Edition. RAN. Available at http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-best-practices/docs/collection_of_approaches_lessons_learned_and_practices_en.pdf (accessed on 27.09.2015).

³⁴ Vidino, L. and Brandon, J. (2012) *Countering Radicalisation in Europe*. London, International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence.

state and non-state stakeholders at local level is certainly a crucial factor in developing targeted interventions, **as long as intelligence work is held separate from counter-radicalisation objectives.**³⁵

In Bulgaria, such mechanisms exist at the local level, including in relation to crime prevention, youth crime prevention, as well as on integration and ethnic issues. For example, the Commissions for Public Order and Safety at municipal and regional level are the main platforms for information exchange and cooperation between police, local authorities and other relevant institutions and community actors. They can potentially provide the channel for delivering problem-oriented interventions, including through the involvement of social and health services, NGOs, etc. In addition, there are regional and municipal Councils for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues, which are in charge for implementation of Roma integration programmes.³⁶ However, the insufficient quality, depth and scope of multi-agency collaboration within such mechanisms may be a major obstacle to developing working solutions in the prevention and identification of radicalisation risks.

The modern principles of community policing are not as deeply embedded in police work as in some other European countries. Law enforcement personnel from the MoI and SANS officers receive regular training provided by domestic and international trainers on working in multi-ethnic environments, on dealing with discrimination, recognising and investigating hate crimes and dealing with victims, recognising and responding to potential radicalisation processes, among other related topics. However, radicalisation is a complex and sensitive topic and more needs to be done to educate frontline practitioners and experts. At the same time, problems of 'securitisation' of cooperation agendas often undermine the trust between law enforcement and local communities and NGOs, which requires the development of mutual understanding. Increasing administrative and expert capacity of key frontline practitioners must be complemented by a counter-radicalisation infrastructure and mechanisms for multi-agency cooperation, information sharing and support for those at risk. All these preconditions are likely to present significant challenges to Bulgarian institutions.

In relation to youth radicalisation, existing juvenile delinquency bodies at the local level should adapt their focus towards early prevention of radicalisation and developing targeted non-repressive interventions for those already on the path towards radicalisation. These include the Juvenile Delinquency Offices, the Central Commission for Combating Juvenile Delinquency (CCCJD) and the Local Commissions for Combating Juvenile Delinquency. In 2010, CCCJD in cooperation with SANS developed a manual for identification and reform work with minors adopting ideas or joining organisations of extremist and radical nature. The manual was presented to school teachers, pedagogical workers and other first-line workers

³⁵ Brandon, J. and Vidino, L. (2012) "European Experiences in Counterradicalisation," *CTC Sentinel*, 5(6), 16-18, Combatting Terrorism Centre, West Point; Butt, R. and Tuck, H. (2014) *European Counter-Radicalisation and De-Radicalisation: A Comparative Evaluation of Approaches in the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark and Germany*. London, Institute for Strategic Dialogue.

³⁶ Национален съвет за сътрудничество по етническите и интеграционните въпроси (2015), Областни съвети. Available at <http://www.nccedi.government.bg/page.php?category=66> (accessed on 28.09.2015).

to assist them in identifying the signs of right-wing radicalisation and working with youth at risk. Such initiatives should be rolled out country-wide, as minors are one of the risk groups most susceptible to recruitment and propaganda by right-wing extremist groups and ideas. Reform plans to overhaul the predominantly repressive approach to juvenile delinquency towards 'child-friendly justice' are yet to produce any concrete results. Counter-radicalisation considerations should be firmly integrated within such efforts. Building resilience among the at-risk youth population through stimulating critical thinking and social skills in school is another area requiring urgent attention.

II. RISKS OF ISLAMIST RADICALISATION

1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the external and home-grown risks to which Bulgaria is exposed in the context of Islamist radicalisation – a phenomenon that is manifested worldwide. The study poses questions about the presence and the nature of ideas, organisational structures and actors that might be associated with Islamist radicalisation in the country and discusses the root causes for both potential Islamist radicalisation and for the observed resilience towards it on the part of local populations.³⁷

Although the security threats related to international and home-grown Islamist radicalisation are on the increase in the EU,³⁸ no in-depth studies have yet been conducted with regard to how Bulgaria might be exposed to such risks. To date, only one academic publication has discussed comprehensively the threats of Islamist radicalisation in Bulgaria in the context of external developments and internal risks.³⁹ While this publication provides a general frame of discussion, no in-depth exploration of any of the outlined risks has been undertaken as a follow-up. A vast body of literature has been produced focusing on various aspects of the history and the present situation of historical Muslim communities in Bulgaria but there have been few studies on the developments in Islamic theological affiliations conducted after 1989 (coming from the fields of anthropology and Islamic studies).⁴⁰ One of the questions that these studies explore is whether and to what extent the processes of religious resurgence among some segments of the Muslim communities influence individual and collective expressions of religious profession along the axis

³⁷ The analysis is based on desk research, including academic sources, governmental reports and strategies, court case files, media coverage and 10 semi-structured interviews with experts on Islam, Muslim communities and minority-majority relations as well as representatives of relevant intelligence and law enforcement institutions. The research was conducted in May and June 2015.

³⁸ This trend is identified in the last EU TE-STAT Report: Europol (2015), European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report. European Policy Office.

³⁹ Проданов, В. и Б. Тодорова (съст.) (2005) *Рискове за България от ислямски фундаментализъм и тероризъм*, ИК ИФИ-БАН.

⁴⁰ It deals with a range of topics such as the history of relations between the state and minorities, the post-1989 social and economic development of Muslim communities, their migratory practices, identity dynamics and mutual attitudes with the majority Christian population. Some representative studies include: Eminov, A. (1997) *Turkish and other Muslim Minorities of Bulgaria*. New York – Routledge; Желязкова, А. (1997) *Мюсюлманските общности на Балканите и в България*. София – ИМИР; Лозанова, Г., Миков, Л. (1999) *Ислям и култура*. София – ИМИР; Градева, Р. (2001) *История на мюсюлманската култура по българските земи*. София – ИМИР; Карамихова, М., ed. (2003) *Да живееш там, да се сънуваш тук. Емиграционни процеси в началото на XXI век*. Sofia: IMIR.

moderate – radical Islam.⁴¹ Other, even more important aspects of the social life of Muslim communities that might be relevant to the exploration of Islamist radicalisation in Bulgaria remain under-researched. These include the impact of emigration for religious education in religious academies in countries of the Arab world by some members of the old Muslim communities in Bulgaria; the religious interactions between migrating Muslims from Bulgaria and local Muslim immigrant communities in Western Europe; as well as between local Muslims in Bulgaria and immigrating Muslims from countries of the Muslim world. Last but not least, no studies have been conducted on the spread and use of online Islamist propaganda.

Experts have identified four radicalisation risks to Bulgarian society stemming from external factors and influences. The first involves risks related to the activities of various terrorist organisations such as IS and al'Qa'ida. Bulgarian intelligence services point that the level of risk for terrorist attack by international terrorist organisations or individual terrorists on Bulgarian territory has become higher after the first and so far only terrorist attack of 18 July, 2012 committed against Israeli citizens at the Sarafovo airport in Bulgaria. The second risk is associated with the transit of foreign fighters through Bulgarian territory both to and from the Middle East. Foreign fighters returning to their home countries with strong combat experience and high level of radicalisation are considered to pose high security risk for the region in general, including Bulgaria when passing through its territory. The third risk involves the potential for infiltration by radicalized persons and terrorists through the intensified inflows of irregular migrants. The fourth risk is related to the influence that high religious educational institutions abroad might exert over Bulgarian citizens who graduate from them. The "risk" influences are related to the probability of propagation of radical ideas based on interpretations of Islam that are uncommon to the Hannafi Sunni tradition in Bulgaria.

The internal security risks identified by experts are associated with the social deprivation and exclusion of some communities which make them vulnerable to radical (religious) ideologies; the accessibility through the internet of radical propaganda; and the potential of provocation and spread of Islamophobic and xenophobic attitudes.⁴²

A number of important components mark the policy context within which the potential for Islamist radicalisation in Bulgaria is dealt with. First, Bulgaria is the EU member state with the largest autochthonous Muslim community that has been formed over the centuries following the Ottoman conquest at the end of the 14th century. Muslim communities have been part of the modern national Bulgarian state since its foundation in 1878. Respectively, Bulgarian society is the successor of centuries-long experience of interaction between Christian and

⁴¹ Evstatiev, S. (2006) "Public Islam on the Balkans in a Wider European Context", available at: http://pdc.ceu.hu/archive/00003105/01/simeon_evstatiev_final.pdf; Ghodsee K., (2010) *Muslim Lives in Eastern Europe. Gender, Ethnicity, & The Transformation of Islam in Postsocialist Bulgaria*, Princeton University Press; Троева, Е. (2012), „Традиционен” и „нов” ислям в България, *Български Фолклор*, 3-4/ 2012 г., с. 5-23; Иванова, Е. (2014) *Ислямизирани Балкани: Динамика на разказите*, НБУ, София.

⁴² Strategy for Countering Radicalization and Terrorism 2015 – 2020, Draft, p. 4-5; Николов, Й., Росен Б., „Има ли пряка опасност за България”, в. *Капитал*, 9.01.2015.

Muslim populations. Second, hostility towards Islam has been key part of the Bulgarian national discourse which was developed historically in opposition to the (Islamic) Ottoman Empire. A third important component regards the ignorance about Islam as a religion and social practice among present day policy and opinion makers.⁴³ It should be added, however, that to some extent this is the outcome of the fact that little research has been conducted regarding the history of the Islamic profession in Bulgaria as a theological doctrine and practice.⁴⁴

Public debates regarding Islamist radicalisation in Bulgaria, as reflected in the media, revolve around international developments and the processes of religious resurgence among some segments of the Bulgarian Muslim and the Roma Muslim communities. In the first case, Islamist radicalisation is discussed in relation to international conflicts involving the Islamic countries of the Middle East, politically motivated terrorist acts justified by radical and narrow interpretations of Islam (from the September 11, 2001 attack to the emergence of the Islamic State as the most recent and extreme example), as well as in connection to developments such as the debate on scarf wearing in France or the controversy over the Mohammad cartoons in Denmark that had global reverberations. Presently, the public discussion is mostly focused on the threats posed by the transiting foreign fighters as well as the potential threats of infiltration by radical elements within the growing refugee inflows entering the country.

In the second case, the processes of religious resurgence among segments of some Muslim communities are discussed in relation to the adoption of imported orthodox interpretations of Islam,⁴⁵ associated with a return to the roots of the religion as it was professed at the time of Mohammad (Islam purified from all developments afterwards) and not typical to the Islamic tradition in Bulgaria inherited from the time of the Ottoman Empire (the Hanafi Sunni tradition). The question that dominates this debate is whether the process of religious resurgence constitutes or not a home-grown threat of Islamist radicalisation.⁴⁶ The main themes of the public discussion include the activity and influence of foreign emissaries of Salafi Islam, the operation of some semi-authorized Islamic educational institutions in the country, and the processes of adoption of orthodox interpretations of Islam by some segments of the Muslim communities in the country.

⁴³ Evstatiev (2006), p. 40.

⁴⁴ The interest of researchers in Bulgaria has been focused on the ethnic and cultural profile of Muslim minorities and the history of minority-majority relations in the context of the modern national Bulgarian state.

⁴⁵ The term orthodox Islam/orthodox interpretations of Islam is used in this chapter interchangeably with Salafism/Salafi interpretations of Islam.

⁴⁶ Numerous media articles discuss this issue. Experts such as A. Zhelyazkova, S. Evstatiev or V. Chukov draw a line between adoption of Salafi interpretations of Islam and Islamist radicalisation (some examples include: Манчева, М. „Владимир Чуков: В Рибново конфликтът е предизвикан от безработицата“, в. *Новинар* (<http://novinar.bg>), 25.03.2009; Чуков, В. (2013), „У нас ислямът не е радикален“, *Komentator.bg*, 3.01.2013; Евстатиев, С. (2014) „България може да се противопостави на ИДИЛ само с подкрепа на българските мюсюлмани“, в. *Капитал*, 5.11.2014 г.; Желязкова, А. (2012), „Връща ли се българското „Време разделно“?“, 23.09.2012, available at <http://www.librev.com/index.php/discussion-politics-publisher/1777-2012-09-23-10-40-53>).

The public debate on the threat of home-grown Islamist radicalisation in Bulgaria has two analytical dimensions that are often mixed together. The first involves the question how and why an orthodox-based religious resurgence took root in some Muslim communities in the country. The second deals with the question of whether and to what extent these processes may be considered a sign of Islamist radicalisation. The confusion of the two dimensions in public discussions indicates that religious resurgence based on orthodox interpretations of Islam is equal to Islamist radicalisation while specialists on Islam warn that this is not true.⁴⁷ Therefore, the approach of this chapter is to trace and distinguish the processes of religious resurgence based on orthodox interpretations of Islam since 1989 from those that potentially attain aspects that could carry risks of radicalisation.

It should be stressed that while external threats from Islamist radicalisation in Bulgaria prevail among the risks identified by intelligence services, this report focuses on the risks of home-grown Islamist radicalisation. The reasons for this choice are twofold. On the one hand, information about external threats and their manifestations in the country as well as about government actions to counteract them is classified and limited. On the other hand, the discussion about the risks of home-grown Islamist radicalisation is of high public interest. The issue is highly sensitive in the context of the management of inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations in the country given that old Muslim communities constitute 10 to 12 percent of the population and right-wing formations and parties use strong anti-minority and anti-Muslim rhetoric.

2. ISLAM AND MUSLIMS IN BULGARIA

Islam in Bulgaria: demography and social status of Muslim communities

Islam in Bulgaria is professed by a share of 10% of the population who declared their religious affiliation in the latest census from 2011 (see Table 3).⁴⁸ Islam is professed by ethnic Turks, Bulgarian-speaking Muslims⁴⁹ and some Roma. Ethnic Turks are the largest Muslim community and the largest ethnic minority in the country, forming a share of 8.8% of the total population of Bulgaria (588,318

⁴⁷ Евстатиев (2014).

⁴⁸ The share of the Muslim population in the country decreased according to the previous national censuses – 12.2% in the 2001 census and 13.1% in the 1992 census. This gradual decrease observed since 1992 is due to the increasing share of people who do not identify their religion in the national censuses (1992 – 0.1%; 2001 – 3.9%; 2011 – 7.1%) (НСИ (2012) *Преброяване на населението и жилищния фонд през 2011 г.* Том 1 Население. Книга 2 – Демографски и социални характеристики, с. 132. For a detailed account of the representation of Bulgarian speaking Muslims in the demographic statistics note: Иванов, М. (2012), „Помациите според българската етнодемографска статистика“, сп. *Население*, 1-2.

⁴⁹ Bulgarian-speaking Muslims are a community formed during the Ottoman rule when under various circumstances they converted from Christianity to Islam. Members of this community today self-identify in three different ways: some consider and declare themselves Bulgarians, others identify as Turks and a third group self-identify as Pomaks. All of them are ethnic Bulgarians, with Bulgarian being their mother tongue. In order to acknowledge the differentiating ways in which members of this community self-identify, the term chosen to refer to them in this report is Bulgarian-speaking Muslims.

persons as of the 2011 census). Roma form a share of 4.9% (325,343 persons) of the total population in the country, having various religious affiliations, including Orthodox Christianity, Evangelism and Islam (about 30% of the Roma,⁵⁰ according to expert estimates). The majority of Muslims in Bulgaria are Hanafi Sunni (95% or 546,004 persons) followed by a small Shi'a community (27,407 persons). Both the Sunni and the minority of Shi'a profess traditional Islam which has been developed under the influence of the Ottoman Empire and during centuries of interaction with majority Christian populations. This Islamic tradition is different from interpretations and practices of Islam in the Arab world and was termed "Balkan Islam" by Alexandre Popovic, one of the leading scholars in the field.⁵¹

Table 3. Population of Bulgaria by denomination in 2011

Denomination	Number	Share
Total population	7,364,570	
Those who declared religious affiliation	5,758,301	100.0%
Eastern Orthodox	4,374,135	76.0%
Muslim	577,139	10.0%
Catholic	48,954	0.9%
Protestant	64,476	1.1%
Jewish	706	0.0%
Armenian – Gregorian	1,715	0.0%
Persons who do not declare their religious denomination	409,898	7.1%
Not affiliated with any	272,264	4.7%

Source: National Statistical Institute, National Census Results 2011.

Bulgaria hosts a small immigrant community with Muslims immigrants being in the minority. The total number of legally residing immigrants in the country in 2013 was 43,215 persons. The share of Muslims from the top ten countries of origin was 23% (a total of 9,973 persons coming from Turkey, Syria and Iraq). The few research studies conducted reveal that there is little religious interaction between local Muslim minorities and Muslim immigrants in Bulgaria.⁵²

The social and economic status of Bulgaria's Muslim minorities (Turks, Bulgarian-speaking Muslims and Roma) is lower than that of ethnic Bulgarians. In the

⁵⁰ Институт „Отворено общество“ (2008) *Ромите в България*. Информационен справочник, Институт „Отворено общество“ – София, с. 12.

⁵¹ Popovic, Alexandre (1986), *L'Islam balkanique: les musulmans du sud-est européen dans la période postottomane*, Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz.

⁵² Troeva, E. and Mila Mancheva (2010) "Gender, Migration and Religion. Immigrant Muslim Women in Bulgaria", (www.gemic.eu).

post-communist period and in the context of country-wide economic crisis, the Muslim communities were the hardest hit. They had consistently higher levels of unemployment and had poorer access to healthcare and public education. Statistical data from 2011 reveals that the Roma and the Turkish ethnic communities both have lower levels of employment and educational attainment than members of the majority Bulgarian ethnic community. The ethnic differences in employment and unemployment are stark, with 19.4% of the Roma, 33.7% of the Turks and 46.9% of the Bulgarians being employed and 19.3% of the Roma, 11.7% of the Turks and 6.6% of the Bulgarians being unemployed.⁵³ In education, 23% of the Bulgarian ethnic population, 5% of the Turkish ethnic population and 0.3% of the Roma population have completed university education. Similarly, 47.5% of the Bulgarian ethnic majority, 26% of the Turkish ethnic minority and 6.8% of the Roma minority have upper secondary education. At the same time, 20% of Bulgarian citizens of Bulgarian ethnicity have only lower secondary education against 43% of those with Turkish ethnicity and 35.3% of the Roma.⁵⁴ In 2011, of the population aged 7 and above only 0.4% of ethnic Bulgarians never attended school as opposed to 3.6% of ethnic Turks and 9.4% of the Roma.⁵⁵

Organisation of the Islamic denomination in Bulgaria

The relationship of the Islamic denomination and the state is regulated by the Denominations Act, according to which all confessional denominations (including the Islamic denomination and the Orthodox Christian denomination) are declared independent from the state (Art. 4/2) and are eligible for state budget subsidies (Art. 28). In order to be acknowledged as a legal person the Islamic denomination has to be registered in the Sofia City Court (Art. 15). The state body designated to oversee the relationship between the government and the denominations in the country is the Directorate of Religious Denominations at the Council of Ministers (Art. 35).

The structure of the Islamic denomination in Bulgaria is governed by the Statute⁵⁶ and attendant regulations for the functioning of its main bodies – Chief Muftiate and Senior Muslim Council.⁵⁷ It is led by the Chief Mufti who heads the institution of the Chief Muftiate. The Chief Muftiate represents all Muslims in Bulgaria, regardless of their ethnicity and the branch of Islam they belong to. Thus, it is

⁵³ Национален статистически институт (2011) *Преброяване на населението и жилищния фонд през 2011 г.* Том 1 Население, Книга 3. Икономически характеристики на населението, с. 56. <http://www.nsi.bg/census2011/pagebg2.php?p2=175&sp2=218>

⁵⁴ Национален статистически институт (2011) *Преброяване на населението и жилищния фонд през 2011 г.* Том 1 Население, Книга 2. Демографски и социални характеристики, 2-11, с. 194. <http://www.nsi.bg/census2011/pagebg2.php?p2=175&sp2=218>

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Устав на Мюсюлманското изповедание, 2011, available at <http://www.grandmufti.bg/bg/za-nas/normativni-dokumenti/881-ustavi.html>

⁵⁷ Правилник за организация на дейността на Главното Мюфтийство и структурите на мюсюлманското изповедание, 2011; Правилник за организацията и дейността на Висшия Мюсюлмански Съвет на мюсюлманското изповедание в Република България, 2011; Правилник за дейността на свещенослужителите (ваиз, имам-хатиб, мюеззин), 2011. available at: <http://www.grandmufti.bg/bg/za-nas/normativni-dokumenti/880-pravilnitzi.html>

in charge not only for the Sunni of the Hanafi school (the majority), but also for the Shia (also called Alevi/Kizilbashi/Bektashi) who have representatives in the Senior Muslim Council (SMC). The SMC is the highest administrative body of the Muslim denomination empowered to convene Muslim Conferences for the election of the new Chief Mufti, his deputies and the chairman of the SMC.⁵⁸ The highest authority of the Muslim denomination is the National Conference which has its chairman and members (Statute of the Muslim Denomination, 2011, Art. 22/1). Some of its main prerogatives include the changes and approval of the Statute of the Denomination, the election of the Chief Mufti and the chairman and the members of the SMC.⁵⁹ In 2015, the Chief Muftiate included 21 regional Muftiates in towns with larger Muslim communities.⁶⁰ In 2010, the number of imams was approximately 1,000. The number of mosques and masjids in 2010 was 1,156 and 302 respectively and the number of registered mosque boards of trustees in 2011 was 1,225.⁶¹

With regard to funding the absolute volume of the state subsidy to the Muslim denomination is gradually rising from 180,000 levs in 2011 to 360,000 levs in 2014.⁶² However, state funding remains rather moderate and insufficient to cover the denominational needs of the Muslim community. This is one reason that prompts the openness of the Chief Muftiate to foreign funds coming either through bilateral agreements (from Turkey and Iran) or through donations from other Muslim states.

In the post-communist period the Muslim leadership appeared deeply divided by struggles for control over the Chief Muftiate. These struggles were manipulated by political parties among which the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF) played an active role. The control over the Chief Muftiate and the resources which the institution was managing translated into a political capital and provided opportunities for consolidation of the Muslim/Turkish vote. As a result, since the early 1990s two High Muslim Councils have existed, each backed by a different political party and electing two different Chief Muftis. The conflicts between the two factions of the Muslim denomination went throughout the period and served to weaken the authority of the institution as spiritual leader of Muslims in Bulgaria.⁶³

Education

The High Islamic Institute was established in 1998 as a university preparing clerics and scholars. However, it does not have official accreditation by the Bulgarian authorities, respectively the diplomas are not recognised in Bulgaria and students

⁵⁸ Zhelyazkova, A. (2014) "Bulgaria", in Joselyne Cesari (ed.) *Oxford Handbook of European Islam*, Oxford University Press, p. 591.

⁵⁹ Устав на мюсюлманското изповедание, 2011, Art. 26/1.

⁶⁰ <http://www.grandmufti.bg/bg/glavno-menyu-rm.html>

⁶¹ Zhelyazkova (2014), p. 591-592.

⁶² U.S. Department of State, International Religious Freedom Reports, Bulgaria for 2011, 2012, 2013, and 2014.

⁶³ For a detailed account and analysis of the history of post-communist rivalries and divisions in the Muslim leadership see Chodsee (2010), pp. 116-129.

cannot continue their studies under Master's programs in neither Bulgarian nor European universities. The Institute does not have appropriate facilities and relies on to a great extent on financial support and donations from Turkey and other Muslim countries.⁶⁴ According to Evstatiev,⁶⁵ the Institute offers an "exclusively low level of education and suffers from the lack of qualified staff," and is not capable of producing well-educated graduates.

Three secondary Islamic schools in Bulgaria (in Shumen, Momchilgrad and Russe) are accredited by the Ministry of Education and Science and grant officially recognised secondary school degrees. The schools are financed mostly by donations from Turkey and by the Chief Muftiate and teach Islam, Arabic, Turkish and English languages in addition to all mandatory classes envisaged by the national curriculum.

Some of the Muslim boards of trustees (Muslim or mosque boards of trustees) run Qur'an classes, while the Chief Muftiate organizes summer Qur'an classes, as well as exams for children for the level they have reached in memorising the Qur'an.⁶⁶ These classes (imam courses according to Ghodsee⁶⁷ or religious schools of the Qur'an course type and Qur'an courses according to Evstatiev⁶⁸) have no official accreditation and are often funded by various religious foundations or foreign individuals. While the curricula in these courses is in principle approved by the Chief Muftiate it is not clear to what extent the Muftiate extends its control over the curricula of some of them.⁶⁹ According to Evstatiev,⁷⁰ as with the Islamic Institute the Qur'an courses are providing education at very low level. Their graduates can become imams or hodjas only. The lack of transparency regarding the funding sources for the Qur'an courses as well as regarding the level of control over their curricula exerted by the Chief Muftiate have been the subject of occasional commentaries in the media.⁷¹

Another educational path is prompted to some extent by the lack of official accreditation of the High Islamic Institute and by the fact that the existing religious educational institutions in Bulgaria are chiefly adapted to the needs of ethnic Turks and do not correspond adequately to the needs of Muslim Bulgarians. This option involves religious education of young Muslims from Bulgaria in Islamic universities in Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Jordan (with the support of the Chief Muftiate and official funding from Turkey or informal funding from various foreign foundations). Some of the graduates from foreign religious universities have become

⁶⁴ Zhelyazkova (2014), p. 593.

⁶⁵ Evstatiev (2006), pp. 57-8.

⁶⁶ Zhelyazkova, A. (2014) "Bulgaria", in Joselyne Cesari (ed.) *Oxford Handbook of European Islam*, Oxford University Press, p. 592.

⁶⁷ Ghodsee (2010), p. 114.

⁶⁸ Evstatiev (2006), p. 58-9.

⁶⁹ Ghodsee (2010), p. 114.

⁷⁰ Evstatiev (2006), p. 59. A similar opinion about the low level of religious Islamic education in Bulgaria was expressed also by Mihail Ivanov, expert in minority-majority relations (Expert interview, 18.06.2015).

⁷¹ Виж. напр. Йорданова, Я. (2004) „Ислямските училища не са това, което са“, в. *Капитал*, 21.08.2004; Tavanier, Y. (2005) "Bulgaria: Mysterious Mosques and Schools", 27.01.2005, Transitions Online.

the vehicle of religious resurgence among some communities of Bulgarian Muslims associated with import of Salafi interpretations of Islam, which are uncommon to the Hanafi Sunni tradition in Bulgaria.⁷²

Channels of penetration of Salafi interpretations of Islam in Bulgaria⁷³

Since 1989, after 45 years of communist regime Muslims in Bulgaria started to be exposed to the outside world and the umma (the global Muslim community). The opening of borders and the freedom to travel coincided with liberation of all suppressive measures regarding the profession of religion which were dominating the atheist communist society before 1989. As a result, Muslims in Bulgaria were exposed to interpretations of Islam different from the Hanafi Sunni tradition characteristic of the Balkans. The main channels through which these new (for the region) interpretations of Islam were reaching Muslims in Bulgaria involved: 1) foreign missionaries; 2) foreign charitable aid coming from Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia or Kuwait; 3) migration for religious education by young Muslims in the prestigious religious universities of Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia; and 4) migration to Western European countries and encounters with local (immigrant) Muslim communities.

Charitable aid from Muslim countries targeted Europe for the first time after 1989. In the Balkans, activities of both emissaries and foundations were triggered by the Bosnian war, with Bulgaria being targeted together with Bosnia, Albania and Macedonia. While in the countries embroiled in the conflicts of the disintegration of Yugoslavia Islamic aid was bringing supplies and arms to the Bosnian army it was also tightly linked to proselytizing of “true” interpretations of Islam and of practices of orthodox Islamic profession. In Bulgaria, since the early 1990s, aid has been provided by Turkey and Iran through bilateral agreements and by Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait through unofficial channels (NGOs or private individuals).⁷⁴ Resources from the Muslim world were directed to the construction of new mosques, opening of free Qur’anic schools, Islamic centres, free boarding houses for Muslim children as well as for the translation, publication and distribution of Islamic literature. In addition, stipends were given to devout families to make the pilgrimage to Mecca and to young people to travel abroad.⁷⁵ These activities have

⁷² Zhelyazkova (2014), pp. 593-594; Chodsee (2010), p. 114; Evstatiev (2006), pp. 60-61.

⁷³ *Salafism* emerged as intellectual movement in the Al Azhar Academy in Cairo at the end of the 19th century with the aim to purge Islam of impurities introduced during centuries of religious practices (termed “traditional Islam”) and return to the Islam practiced by Muhammad and the early Islamic community. Respectively the term “*salafi*” denoted those who follow the example of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad. *Salafis* stand for purified Islam strictly following *Qur’an* and the *Sunna* which is a way to eliminate human subjectivity and thus allowing the identification the singular truth of God’s command (Wiktorowicz, Q. (2005) A Genealogy of Radical Islam, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 28:75-97, p. 75). Three branches have evolved within the Salafi movement: (i) purists who put focus on non-violent methods of propagation, purification and education, (ii) a political branch, whose followers advocate the application of the *Salafi* creed in the political arena, and (iii) *jihadist* branch whose followers take a militant position arguing that the current context calls for violence and revolution.

⁷⁴ Ghodsee (2010), p. 134-139; Kerem O. (2010) *New Islamic Actors after the Wahhabi intermezzo: Turkey’s Return to the Muslim Balkans*, European Studies Centre – University of Oxford, p. 19, available at: https://wikileaks.org/gifiles/attach/126/126845_Oktem-Balkan-Muslims.pdf (accessed on July 15, 2015).

⁷⁵ Ghodsee K. (2010), p. 133. The provision of financial aid to young Muslims for travel for religious education is reported also by Antonina Zhelyazkova, Expert Interview, 5.06.2015.

facilitated the exposure of members of the Muslim community in Bulgaria to the global umma and to interpretations of Islam uncommon to the region. Foreign emissaries visiting and providing lectures in mosques in the Muslim populated regions contributed to the process. However, they were not accepted by the Turkish community and after an initially better reception by some communities of Bulgarian-speaking Muslims they also dissociated themselves from these emissaries.⁷⁶ A growing suspicion towards foreign Islamic aid⁷⁷ led to measures for monitoring and rejection of the registration of some of these organisations by Bulgarian authorities.⁷⁸ However, the import of Salafi interpretations of Islam was perpetuated and facilitated by the return to Bulgaria of young Muslims who graduated from Islamic universities in Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia. Most of these graduates returned to become imams or teachers in the network of Qur'an schools. Their number in 2014 amounted to about 30 graduates from Jordan, 30 from Saudi Arabia and 30 from Egypt and other countries of the Arab world.⁷⁹ Upon their return some of the foreign religious university graduates started introducing new practices related to orthodox Islam entailing the purification of local traditional Islam from so-called non-canonical practices. This process has been uneven in the regions with Bulgarian-speaking Muslims with some communities refuting the new preaching,⁸⁰ segments of other communities adopting it and others becoming an arena of intergenerational conflicts between old and young religious leaders. The outcome of the intergenerational tension in the villages of the third type is the establishment of two mosques with two different imams.⁸¹

History of (violent) Islamist radicalisation

So far there has been no known involvement of Bulgarian citizens in acts of violent Islamist radicalisation or in Islamist terrorist attacks both at home and worldwide. In only one instance, a Bulgarian citizen was arrested by the Bulgarian authorities under suspicion of being indirectly linked to the perpetrators of the terrorist attack in Madrid on 11 March 2004.⁸² On the other hand, a number of tragic events indicate that Bulgaria and Bulgarian citizens are vulnerable to acts of international Islamist radicalisation. On 27 September 2003, the Bulgarian military

⁷⁶ Expert Interview with Antonina Zhelyazkova, 5.06.2015.

⁷⁷ Николов, Й. (2004) „Първи идват емисарите“, в. *Капитал*, 14.08.2004 г.; Йорданова (2004); Tavanier (2005).

⁷⁸ Виж напр. Николов, Й. „България е в глобалния план на радикалните ислямисти“, в. *Капитал*, 22.09.2001.

⁷⁹ Ahmed Ahmediv, Chief Secretary of the Chief Muftiate shared the following data in an interview in Capital weekly (Зорница, С., „Какво патриотично има в това да изправяш хората едни срещу други“, в. *Капитал*, 28.03.2014). The number of graduates from foreign Islamic universities in 2014 amounted to 300 persons, of whom about 70% graduated in Turkey, 10% in Jordan, 10% in Saudi Arabia and the rest in Egypt and other countries of the Arab world.

⁸⁰ Expert Interview, Antonina Zhelyazkova, 5.06.2015.

⁸¹ Троева (2012), p. 5-23.

⁸² The Bulgarian citizen, Tony Radev, was arrested under suspicion of being linked to the perpetrators of the Madrid terrorist attack from 2004. However, he was released within a month as no proof was found of his engagement with the preparation of the terrorist act (*Bginfo.es*, „Справка за атентатите в Мадрид (2004 г.) и Лондон (2005 г.)“, 29.03.2010; Николов, Й., „Хасковската връзка в атентатите в Мадрид остава недоказана“, в. *Капитал*, 02.04.2005; *Mediapool.bg*, „Испания иска да разпитва отново българина Тони Радев заради атентатите в Мадрид“, 14.03.2005.

regiment in the military base of the town of Karbala in Iraq (part of the Multi-National Force in the country) was targeted by a lorry loaded with explosives. The attack took the life of five Bulgarian soldiers and injured 27 others.⁸³ In July 2004, two Bulgarian drivers were taken hostage in Iraq and subsequently executed by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's Islamist Organisation of Monotheism and Jihad (al-Tawhid wal-Jihad).⁸⁴ Finally, in 2012, Bulgaria for the first time was targeted by a terrorist attack, which was plotted externally and committed against Israeli citizens visiting the country for holidays. In the attack, five Israelis and one Bulgarian were killed together with the perpetrator himself and another 35 persons were injured.⁸⁵ On 5 February 2013, the Bulgarian government officially named Hezbollah as the perpetrator of the terrorist act⁸⁶ and as a consequence the military wing of the organisation was included in the EU list of terrorist organisations.⁸⁷

3. ORGANISATIONAL FORMS AND ACTORS

The discussion about the presence and nature of organisational structures associated with Islamist radicalisation in Bulgaria needs to be conducted with the awareness that no such acts have been perpetrated in the country, no research has been undertaken and the work of intelligence and law enforcement agencies has been associated with prevention rather than reaction. In the context of close monitoring of groups adopting Salafi interpretations of Islam and the imposition of measures to halt the channels through which such influences penetrate the country, the intelligence services admitted that there were no cells of Islamist radicals in Bulgaria⁸⁸ (more on this in the chapter "Legal framework and institutions").

Therefore, what can be discussed are the structures in association with which some Roma recently demonstrated sympathy with IS based on adopted Salafi interpretations of Islam. In addition, a brief review is provided of the structures along which the proselytising of Salafi interpretations of Islam has taken place among Bulgarian-speaking Muslims.

According to law enforcement and intelligence experts close monitoring is needed of some groups among the Roma communities in the towns of Pazardjik, Plovdiv, Nova Zagora and Asenovgrad where groups of Muslims and recent Muslim converts profess simplified interpretations of Salafism and in some instances manifest sympathy with the Islamic State. The core group of Salafi followers is composed of 50-60 persons based in Pazardjik and motivated by their leader

⁸³ Bulgarian Ministry of Defence, http://www.md.government.bg/bg/tema_MissionsOperations_Over.html#02

⁸⁴ В. *Капитал*, „Двама българи заложници на терористи,” 10.07.2004.; *Vesti.bg*, „Лазов екзекутиран, нов ултиматум”, 14.07.2004.

⁸⁵ *Dariknews.bg*, „Бургаският агент”, http://dariknews.bg/view_topic.php?topic_id=356

⁸⁶ Лалов, Н., „България официално обвини Хизбула за агентата в Бургас”, *Mediapool.bg*, 5.02.2013.

⁸⁷ Янков, К., „ЕС постави военното крило на „Хизбула” в списъка с терористични организации”, в. *Дневник*, 22.07.2013.

⁸⁸ В. *Капитал*, „Това не е клетка на „Ислямска държава”, но можеше да бъде”, 26.11.2014; Филева, Л., „ДАНС и Прокуратурата с акция за „генерална превенция” срещу Ислямска Държава”, в. *Дневник*, 26.11.2014.

Ahmed Musa, with similar groups emerging in the Roma quarters of the other mentioned cities.⁸⁹ The group has no clear hierarchy, however, Ahmed Musa being its informal leader. Recruitment usually targets young persons with addiction problems who are offered support, helped to find wives and work.⁹⁰ According to law enforcement experts, recruitment into Salafi Islam among the Roma is also associated with financial stimulus for wearing the niqab, for example. More specifically financial stimulus is considered an initial motivating factor, followed by the development of more authentic pious attitude and feeling.⁹¹

It is important to note that the leaders of these groups have the status of informal Islamic preachers who do not have the required religious education and are not part of the structure of the Islamic denomination in the country under the Chief Muftiate. In addition, the recently constructed mosque in the town of Pazardjik is a private one that is not under the jurisdiction and the control of the Chief Muftiate. Ahmed Musa – the informal leader of the Pazardjik group – has been prosecuted three times (in 2004, 2012 and 2015) for propagating anti-democratic ideas, religious hatred and incitement of war.

There is scant information regarding the trajectory of Musa's conversion to Islam and gradual association with more radical interpretations of Salafi Islam. According to some sources Musa encountered and embraced Salafi interpretations of Islam while in Germany or Austria.⁹² According to other sources he converted to Islam in Vienna in the 1990s but was influenced to profess Salafi interpretation of Islam while attending the Qur'an course in the town of Sarnitsa, which was closed down in 2007 by the Bulgarian authorities.⁹³ Although some reports point to Musa's arrest in Cologne on suspicion of associating with local radical Islamist circles, no further details are available regarding his arrest.⁹⁴

The structures that have been associated with proselytising Salafi interpretations of Islam in Bulgaria involve foreign emissaries who operated in the country in the 1990s; various Islamic foundations and associations some of which functioning with foreign charitable donations from Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait;⁹⁵ and

⁸⁹ However, the number of persons identified to be involved in providing logistical support to transiting foreign fighters is rather limited (five to ten persons), Expert interview, representative of law enforcement/intelligence institutions, 18.06.2015.

⁹⁰ Expert interview, representative of law enforcement/intelligence institutions, 15.06.2015.

⁹¹ Expert Interview, representative of law enforcement/intelligence institutions, 18.06. 2015.

⁹² According to law enforcement experts, it took place in Germany (interviews, representative law enforcement/intelligence institutions, 15.6.2015 and 18.06.2015), while some media reports claim it was in Austria (Илков, Л. "Имамът Ахмед Муса прегърнал исляма в Австрия", 24 часа, 1.12.2012).

⁹³ Обвинителен акт, Досъдебно производство № 87/2014, Преписка вх. № 2291/14.

⁹⁴ Филева, Л. „Проф. Евгения Иванова: Не допускам, че „Ислямска държава“ може сериозно да спечели когото и да било в България”, в. *Дневник*, 30.11.2014. His arrest in Cologne was also mentioned in an expert interview with representative of law enforcement/intelligence institutions, 18.06.2015.

⁹⁵ Lists of selected Islamic foundations and associations in Bulgaria can be found in Ghodsee (2010), p. 206 and Троева (2012), pp. 11-12. However, no study has been conducted of the Islamic foundations and organisations in the country and respectively no information is available with regard to whether and to what extent those of them associated with proselytism of Salafi interpretations of Islam might have been promoting radical Islamist ideas.

the denominational structure of the Chief Muftiate with some imams having become proponents of new Salafi interpretations of Islam after having received their religious education in Islamic universities abroad. Some media reports point that the curricula of some Qur'an courses in the country may involve teaching of Salafi interpretations of Islam. A journalist investigation of August 2004 turned attention to the Qur'an course in the town of Sarnitsa as teaching orthodox Islam different from the Sunni Hanafi tradition. The investigation brought attention to the lack of transparency regarding the funding sources for the Qur'an courses as well as regarding the level of control over their curricula exerted by the Chief Muftiate.⁹⁶

While proselytism and adoption of Salafi interpretations of Islam is a recent development that deserves attention, it needs to be clearly distinguished from Islamist radicalisation and needs to be studied as a phenomenon at the intersection of specific local social, economic, cultural and identity dynamics.

4. REPERTOIRE OF ACTIONS AND IDEAS RELATED TO ISLAMIST RADICALISATION

So far, there has been no known involvement of Bulgarian citizens in acts of violent Islamist radicalisation or in Islamist terrorist attacks both at home and internationally. In only one instance a Bulgarian citizen was arrested by Bulgarian authorities under suspicion of being indirectly linked to the perpetrators of the terrorist attack in Madrid from 11 March 2004 but was released within a month as no proof was found of his engagement.⁹⁷ Unlike many European countries, Bulgaria donated no transnational fighters and has no cells of radical Islamists in the country.⁹⁸ There have been occasional reports on foreign citizens passing through the territory of the country being suspected of affiliations with international terrorist groups. Several arrests and subsequent deportations have taken place in this regard, among them that of three foreign citizens (on 16 December 2014) under investigation for terrorist activity by both the Spanish security services and Interpol;⁹⁹ or that of a French citizen under European arrest warrant and indictment of terrorist activity and affiliation with the perpetrators of the terrorist attack against Charlie Hebdo newspaper on 7 January 2015.¹⁰⁰ Bulgaria, together with other EU countries, has become a transit route for transnational fighters on their way to Syria or Iraq and back. According to data of the National Security

⁹⁶ Йорданова (2004); Tavanier (2005).

⁹⁷ For more details, please refer to footnote 82.

⁹⁸ Acknowledged by the then head of the National Security Service, Vladimir Pisanchev at a press conference on 26 November 2014, В. *Капитал*, „Това не е клетка на „Ислямска държава“, но можеше да бъде“, 26.11.2014; в. *Дневник*, „ДАНС и прокуратурата с акция за генерална превенция срещу ИД“, 26.11.2014 г.

⁹⁹ В. *Дневник*, „България е задържала трима, издирвани за тероризъм, на път за Сирия“, 17.12.2014.

¹⁰⁰ *Mediapool.bg*, „Заподозреният в тероризъм, Фриц Жьоли Жоашен, бе екстрадиран във Франция“, 29.01.2015; *Vtv Новините*, „Стрелец от „Шарли ебдо“ – стар приятел на Фриц-Жоли Жоашен“, 13.01.2015.

Agency, cited in media reports, in 2013 a total of 82 transnational fighters transited the country; in 2014 their number was 154 and in the first six months of 2015 – 96. According to the same reports some of these persons have been either intercepted at the border because lacking proper travel documents or apprehended under European arrest warrants.¹⁰¹

Acts of symbolic approval for radical Islamist organisations

Since the beginning of the 21st century, individuals or groups of Muslim Roma (some of whom recent converts) have in certain instances manifested sympathy to more radical interpretations of Salafi Islam or even with international (radical) Islamist organisations. The first such act was reported as early as 2003 when a banner saying “The state is a Caliphate” was displayed above two houses in the Roma Iztok quarter in the town of Pazardjik, where followers of the banned Islamist organisation “Halifat” (Caliphate) were gathering.¹⁰² Since 2013, there has been a trend of acts of demonstration of sympathy to fighters from the organisation “Al’Qa’ida in Iraq”, and later IS in cities like Pazardjik, Plovdiv and Asenovgrad. For example, in October 2014 a video was uploaded on the Facebook profile of the chief Islamic preacher in the Pazardjik Roma quarter – Ahmed Musa. The video showed waiters at a Roma marriage wearing T-shirts with the sign of IS and taking pictures of themselves.¹⁰³ According to media reports about the evidence collected in the SANS-led operation that followed (25 November 2014), members of the community possessed IS advertisement materials such as hats, T-shirts, stickers, flags, all with the IS sign; as well as video materials displaying preaching and glorifying IS and advocating for the establishment of a Sharia state.¹⁰⁴ The latest incident of this kind involves a picture posted in the personal Facebook profile of informal Islamic preacher Remzi Hasan of the town of Harmanli of himself with the flag of IS.¹⁰⁵ Other registered acts involve the display of flags (although of various colours) with the signs of IS in masjids¹⁰⁶ in Plovdiv and Asenovgrad and in the private mosque in Pazardjik in front of which informal preachers would deliver sermons (without being qualified and authorised by the Chief Muftiate). In addition, Facebook monitoring by law enforcement services identified user profiles with regular postings of IS symbols, pictures of leaders of terrorist organisations and video clips glorifying the Islamist fighters.¹⁰⁷ The gravest acts registered so far involve instances of provision of logistical support to transiting transnational fighters. In particular, some Muslim Roma in the town of Pazardjik were reported to be involved in facilitating the accommodation of transnational fighters on their way

¹⁰¹ Стоилова, З. „Как жълтите медии съчиниха история за терористи от „Ислямска държава“, в. *Капитал*, 10.08.2015.

¹⁰² Николов (2004).

¹⁰³ в. *Капитал*, „Обичат Аллах и навсякъде го пишат“, 3.10.2014 г.

¹⁰⁴ в. *Дневник*, „ДАНС и прокуратурата с акция за генерална превенция срещу ИД“, 26.11.2014 г.

¹⁰⁵ *Btv Новините*, „Имам’ от Харманли развя знамето на „Ислямска държава““ 12.02.2015.

¹⁰⁶ Arabic for a place of worship, generally referring to any building where congregations gather for prayer.

¹⁰⁷ Обвинителен акт, Досъдебно производство № 87/2014, Преписка вх. № 2291/14. The indictment has not been finalized as it has been returned twice because of procedural mistakes by the chief judge (lastly on 23.09.2015).

to Syria.¹⁰⁸ According to some law enforcement representatives, the group in Pazardjik has made some efforts to provide physical training to local boys to teach them discipline and distinguish them from the rest.¹⁰⁹ However, no further sources have been found to confirm or elaborate on this information.

The ideas that are professed and shared within this group are listed in the indictment against 14 Muslim Roma who were put on trial on 2 July 2015 on charges of propagating hatred on religious grounds and inciting war.¹¹⁰ According to the indictment, some of the main ideas professed by the defendants include: support for the IS concept of war to establish a Caliphate; it is a religious duty of any Muslim to join the Caliphate, including to join its army; if needed local Muslims have to be ready to go and fight for IS; anyone who is not professing Salafism is apostate; those who vote are apostates; Muslims who make friends with Christians, Jews or atheists are apostates. Some of these ideas have a sounding that can be associated with aspects of jihadist ideology. Taken the fact that the court trial has not yet started it is still early to put these ideas under analysis as all presented evidence is about to be proven or not in court.¹¹¹

Proselytising and professing Salafi interpretations of Islam

The process of adoption of Salafi interpretations of Islam by some segments of the Muslim communities in Bulgaria is associated with activities such as proselytism of the main theological tenets of Salafism through mosque sermons, informal discussions at local cafes and possession and dissemination of related theological literature¹¹² as well as attempts to change canonical for the region Islamic practices. The process is also manifested in changes in clothing and appearance in both men and women and the adoption of Salafi style dress.

The activities of those Bulgarian-speaking Muslims who are adopting orthodox interpretations of Islam involve changes in the performance of religious rituals and customs and the dress code. These include for example prayers of men in the mosque without hats, different prayer positions, visits to the mosques by women in the month of Ramadan,¹¹³ abolition of the custom of collecting money upon the death of a person in order to pay his/her religious obligations, or to count the chaplet in order to catch up for the prayers that the person did not do during his/her lifetime; abolition of the custom to dish out food at funerals, as

¹⁰⁸ Expert interview, representatives of law enforcement/intelligence institutions on 12.06.2015, 15.6.2015, 18.06.2015; Стоилова, З. „Как жълтите медии съчиниха история за терористи от „Ислямска държава“, в. *Kanumal* 10.08.2015. The circle of persons involved in logistical support to transiting foreign fighters is believed to be limited to 10 persons (Expert interview, representative of law enforcement/intelligence institutions, 18.06.2015).

¹⁰⁹ Expert interview, representative law enforcement/intelligence institutions, 18.06.2015.

¹¹⁰ Обвинителен акт, досъдебно производство № 87/2014, Преписка вх. № 2291/14, Окръжна Прокуратура – Пазарджик.

¹¹¹ The Court Indictment has been returned by the Chief Judge for correction of procedural violations twice, on 22 July 2015 and on 23 September 2015.

¹¹² Indicated in the indictment under pre-trial proceedings (Обвинителен акт, досъдебно производство № 9/2009, Преписка вх. № 1122/09, Окръжна Прокуратура – Пазарджик).

¹¹³ Mosques in Bulgaria are traditionally strictly male spaces.

well as the so called *mevlid*.¹¹⁴ The attempts by some imams to introduce changes in the funeral rites in accordance with Salafi practices seem to have not found root among Muslims in Bulgaria as in 2011 96.1% of them declared to bury their dead according to the local Muslim tradition.¹¹⁵ The changes in the dress code of women include the introduction of long mono-colour garments and hijab and in some instances hijab covering the face.¹¹⁶ With regard to men a novelty is the wearing of long beard. Changes involve also abstaining from eating pork and drinking alcohol.¹¹⁷ These changes are far from widespread. On the contrary, Salafi influences in terms of dress, polygamy and piety remain limited to specific cases of some Pomak villages and Roma settlements in Bulgaria.¹¹⁸ Experts in Islam stress that heightened levels of religious piety and changes in clothing are not in themselves a sign of radicalisation.¹¹⁹

The ideas propagated by imams or informal Islamic preachers professing Salafi interpretations of Islam are presented in the indictment against 12 imams and one informal Islamic preacher who stood trial in the period 2012 – 2015. According to it, some of the main ideas professed by the defendants include: refuting the state since power comes from God and not from man; secular laws are to be obeyed only as long as they do not contradict Islam; the law comes from the Prophet; Muslims should not vote; Muslims should not make friends with Christians; women cannot have the same rights as men; women should not be greeted; Islam is holy and incompatible with other religions; many of the holidays in Bulgaria such as New Year and Baba Marta (March 1) should not be celebrated as they do not come from Islam; believers should follow specific (Salafi) style of dressing and preaching; anyone who is not professing Salafism is a non-believer.¹²⁰ While these ideas align with the strict Salafi interpretations of Islam they do not have the sounding of those associated with jihadist ideology. Two of the three defendants were pronounced innocent on charges under articles 108 and 164 of the *Criminal Code* and twelve of the thirteen defendants were acquitted of charges under article 109 with only administrative fines being imposed on them. This outcome indicates that the court did not find sufficient proof for most of the charges in the indictment.

It needs to be pointed that the adoption of Salafi interpretations of Islam has not led to any (violent) religiously inspired incidents involving either Christians or Muslims professing traditional Islam. Only one incident that might be of such nature has been reported. On 5 May 2011, in the Iztok quarter of Pazardjik five Muslim Roma professing Salafi Islam assaulted the evangelist Roma pastor of the same

¹¹⁴ *Mevlid* is a custom performed by Muslims in Bulgaria on different occasions – on the 52nd day of someone's death, at the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad or on the occasion of significant public events. For detailed account see: Троева, Е., „Традиционен“ и „нов“ ислям в България, *Български Фолклор*, 3-4/2012.

¹¹⁵ Иванова (2014), p. 177.

¹¹⁶ Reported to have taken place in the town of Rudozem (Ghodsee (2010), p. 543).

¹¹⁷ It is a widespread practice among Muslims in Bulgaria not to be bound by the Islamic prohibition of eating pork and drinking alcohol.

¹¹⁸ Kerem (2010), p. 18.

¹¹⁹ Expert interview with Yordan Peev, 23.06.2015.

¹²⁰ Обвинителен акт, досъдебно производство № 9/2009, Преписка вх. № 1122/09, Окръжна Прокуратура – Пазарджик.

quarter.¹²¹ The motives for the incident were never clearly established; suggested motives ranged from irritation by the Muslim Roma about the insistence of the pastor to proselytise Evangelism to improper behaviour of the pastor contrasting with the stricter moral norms of Salafi Islam to some personal conflict.

5. INSTITUTIONAL AND LAW ENFORCEMENT RESPONSE

The institutional response with regard to countering risks of Islamist radicalisation has been dominated by the law enforcement agencies. The MoI, SANS and the prosecution have so far been the leading, if not the only, institutions enforcing measures in this regard. In the light of the terrorist act on Bulgarian territory in July 2012 and the global escalation of Islamist terrorist activity exemplified by IS, Bulgarian law enforcement and intelligence institutions started developing more systematic counter-radicalisation mechanisms. These include relevant amendments to the Bulgarian *Criminal Code* adopted in June 2015 as well as the development of the Draft Strategy for Countering Radicalisation and Terrorism (2015 – 2020). The approach that is evolving and envisaged in the Strategy acknowledges the importance of prevention measures and cooperation among various institutions in countering radicalisation.

The type of measures enforced so far by intelligence, law enforcement and prosecution services are directed at countering external Islamist threats and potential home-grown risks. Regarding the first group of measures the law enforcement and intelligence services monitor and intercept transiting transnational fighters as well as foreign citizens suspected of affiliation with terrorist organisations. In addition, SANS is currently monitoring the inflow of irregular migrants and asylum seekers and screening persons who might be fighters from Syria.¹²² The second group of measures related to countering potential home-grown threats of Islamist radicalisation include expulsions of foreign emissaries of orthodox Islam (during the 1990s and early 2000s), arrests of persons suspected of propagating more radical Islamist-based ideas (2007, 2009, 2010, 2014); opening of three legal proceedings against Bulgarian citizens suspected of propagating anti-democratic ideas, hatred on religious grounds (in 2004 and in 2012 – 2015) and incitement of war based on adopted Salafi interpretations of Islam (court hearings started in July 2015 but the trial is under suspension as the indictment was returned by the chief judge to rectify procedural violations of defendants' rights).

The involvement of other relevant institutions (the Directorate on Denominations at the Council of Ministers and the Chief Muftiate) that can be instrumental in the introduction of soft prevention measures among risk groups has been unsystematic and minimal. So far, actions by the Directorate of Denominations have included refusal to register or renew the registration of foreign Islamic organisations while those of the Chief Muftiate have been limited to the issuance of some official

¹²¹ В. 24 часа, „Роми пребиха пастор, дават им 15 денонощия арест“, 02.05.2011; Начев, М., „Пребит пастор: Биха ме жестоко талибани!“, в. *Труд*, 05.05.2011.

¹²² Since 2013, 40 to 50 persons among the incoming asylum seekers have been identified to fall in this risk group (Expert interview, representative of law enforcement/intelligence service, 8.04.2015).

declarations, such as those in response to the opening of the 2012 – 2015 court trial and in support of its defendants or in response to IS and denouncing its acts.¹²³

Law enforcement response

The process of religious resurgence based on the adoption of Salafi interpretations of Islam among some segments of the Muslim communities in Bulgaria has attracted the attention of Bulgarian institutions since the mid-1990s and has been viewed by intelligence and law enforcement experts as bearing the potential for “radicalisation” of some local Muslims. State authorities imposed a more restrictive regime to the (externally funded) proliferating Muslim organisations and foundations since the mid-1990s by rejecting the renewal of registrations or subjecting them to investigations by the prosecution.¹²⁴ One example is the Saudi-financed organisation Al Wakf Islami which was officially registered in 1993 but a renewal of its registration was rejected by the Directorate of Denominations in 1994.¹²⁵ In 2002, the Sofia City Court registered the foundation “Al Wakf” but in 2004 the registration was cancelled.¹²⁶ In addition, Bulgarian security services deported some Muslim foreigners for their religious proselytising claiming they had been a threat to the national security.¹²⁷ According to security experts, more systematic deportations have been taking place since 2000.¹²⁸ In fact, in the aftermath of the September 2001 attacks and the precautionary measures taken by the U.S. to prevent Al Qaeda from launching operations from the Balkans, all Balkan states sought to hold off organisations and actors connected with transnational Arab Islamic networks.¹²⁹ The control and prosecution over Islamic organisations in Bulgaria was especially tightened since 2008/2009.¹³⁰

¹²³ Декларация на Главно мюфтийство на Мюсюлманско изповедание в Република България, по повод повдигнатите обвинения срещу 13-те български граждани, изповядващи исляма, от Окръжна прокуратура – Пазарджик, 25 Септември 2012; Декларация на Главно мюфтийство на Мюсюлманското изповедание в Република България по повод античужденските и терористични деяния на т.н. „Ислямска държава” в Близкия Изток, 12.09.2014; Декларация на Главно мюфтийство на Мюсюлманско изповедание в Република България, по повод варварския терористичен акт над редакцията на списание „Шарли Ебдо” в Париж на 07.01.2015 г.

¹²⁴ Троева (2012). **A total of 30 such organisations operated in Bulgaria until 1994. Since then, most of them have been banned with only 5 remaining by 2004** (Николов, 2004).

¹²⁵ Йорданова (2004).

¹²⁶ Обвинителен акт по досъдебно производство № 9/2009, Преписка, вх. № 1122/09.

¹²⁷ According to *Capital Weekly*, between 1990 and 2004 a total of eight foreigners had been deported from Bulgaria on accusations of preaching “radical Islam” and the establishment of unregistered organisations. (Николов, 2004). **For example the Jordanian Ahmad Musa was deported in August 2000 under accusations for preaching Islamic fundamentalism, preparing Bulgarian Muslims to engage in terrorism, organising seminars and youth camps that preached radical Islam and organising a Bulgarian cell of the Muslim Brotherhood.** (Ghodsee (2010), p. 120).

¹²⁸ Expert interview with representative of law enforcement/intelligence institutions, 15.06.2015.

¹²⁹ Kerem (2010), p. 21.

¹³⁰ Expert interview with representative of law enforcement/intelligence institutions, 15.06.2015.

Countering acts of symbolic approval for radical Islamist organisations

The activities of Ahmed Musa, the chief Islamic preacher in the Roma quarter of Pazardjik and the informal leader of a group forming around him, have been monitored by law enforcement since the early 2000s. He has been the subject of series of arrests and three court trials. He was put on trial for the first time in November 2004 under indictment for preaching Islamic fundamentalism, propagation of changes in the constitutional order and instigation of inter-ethnic hatred on religious grounds.¹³¹ Under this trial, the regional court in Pazardjik issued a three-year suspended sentence for Musa for participation in a banned Islamic foundation, rejection of the secular state and preaching in favour of a Caliphate.¹³² Between September and March 2012, Ahmed Musa was again put on trial under accusations for preaching undemocratic ideology, hatred on religious grounds and for being a member of the non-registered organisation Al-Wakf-al-Islami.¹³³ The verdict at appellate instance included two years of imprisonment, a fine of 5,000 leva (approx. €2,500) and enforcement of the verdict of his 2004 trial – of 3 years of imprisonment.¹³⁴ On 25 November 2014, SANS and the prosecution conducted an operation in the Roma quarters of the towns of Pazardjik, Plovdiv, Smolyan and Haskovo on suspicion of criminal misconduct involving preaching of undemocratic ideology, violent change of the public order and incitement of war.¹³⁵ The number of those arrested in the operation varies between 20 and 40 according to different media reports, most of them released on the same day.¹³⁶ In a press conference following the operation the SANS Chair Vladimir Pisanchev stated that there is no IS cell in the country implying that the operation was conducted as a preventive measure aimed to stop such a cell from being established.¹³⁷ As a result of the SANS operation, seven Muslim Roma remained in custody on charges for preaching undemocratic ideology (all seven) and propagation of a war (one of them).¹³⁸ Ahmed Musa was also retained in custody.¹³⁹ On 31 March 2015 another eight persons were arrested on charges of preaching anti-democratic ideology and incitement of war.¹⁴⁰ All of the arrested on 25 November 2014 and on 31 March 2015 were Roma from the Roma quarters in the towns of Pazardjik, Plovdiv and

¹³¹ *News.bg*, „В Пазарджик гледат дело за проповядване на ислямски фундаментализъм“, 01.11.2004.

¹³² *ТелекабелТВ*, „Кой е задържаният Ахмед Муса?“, 25.11.2014.

¹³³ Обвинителен акт, досъдебно производство № 9/2009, Преписка вх. № 1122/09, Окръжна Прокуратура – Пазарджик.

¹³⁴ Присъда, Пловдивски апелативен съд, гр. Пловдив, 01.07.2015.

¹³⁵ В. *Дневник*, „ДАНС влезе в ромската махала и в джамията в Пазарджик“, 25.11.2014.

¹³⁶ В. *Дневник*, „Над 20 са задържаните при спецакцията на ДАНС“, 25.11.2014; *Mediapool.bg*, „Ходжи имами арестувани при антитерористична акция в четири града“, 25.11.2014.

¹³⁷ В. *Дневник*, „Това не е клетка на „Ислямска държава“, но можеше да бъде“; в. *Дневник*, „ДАНС и прокуратурата с акция за ‘генерална превенция’ срещу Ислямска Държава“, 26.11.2014.

¹³⁸ В. *Дневник*, „Съдът остави в ареста всички задържани мюсюлмани от акцията на ДАНС“, 29.11.2014.

¹³⁹ В. *24 часа*, „Съдът остави окончателно в ареста обвинения за радикален ислям Ахмед Муса“, 21.05.2015.

¹⁴⁰ Сп. *Правен свят*, „Прокуратурата обвини още 8 привърженици на Ислямска държава“, 31.3.2015.

Asenovgrad. On 2 July 2015 a new court case was opened against 14 persons, including Ahmed Musa,¹⁴¹ indicted for propagating hatred on religious grounds (13 of them) and inciting war (all 14 defendants).¹⁴² As of November 2015, the case has been returned twice (on 22 July and on 23 September 2015) by the judge to the Prosecutor's Office to rectify procedural violations of defendants' rights.¹⁴³

Countering proselytism of Salafi interpretations of Islam by Bulgarian citizens

In February 2007, Ali Khairaddin and three other Muslims associated with the Union of Bulgarian Muslims were arrested in an operation conducted by the Directorate General for Combatting Organised Crime and SANS on charges of publishing "two radical Islamic websites" and propagating the establishment of a Sharia state and waging a jihad against non-Muslims. According to the charges, Khairaddin was connected to Ahmad Musa who had been deported earlier.¹⁴⁴ However, Ali Khairaddin was soon released and no further investigation was conducted against him. In 2007, the Qur'an course in the town of Sarnitsa, Velingrad region, was closed under suspicion of connection with the Islamic foundation "Al Wakf Islami" and allegations for propagation of radical Islam.¹⁴⁵ In June 2009, the regional prosecution office in the town of Pazardjik initiated pre-trial proceedings against the activities of a local branch of the organisation "Al Wakf Islami". The investigation led to joint search operations by SANS, the Mol and the prosecution in the offices and homes of imams in the regions of Smolyan, Velingrad, Gotse Delchev, Madan, Rudozem, Dospat, Sarnitsa, the villages of Kondovi and Kochan (6 October 2010). The operation, which was unprecedented in its scope led to the opening in September 2012 of a trial against 12 imams (and the Islamic preacher Ahmed Musa). The trial raised the question of possible radicalisation of local Muslims based on orthodox interpretations of Islam, with public officials, experts and minority activists fiercely arguing whether or not there is such a threat. According to the indictment, two of the defendants were charged for preaching anti-democratic ideology (Art. 108 of the *Criminal Code*) and preaching of hatred on religious grounds (Art. 164 of the *Criminal Code*), and all twelve defendants were charged for participating in unregistered organisation (one of them as leader and 11 as members, Art. 109 of the *Criminal Code*).¹⁴⁶ Two defendants were found innocent

¹⁴¹ В. Дневник, „Прокуратурата е внесла обвинение срещу подсъдимите за радикален ислям (допълнена)“, 02.07.2015.

¹⁴² Indictment under re-trial proceedings N 87/2014, registry file N 2291/14, Regional Prosecution Office Pazardjik.

¹⁴³ News.bg, „Прекратиха делото срещу Пазарджишките ислямисти“, 22.07.2015; „Второто дело за радикален ислям 'зави' към прокуратурата“, 24.09.2015, available at <http://www.desant.net/show-news/33650/>

¹⁴⁴ В. Сега, „Бивш мюфтия арестуван в акция срещу фундаменталисти“, 27.02.2015; Vesti.bg, „Бившият столичен мюфтия арестуван за пропаганда на радикален ислям у нас“, 20.02.2007.

¹⁴⁵ Троева (2012), pp. 5-23.

¹⁴⁶ Обвинителен акт, досъдебно производство № 9/2009, Преписка вх. № 1122/09, Окръжна Прокуратура – Пазарджик. The charges are under art. 108/1, art. 109/1 and 2, and art. 164/1 of the Criminal Code.

on the first two charges (preaching of religious hatred¹⁴⁷ and anti-democratic ideology¹⁴⁸). All twelve defendants were released from criminal liability on the charge of membership or leadership of unregistered organisations and were sentenced to pay fines.¹⁴⁹

It should be pointed out that the trial of 2012-2015 raised a heated public debate centred around the question whether the religious proselytism of the twelve imams, based on Salafi interpretations of Islam, was a sign or act of Islamist radicalisation. While some experts and far right politicians claimed that these were indications of radicalisation,¹⁵⁰ other experts on Muslim minorities and Islam claimed that the activity of the twelve imams pointed to heightened religiosity associated with profession of Salafi interpretations of Islam as well as of proselytism of Salafi Islam.¹⁵¹ At the opening of the trial, the Chief Musftiate issued a declaration in support of the defendants stating that the charges (threatening the national security and the constitutional order) were “inhuman,” given excessive media coverage and based on claims that are manipulative. Worries were shared that such charges undermine the reputation of the religious institution of the Muslims and hopes were expressed that competent, independent and just decision would be taken by the Bulgarian judicial system.¹⁵² The Movement for Rights and Freedoms issued a declaration with similar contents. The party insisted that the charges were given excessive media coverage and were the outcome of lack of sufficient competences in theology. The declaration noted that in the context of the voiced concerns that certain imams graduate from Saudi Arabia the High Islamic Institute in Bulgaria remained without accreditation and thus prevented Bulgarian Muslims from studying in their home country.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁷ Verdict issued by the court of first instance (Пазарджишки окръжен съд, Присъда, 19.03.2014 г., гр. Пазарджик).

¹⁴⁸ Verdict issued by Plovdiv appellate court (Пловдивски Апелативен Съд, Присъда, 01.07.2015, гр. Пловдив).

¹⁴⁹ The court of first instance and the appellate court sentenced one defendant to a fine of 4,000 levs, two defendants to pay 3,000 levs each and nine defendants to pay 2,000 levs each.

¹⁵⁰ Some examples include: Expertise by expert witnesses Agop Garabedian, Antoni Galabov, Klara Stamatova under the court trial against the 12 imams – Court of First Instance, Regional Court – Pazardjik; Алексиев, А., „При делото в Пазарджик по всичко личи, че имаме работа с убедени ислямисти“, 5.07.2013, www.librev.com; Yordan Peev, his opinion in his capacity of expert witness under the court trial against the 12 imams – Court of Appellate Instance, Regional Court – Plovdiv, reported in *Epicenter.bg*, „Делото срещу 13-те имами продължава на 23 юни с разпит на ново нещо лице и свидетели“, 07.04.2015.

¹⁵¹ Some examples include: Expert witness testimonies by Simeon Evstatiev and Ivan Dulgerov in the trial against the 12 imams – Court of First Instance, Regional Court – Pazardjik; Евстатиев (2014); Желязкова (2012); Opinions expressed by Mihail Ivanov and Pavel Pavlovitch (as quoted in: *Novini.bg*, „Павлович: Имамите в Пазарджик няма да бъдат осъдени“, 28.09.2012); Чуков (2013).

¹⁵² Декларация на Главно мюфтийство на Мюсюлманско изповедание в Република България, по повод повдигнатите обвинения срещу 13-те български граждани, изповядващи исляма, от Окръжна прокуратура – Пазарджик, 25.09. 2012, available at: <http://web-archive-bg.com/page/3085970/2013-10-26/http://grandmufti.bg/bg/2011-07-19-19-47-51/2803-deklaratziya-na-glavno-myuftiistvo-na-myusyulmansko-izpovedanie-v-republika-balgariya-po-povod-povdignatite-obvineniya-sreshtu-13-te-balgarski-grazhdani-izpovyadvashti-isllyama-ot-okrazhna-prokuratura-pazardzhik.html>

¹⁵³ Available at: <http://www.vesti.bg/bulgaria/politika/dps-s-deklaraciia-protiv-islamofobiata-5194311>

It needs to be stressed that the approach to preventing and countering Islamist radicalisation in Bulgaria should involve a range of civil institutions at the central and local levels with law enforcement institutions to come into play as the last resort of institutional response. In this respect, it is highly recommended that strategies be developed for facilitating and improving the dialogue between the Islamic denomination (represented by the Chief Muftiate) and the Bulgarian institutions. In particular, the Directorate of Religious Denominations at the Council of Ministers needs to develop strategies for communication and regular dialogue with the Muslim religious leadership and should also serve to facilitate the dialogue between Muslim religious leaders and the other state institutions. In addition, the Chief Muftiate needs to take more proactive role in the Muslim community in the context of the global radicalisation challenges, for example by way of taking official positions on key issues related to the Islamic profession and by tightening the control over the Islamic denomination throughout the country. In the context of the global radicalisation challenges Bulgarian state institutions may consider well informed policies of empowerment of the Chief Muftiate in order to help reinforce the resilience of Muslim communities to imported interpretations of Islam.

6. ROOT CAUSES AND MOTIVATIONS

The root causes and motivations are considered in this report through the community approach which brings into analysis issues such as communities' social, religious and identity dynamics. The approach is applied with the awareness that it is criticised by some scholars in the field of Islamist radicalisation because of its limitations and analytical risks. The criticism of these authors is based on the argument that the circumstances and conditions of whole communities are not sufficient to explain the violent Islamist behaviour of usually isolated individuals or groups of individuals.¹⁵⁴ However, this approach seems useful for the case of Bulgaria for two reasons. The criticisms of the community approach analysis are usually voiced when it is applied to the understanding the genesis of violent acts of Islamist radicalisation. In Bulgaria, however, no acts of such kind have been committed. The issue of the risks of Islamist radicalisation in the country is presently tied to processes of religious resurgence based on the adoption of Salafi interpretations of Islam. The genesis and root causes of such processes can best be analysed and understood in the context of community dynamics.

Acts of symbolic approval of Islamist organisations

So far, little or no research has been conducted to trace macro or micro level factors that contribute to the adoption of Salafi interpretations of Islam by segments of some Roma communities and what pushes and pulls some of them into manifesting sympathy with Islamist ideas and organisations. The factors that are presently being discussed relate to social and economic circumstances as well

¹⁵⁴ PISOIU, D. (2014) "Radicalisation", in Joselyne Cesari (ed.) *Oxford Handbook of European Islam*, Oxford University Press; DALGAARD-NIELSEN, A. (2010) "Violent radicalisation in Europe: What we know and what we do not know," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 33:9.

as to identity dynamics. Experts in the field of minority studies and Islam point to the role of identity dynamics played in the process. According to Zhelyazkova¹⁵⁵ the Roma in Bulgaria display unstable religious identity and share history of conversions from Islam to Orthodox Christianity and Evangelism. In the context of their severe marginalisation in the Bulgarian society the Roma from the Iztok quarter of Pazardjik started adopting Salafi interpretations of Islam because it provided them with a transnational identity that gives them symbolic status of a different magnitude.¹⁵⁶ The same factors appear to motivate some of them for performing demonstrative acts that serve to signify and reinforce their new identity and association with the larger transnational Islamic community.¹⁵⁷ It should be noted that at the same time the Salafi interpretation of Islam is adopted by the Roma at a rather superficial level and is not associated with deeper internalisation of the religious doctrine.¹⁵⁸

The severe social and economic marginalisation of the Roma, their low educational attainment with shares of the young Roma population being illiterate are considered to play an important role in the process as well. These factors are believed to make them susceptible to simple truths and respectively to simplified Salafi interpretations of the religious doctrine. The prospect of improvement of the social and financial status and of being accepted within a peer group seem to play a role in the recruitment into the Roma Salafi circle. According to law enforcement information, some young persons with drug addiction problems have joined these groups after having been offered support and helped to find wives and work.¹⁵⁹ In addition, in some cases initial motivations for adopting Salafi Islam among the Roma involve financial stimulus for wearing the niqab, for example.¹⁶⁰ Becoming part of the group of Muslim Roma professing the Salafi interpretation of Islam in the Iztok quarter of the town of Pazardjik is associated with three important changes in the male social practices which are considered by the women as being a significant improvement in the life of the family and the community at large. These practices stem from the adherence to required religious norms and include abstaining from alcohol, no resort to violence towards female partners and bringing earned money into home and family.¹⁶¹ An educated guess would also point to the accessibility of radical Islamist ideas through the internet.

It needs to be stressed, however, that in-depth sociological and anthropological research should be conducted in order to establish the factors that make some individuals from the Roma community receptive to Salafi interpretations of Islam and inclined to manifesting sympathy with IS. While such studies would have to assess the role of factors such as poverty and marginalisation (relevant at community level) they should focus on the investigation of individual characteristics,

¹⁵⁵ Expert interview with A. Zhelyazkova, 05.06.2015.

¹⁵⁶ Expert interviews with A. Zhelyazkova (05.06.2015) and Y. Peev, (23.06.2015).

¹⁵⁷ Йорданов, Р., „Държавата загуби контрол над гетата. Интервю с Антонина Желязкова“, в. *Стандарт*, 27.11.2014.

¹⁵⁸ Expert interview with Y. Peev, 23.06.2015.

¹⁵⁹ Expert interview, representative of law enforcement/intelligence institutions, 15.06.2015.

¹⁶⁰ Expert interview, representative of law enforcement/intelligence institutions, 18.06. 2015.

¹⁶¹ Expert interview, A. Zhelyazkova, 05.06.2015.

the community dynamics (peer pressure, need of group belonging, social and economic benefits) and the structural factors (spread and accessibility of the ideas of Islamist radicalisation; reception and reaction of the broader society, including discrimination and racism towards the Roma) that play into this process. Such studies should look into the role of women in the process of adoption of Salafi interpretations of Islam. Finally, such studies would also need to establish the factors that make other Roma from the very same localities, Orthodox Christians and Evangelists, resilient to such influences.

Proselytising and professing Salafi interpretations of Islam among Bulgarian-speaking Muslims

The factors that contributed to the adoption of orthodox interpretations of Islam by some Bulgarian-speaking Muslims have been researched and discussed by a number of scholars, either anthropologists working among Muslim communities or specialists in Islamic studies.¹⁶² The same studies also explain why such a process has not taken place among the Turkish community and the factors that prove Muslim communities in Bulgaria generally resilient to Salafism.

The process of adoption of Salafi interpretations of Islam is tied to a religious resurgence among some segments of Muslim communities in Bulgaria and it is the outcome of a number of factors. Given the two important channels through which this influence took place – the international Islamic charitable establishment¹⁶³ and proselytism by local imams who graduated from religious academies abroad – the factors that opened these channels need to be discussed. The training of local imams abroad is the outcome of the low level of Islamic training in Bulgaria which in addition serves the needs of members of the Turkish community at the expense of those of Bulgarian-speaking Muslims. The language of training and communication in both the Islamic Institute and the three secondary Islamic schools in the country is often Turkish which contributes to creating sense of exclusion among Bulgarian-speaking Muslims.¹⁶⁴ In addition, these Islamic educational institutions teach “Turkish” interpretation of Islam insisting on the preservation of the Ottoman heritage which contradicts the re-Islamisation process among the Bulgarian-speaking Muslims who start looking for alternative ways to attain religious education.¹⁶⁵ Another important factor relates to the weakness of the Muslim leadership, torn by politically motivated struggles throughout the 1990s and the early 2000s. The process led to the neglect of the religious needs of the Muslim community especially those of the Bulgarian-speaking Muslims and perpetuated the “theological vacuum”¹⁶⁶ created in the communist period. This “vacuum” was filled by penetrating orthodox

¹⁶² Ghodsee (2010); Троева (2012); Evstatiev (2006) pp. 62-65.

¹⁶³ The international Islamic charitable establishment penetrated not only into Bulgaria but into the whole of the Balkans since the Bosnian war. The process was the outcome of an official policy by Saudi Arabia that is in global competition with other Islamic world centres like Egypt, Pakistan and Indonesia. For a detailed account of charitable aid to Muslims in Bulgaria provided by countries such as Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait see Ghodsee (2010), pp. 130-158.

¹⁶⁴ Expert interview with M. Ivanov, 18.06.2015.

¹⁶⁵ Evstatiev (2006), pp. 62-65.

¹⁶⁶ Ghodsee (2010), pp. 116-129; Evstatiev (2006) pp. 62-65; Евстатиев (2014); Expert interview with M. Ivanov, 18.06.2015.

interpretations of Islam, on the one hand, and by a process of seeking leadership outside the country, especially by some Bulgarian speaking Muslims.¹⁶⁷ Another important factor involved the social and economic hardships related to the post-communist transition and experienced with particular severity by some Muslim populated regions such as Madan, Rudozem, Smolyan. The abrupt economic downturn experienced by some communities of Bulgarian-speaking Muslims will be associated with loss of status especially for men. This loss entailed an uneasy shift in gender roles which imported Salafi interpretations of Islam promised to reverse.¹⁶⁸

The role played by identity dynamics in this process is also seriously discussed. Scholars that resort to this explanatory paradigm delve into identity dynamics as explaining both receptiveness and resilience to Salafi interpretations of Islam. Bulgarian-speaking Muslims, for example, have adopted three identity affiliations throughout the history of the modern Bulgarian national state – Bulgarian, Turk and Pomak. According to Troeva¹⁶⁹ the formation of the identity of Bulgarian-speaking Muslims is influenced by their surrounding population – if surrounded by ethnic Turks they tend to self-identify as Bulgarians and if surrounded by ethnic Bulgarians they tend to self-identify as Turks. Tendencies among the first group (inhabiting predominantly the Eastern and Northern Rhodope Mountains) involve preservation of traditional Balkan Islam, declarations of atheism or even instances of conversion to Christianity. Tendencies related to the second group (inhabiting predominantly the Western Rhodope Mountains) involve a process of resurgence of religion and adoption of orthodox Islam to the expense of centuries-long traditional Islamic interpretations and practices. This process takes place predominantly in the regions of Gotse Delchev, Madan and Rudozem where Bulgarian-speaking Muslims self-identify as “Turks”, “Pomaks”, “Muslims” and differentiate themselves from Orthodox Christian Bulgarians.¹⁷⁰ In the context of the unstable ethnic identity of the Pomaks, the Islamic religion becomes the most important identity component for some of them.¹⁷¹ At the same time Islam is providing a space of “spiritual competition” between them and ethnic Turks – a competition that some Bulgarian-speaking Muslims consider to have won by the adoption of “true” Islam based on Salafi interpretations of the religion which made them better Muslims.¹⁷²

It is important to point out that the issue of Islamist radicalisation has become the subject of instrumentalisation by the Muslims themselves in the context of the struggles for leadership of the Chief Muftiate that took place throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. On the one hand, since the late 1990s the Muslim leadership around Nedim Gendzhev started to claim that foreign emissaries supported by the rivalry Chief Muftiate were promoting Saudi-influenced Islam in Bulgaria – thus arguing against the legitimacy of the rivalry Muftiate and implying the importance of their own Muftiate as a guardian of traditional Islam in the country. On the

¹⁶⁷ Евстатиєв (2014).

¹⁶⁸ Ghodsee (2010) pp. 25-26.

¹⁶⁹ Троева (2012), pp. 5-23.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.; Zhelyazkova (2014), pp. 577-578.

¹⁷¹ Евстатиєв (2014).

¹⁷² Expert interview with M. Ivanov, 18.06. 2015.

other hand, the rival Chief Muftiate¹⁷³ used the threat of Islamic fundamentalism to enforce their claims for reinstating the *vakuf*.¹⁷⁴ They argued that if the financial independence of the Chief Muftiate is not secured (by way of restoration of *vakuf* properties), Islamic fundamentalism would be embraced by many Muslims in Bulgaria as it brings vast resources into the country.¹⁷⁵ This reality and the approach by the divided Muslim leadership have played a negative role as regards the penetration of orthodox interpretations of Islam in the country. First, it hindered the effective prevention of such processes. Second, the very authority of the Muftiate as a spiritual leader of the denomination was weakened so that some Muslims in Bulgaria started looking for spiritual leadership elsewhere.

Factors serving to discourage the adoption of Salafi interpretations Islam

Explanations about the resilience of the ethnic Turks to Salafi interpretations of Islam are related to the solid ethnic identity that they display as the largest Muslim minority in the country that is supported by neighbouring Turkey, as well as by their political party (MRF) which is secular-oriented. In addition, ethnic Turks receive aid from the Turkish state which appears to be a serious competitor to Islamic aid provided by countries like Jordan or Saudi Arabia.¹⁷⁶ It seems that in the post-communist period both the Chief Muftiate and the Islamic educational institutions in the country were attending to the needs of ethnic Turks to a greater extent than to the needs of Bulgarian-speaking Muslims. Factors that serve as resilient forces for both ethnic Turks and Bulgarian-speaking Muslims include the communist history of atheism and the preservation of secular preferences among members of both communities.¹⁷⁷ An important role is played by the pro-Bulgarian identity affiliations of some of the Bulgarian-speaking Muslims. In addition, the economic migration to countries of Western Europe and the U.S. served as a powerful tool to restore and maintain status at home in the times of post-communist collapse and massive loss of status due to the dismantling of

¹⁷³ Since 1997, under Mustafa Handzhi, since 2000 under Selim Mekhmed, since 2003 under Fikri Sali Hasan (History of the Chief Muftiate, available in Bulgarian at <http://www.grandmufti.bg/bg/za-nas/istoriya.html>, accessed on 10.06.2015).

¹⁷⁴ Also spelled *waqf* – a type of mortmain property (usually land or building) donated for Muslim religious or charitable purposes.

¹⁷⁵ The account of Kirsten Ghodsee implies that the issue of Islamic fundamentalism was instrumentalised by Nedim Genzhev for his own benefit in the context of deep “political machinations”, dominating the national leadership of the Islamic denomination. (Ghodsee (2010) p. 122).

¹⁷⁶ Expert interviews with A. Zhelyazkova (5.06.2015), M. Ivanov (18.06.2015) and Y. Peev (23.06.2015); Троева (2012); Ghodsee (2010), p. 140. The stable identity of the ethnic Turks and their more secular orientation and better integration are considered by law enforcement and intelligence experts to serve as factors contributing to the resilience of this community to imported interpretations of Islam (Expert interview with a representative of law enforcement/intelligence institutions, 15.06.2015).

¹⁷⁷ A representative sociological survey conducted in 2011 revealed that 41% of the Muslims in Bulgaria declare not to visit mosques and 59.3% declare not to pray at all. Those that declare to be “deeply religious” are 28.5%. The highest share of “deeply religious” is among Muslim Bulgarians – 32% (Иванова, 2014). Comparison with a similar survey conducted in 1994 shows no increase in the share of deeply religious Muslim Bulgarians – 32% (Tomova, I., Specifics of the Religiousness of Muslims and Christians in Bulgaria, in Zhelyazkova, A. (ed.) Relations of Compatibility and Incompatibility Between Christians and Muslims in Bulgaria, Sofia – IMIR (no year of publication), p. 374.

industrial and mining enterprises established in Muslim populated regions of the country.¹⁷⁸ Finally, emissaries and preachers from the Arabian Peninsula were at an ideological disadvantage with regard to local (Bulgarian and Balkan) Muslims. Bearing the purist and authoritarian spirit of Salafism they approached local Muslims with ignorance of their religious syncretism and local conventions and lack of understanding for the fabric of interfaith relations that have been developed and tested for centuries. This posed a serious hindrance to their proselyte messages and prevented a deeper influence into the social and cultural fabric of Muslim communities.¹⁷⁹ Experts share the view that the long Hannafi Sunni tradition of Bulgarian Muslims makes the majority of them – Turks and Bulgarian-speaking Muslims – resilient to imported Salafi interpretations of Islam and make those of them who adopted such interpretations resilient to potential affiliation with any radical and even less with the militant aspects of this interpretation.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ It is likely that the same factors may serve as a force of resilience among Roma communities. If this is the case, it would be all the more important to study the factors that lead some members of the Roma community to express sympathies to IS.

¹⁷⁹ Kerem (2010), p. 20. This argument is expressed also by Simeon Evstatiev in his expert testimony at the trial against the imams. He claims that the Islamic exhortation spread by Saudi Arabia (by way of charity and education) is still rather limited to local cultural roots in the Arab Peninsula and is being “exported” before it could develop and offer a more inclusive interpretations of Islam. (Експертиза на доц. Д-р Симеон Евстатиев и гл. ас. Иван Дюлгерев – арабисти, по делото за разпространение на анти-демократична идеология – на първа инстанция в окръжен съд Пазарджик).

¹⁸⁰ Expert interviews with A. Zhelyazkova (5.06.2015), M. Ivanov (18.06.2015) and Y. Peev (23.06.2015).

III. RIGHT-WING AND LEFT-WING RADICALISATION

The concepts of political left and right are notions which vary between countries and regions, and historical periods.¹⁸¹ In Bulgaria, the distinction between right and left-wing political parties and movements has been shaped by the country's recent history of totalitarian state socialism. After the peaceful change of the former regime in 1989 the notions of left and right-wing politics were inverted.¹⁸² In contrast to trends in Western Europe, and similarly to other Central and Eastern European countries, the right symbolised revolutionary change, democratic values, human and civil rights and liberties, and to an extent, the protection of the national interest, while the left stood for conservatism, totalitarianism, the preservation of the status-quo and Russian domination.¹⁸³

This chapter examines current right-wing and left-wing radicalisation trends in Bulgaria and reviews the ideas, organisational forms, actors, patterns of recruitment, and root causes of radical political movements in the country. In addition, the report identifies groups at risk of political radicalisation in Bulgaria.¹⁸⁴

1. RIGHT-WING RADICALISATION TRENDS

1.1. Background

In order to define the radical right in Bulgaria, some theoretical and historical issues need to be pointed out at the outset. The first one is to clarify the difference between patriotism and nationalism. Researchers consider patriotism and nationalism the good and the retrogressive side of the same coin – the need of the individual to “protect” his or her own “sense of self.”¹⁸⁵ The relation

¹⁸¹ Bobbio, N. (1996) *Left and Right: the Significance of a Political Distinction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 56, 58.

¹⁸² Желев, Желю. “Партиите и партийната система на прехода”. 28.09.2011. Available at: <http://novotovreme.bg/?cid=34&p=&id=3601>; Цеков, Н. “Леви, десни, да вървим напред!”. *Deutsche Welle Bulgaria*, 30.10.2013;

¹⁸³ Желев, Желю, op.cit.; Цеков, Н., op.cit.; Petkova, M., “Where Socialism is a Dirty Word”. *Al Jazeera Magazine*. June 2015.

¹⁸⁴ The analysis is based on desk research of Bulgarian and foreign media and academic sources, the programmes of right-wing left-wing groups and movements and 7 semi-structured interviews with experts on right-wing and left-wing radicalisation and (former) right-wing and left-wing activists in Bulgaria who provided an insider's perspective, including their personal motivations and little-known facts about the researched groups. The media monitoring identified issues of high public interest and commentaries on radical political groups in the country. The research was conducted in May and June 2015.

¹⁸⁵ For example: Pury, J. (2004) *Encountering Nationalism*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, p. 12.

between the two is explained in many other ways – by the degree of ideological commitment,¹⁸⁶ or as a moral or physical attitude.¹⁸⁷ George Orwell contrasted the two in terms of aggressive versus defensive attitudes.¹⁸⁸ In Bulgaria, although both terms are used interchangeably, nationalism tends to be considered the political manifestation of patriotism.¹⁸⁹

By looking at contemporary nationalist ideas, it is difficult to define these on the left-right axis since there are some ideas which can be attributed to both sides. Researchers, however, argue that although nationalism is found in the political space of the left,¹⁹⁰ for instance in “national-bolshevism,” it is a key element of modern conservative ideology.¹⁹¹ Therefore, in this study the terms nationalist, right and ultra-right will be used interchangeably. However, it should be noted that there have been cases of nationalist organisations on the left, some of which were assimilated by the Bulgarian Socialist Party in the 1990s.¹⁹²

In Bulgaria, the right-wing, or nationalist movements as political formations do not have such a solid historical background as patriotic ones. After 1944, when the communists came to power, all nationalist and patriotic political or civil organisations were declared fascist, banned and their activists prosecuted.

In pre-World War II Bulgaria, two types of nationalist movements existed – “elitist” and “popular.”¹⁹³ Their ideologies were in line with the European context and with the then popular issue of “Bulgaria’s national interest.” Bulgaria’s national interest, or having the state’s territory correspond to ethnic territories, was a nation-wide cause after the Berlin Congress of 1878 and the loss of territories during the Balkan wars and World War I.¹⁹⁴ The elitist organisations often combined eminent entrepreneurs who were politically not affiliated, university professors or army officers. The popular organisations were inspired by the Nazi movement in Germany and the fascists in Italy. However, they failed to gain enough support to turn into significant political players. According to different estimates, the most popular of them – National Defence – recruited over

¹⁸⁶ Savich, C. K. (2008) Nationalism and War: Nationalism: Origins and Historical Evolution, In: Serbianna.com

¹⁸⁷ Dalberg-Acton, J. (1862) “Nationality,” in: *The Home and Foreign Review*, July 1862.

¹⁸⁸ Orwell, G. (1945) “Notes on Nationalism,” in: *Polemic*. London, May 1945.

¹⁸⁹ Петканов, Н. (2015) „Да запазим човечността, да се изправим срещу несправедливостта“, *Без лого*, 27.05.2015.

¹⁹⁰ Тодоров, А. (2012) *Крайната десница в България*. София: Фондация Фридрих Еберт, Бюро България, стр. 5 и 7.

¹⁹¹ Тодоров, А. (2000) „Дясно и национално.“ В: *НИЕ: Списание за политика, история и култура*, бр. 11-12, октомври-ноември 2000.

¹⁹² Рагару, Н. (2010) „Как така АТАКА? Преоформянето на лицата на българския национализъм“. В: *Преплетените времена на настоящето*. София: ИК КХ, 2010. стр. 304.

¹⁹³ Тодоров (2012), р. 2.

¹⁹⁴ The Berlin Congress of 1878 and later the Treaty of Neuilly-sur-Seine of 1919, which shaped Bulgaria’s territory after its independence from the Ottoman Empire, are widely considered unjust, leaving significant territories populated with ethnic Bulgarians in neighbouring countries’ territories. The unification of Bulgaria’s territory was the main subject of Bulgaria’s politics until World War II and was known as “solving Bulgaria’s national issue.”

100,000 members by 1930 and the Union of the Bulgarian National Legions – some 10,000 members.¹⁹⁵ Researchers do not agree whether these organisations can be considered “pro-Nazi”¹⁹⁶ or “patriotic.”¹⁹⁷ In 1940, Bulgaria tried to institutionalise the popular movements by introducing the *Law on Organisation of Bulgaria's Youth* under which the government formed the youth organisation Brannik following the example of the Hitler Youth in Germany and Opera Nazionale Balilla in Italy. Nevertheless, Brannik was a bureaucratic organisation with no significant support.

In the early post-communist period after 1989, some far-right organisations tried to revive those existing in the beginning of 20th century. However, as the structures and ideas of some 50 years back were no longer valid and no new ones had crystallised yet, they remained marginal. Such a revival can be considered an attempt to justify a tradition in ultra-nationalist movements but with new leaders and with unclear ideas. The few old far-right leaders who survived the communist regime – such as the Union of Bulgarian National Legions' Ilia Minev – obtained the status of repressed by the regime thus adding legitimacy to the newly-formed actors after 1990.¹⁹⁸

The post-communist right-wing nationalist organisations were rather marginal and not durable. Also, ultra-right views were marginal in post-1990 Bulgarian public life, although populist and racist speech appeared occasionally both in media and political discourse. Moreover, as Genov defines it: “Somewhat paradoxically, the influential nationalist groups consisted of members and followers of the supposed-to-be left-wing Bulgarian Communist Party which was re-named Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) in 1990.”¹⁹⁹ There was no significant far-right party or movement until 2005 when ultra-right populist coalition Ataka (Attack) got some 8.0% in the parliamentary elections. By entering parliament, Ataka introduced extreme populist and xenophobic speech in public life.

As of 2015, there are two far-right formations in Bulgaria's parliament which practically share the previously Ataka-dominated right-wing electorate – Ataka itself and the Patriotic Front (a coalition between the National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria – a splinter group from Ataka – and the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation (IMRO), which was revived in the 1990s and has had a strong tradition in being a parliamentary-represented party through its participation in a number of diverse coalitions).

The public side of the ultra-nationalist scene in Bulgaria, namely the political parties, enjoy the attention of the media and analysts. There is, however, a variety of semi-formal actors who remain hidden from the general public unless

¹⁹⁵ Алтънков, Н. (2004). *Нарекоха ги фашисти: Легионери, отцепанисевци, ратници, бранници, родозащитници, кубратисти*. София: „Тангра ТанНакРа ИК”, ISBN 954994266X.

¹⁹⁶ For example in: Поппетров, Н. (съставител) (2009). *Социално наляво, национализъм – напред*. Програмни и организационни документи на български авторитаристки националистически формации. София: ИК „Гутенберг”.

¹⁹⁷ Алтънков (2004).

¹⁹⁸ Тодоров (2012), p. 4.

¹⁹⁹ Genov, N. (2010) “Radical Nationalism in Contemporary Bulgaria”. In: *Review of European Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 2; December 2010.

a scandalous event related to them gains media attention. The most significant of these will be examined in the section below.

1.2. Organisational structures and actors

Political parties

Far-right **political parties** are those entities that try to achieve change by means of participation in the political system. Researchers define their most common features as follows: a fundamental rejection of democracy, of individual liberty, and of the principle of equality and equal rights, and their replacement by an authoritarian system based on race, ethnicity or religion.²⁰⁰ In Bulgaria, the extreme right views of some political parties are often combined with populism. As Betz writes, ideologically radical populism is still a right-wing phenomenon, although considerably different from the traditional extreme right. Although not researched in detail, this can probably be one of the reasons why the traditional non-parliamentary far-right does not generally support the parliamentary represented extreme right parties. The latter, however, tend to enjoy the support of the less ideological far-right football fans and the non-active voters with different political views.²⁰¹ The most popular of these parties are Ataka, the National Front for Salvation of Bulgaria, IMRO and the Nationalist Party of Bulgaria.

Box 2. Right-wing political parties

Ataka

History The party was consolidated as a coalition of five nationalist groups²⁰² shortly before the 2005 parliamentary elections when it surprisingly won 8.2% of the vote. This success was followed by winning 26% of the vote in the presidential elections in 2006 by party leader Volen Siderov who used populist anti-corruption rhetoric. In 2007, three party members were elected as members of the European Parliament. Gradually, starting from

²⁰⁰ Smrčková, M. (2009) "Comparison of Radical Right-Wing Parties in Bulgaria and Romania: The National Movement of Ataka and the Great Romania Party". In: *Central European Political Studies Review*, 1/XI/winter 2009, available at: <http://www.cepsr.com/clanek.php?ID=360>; Betz, H.G. (1993) "The New Politics of Resentment: Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties in Western Europe". In: *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (Jul., 1993), pp. 413-427.

²⁰¹ Interviews with right-wing activists conducted on 10.05.2015 and 19.05.2015; Иванова, Е. (2007) *Обобщени резултати от теренното изследване „Избирателя на „Атака“ – опит за портрет“*, Нов български университет, <http://bgsociety.nbu.bg/data/00002.pdf>

²⁰² Besides the newly-formed party named Ataka, the coalition included: National Movement for Homeland Salvation (with a left nationalist as a leader), Bulgarian National-Patriotic Party, New Dawn Party, and Union of the Patriotic Forces "Defence" (again with a left nationalist as a leader). The leader of the coalition, Volen Siderov became well known for his anti-government, anti-NATO and anti-minority rhetoric was a former journalist, former editor-in-chief of Bulgaria's first anti-communist daily *Demokratiya* (Democracy) in the 1990s, and later a TV show host and author of a series of "Jewish Freemasons' conspiracy" books, some examples including: Сидеров, В. (2002) *Бумерангът за злото*. София, Жарава; Сидеров, В. (2004) *Властта на Мамона*, София, Бумеранг Б.

Box 2. Right-wing political parties (continued)

2006, a series of hooligan acts by party members and personal conflicts²⁰³ resulted in the coalition's disintegration.²⁰⁴ Ataka dissidents formed different political entities among which the Citizens' Union for a Real Democracy; the National-Democratic Party; and the National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria.²⁰⁵ The latter two are currently part of the Patriotic Front, which as of 2015 is a member of the government coalition in Bulgaria.

Ataka operates its own TV station Alfa which enjoys national coverage and publishes a newspaper "Ataka".

Ideology

At the time of its consolidation (2005) Ataka united the most significant nationalist establishments using anti-Roma and anti-Turkish rhetoric, patriotism slogans, and the opposition between "national" and "foreign," a rhetoric developed in the 1990s.²⁰⁶ Several topics dominate Ataka's ideology: (1) the minorities are to blame; (2) there should be unity of the nation and a strong state; and (3) foreign influence is harmful to Bulgaria.²⁰⁷ Identifying these main issues, Ragaru²⁰⁸ also adds that the party's goal is to emancipate the country from the minorities in domestic policy aspect and from the international community in foreign policy. As more of Ataka's eminent figures started leaving the party, a change in its political discourse has been observed. The anti-minority and nationalist discourse of its early period transformed to strongly pro-Russian and anti-system rhetoric, including promoting Bulgaria's joining the Eurasian Union.²⁰⁹ Moreover, after 2007, Ataka has focused increasingly on social issues making its messages acquire a leftist sounding. It has been argued that together with its pro-Russian discourse, the party aims at attracting left-wing neo-Bolshevik voters.²¹⁰

²⁰³ An example is a road accident with Volen Siderov, which he claimed was a deliberate attack, Siderov's driver commits a violent act. Ataka MP Pavel Chernev first testifies that he had been in the car with Siderov and afterwards he says he was made by Siderov to cover his driver who had already been convicted. This case causes disruption in the party and Chernev spins off. For more information, please see: „Атака“ пред разпад, в. Сера, 18.04.2006.

²⁰⁴ Coalition members started to distrust Siderov suspecting him of using his political position for his own benefit (according to an interview with a nationalist organisation activist who took part in these events).

²⁰⁵ The first formation is led by Slavi Binev, the second by Siderov's former partner Kapka Georgieva and the third by Valery Simeonov.

²⁰⁶ Тодоров (2012). According to the same author this latter distrust towards international institutions such as the EU and NATO might to some extent explain the presence of leftist nationalists associated with the BSP, such as the National Movement for Homeland Salvation and the Union of Patriotic Forces "Defence" in the coalition.

²⁰⁷ Тодоров (2012), p. 8.

²⁰⁸ „20 точки на партия АТАКА“, http://www.ataka.bg/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=13&Itemid=51; Рагару, Н. (2010) „Как така АТАКА? Преоформянето на лицата на българския национализъм“. В: *Преплетените времена на настоящето*. София: ИК КХ, 2010. стр. 288. For example, one proposal includes that the amount of taxation and income in Bulgaria should depend on the needs and abilities of its citizens, not on the requirements of the IMF and the World Bank.

²⁰⁹ Кристиан Димитров – Дневен Ред – „Трябва да минем към Евразийския съюз“. ТВАлфа–Атака, 07.04.2014г., <http://vbox7.com/play:d5190b1794>

²¹⁰ Ghodsee, K. (2008) "Left Wing, Right Wing, Everything: Xenophobia, Neo-totalitarianism, and Populist Politics in Bulgaria". In: *Problems of Post-Communism*, May/June 2008, http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/kristenghodsee/files/left_wing_right_wing.pdf

Box 2. Right-wing political parties (continued)

National Front for Salvation of Bulgaria (NFSB)

History NFSB was established as a splinter group from Ataka, following a personal conflict between the leaders of the two parties. NFSB participated together with IMRO in the Patriotic Front coalition in the October 2014 parliamentary elections and won 19 seats in parliament (winning over their rival Ataka which took 11 seats). Similarly to Ataka, NFSB operates its own TV station which, however, is not nationally broadcasted²¹¹ and publishes a newspaper called *Desant* (disembarkment).

Ideology The ideology of NFSB is centred on a nationalist rhetoric. Among its professed aims are a healthy and rich nation, revival and preservation of the Bulgarian identity, tradition and culture, support for Bulgarian Orthodox Christianity.²¹² Although NFSB's political programme published in 2014²¹³ is more moderate than that of Ataka, leading political scientists believe that the party aims at destroying the system of democracy.²¹⁴ Some of its proposals are openly aimed at social and political exclusion of members of the Roma and other minority communities: 1) tying access to social and child benefits to parents' educational status and ability for social integration; 2) introduction of Bulgarian language entry exams for all children aged six and in case of insufficient knowledge compulsory preschool classes to be paid by parents; 3) introduction of tax on foreign cultural products as a measure to stimulate the production of Bulgarian folklore, music, movies, series, shows, etc.; 4) introduction of the right of Bulgarian citizens to bear arms in defence of their lives, health and property as the cheapest measure for curbing crime.

The Bulgarian Helsinki Committee filed a complaint to the Sofia Appellate Prosecutor's Office against NFSB and IMRO programme for preaching and incitement to discrimination, violence and hatred towards the Roma population. It was however rejected with the motives that the political programme rather calls upon integration and compliance with the law.²¹⁵

Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation (IMRO)

History IMRO is the second nationalist party in the Patriotic Front. Its name is borrowed from a quasi-military organisation established in 1893 to promote the Bulgarian territorial unity and the geographical area of Macedonia in the context of the then disintegrating Ottoman Empire. A party under the same name (with different factions such as IMRO-BDM, IMRO-BNM and IMRO-UMA) was founded in 1989 and gained popularity in the South-west of the country and among some groups of the Bulgarian youth. The contemporary IMRO was unable to become a stable and influential political force,²¹⁶ which can partly be attributed

²¹¹ It is available via the cable operators in Sofia and eastern Bulgaria.

²¹² NFSB website at: <http://www.nfsb.bg/targets.php>

²¹³ NFSB website, „Основни задачи на правителството на националното спасение“, http://nfsb.bg/programa_2014.php

²¹⁴ Тодоров, А. (2014) „НФСБ или защо са personanongrata в едно бъдещо правителство?“, Блог на Антоний Тодоров, <https://antonytodorov.wordpress.com/2014/10/31>

²¹⁵ *News.bg*, „БХК разочарован от отказа на прокуратурата да се заеме с НФСБ и ВМРО“, 02.09.2014, http://news.ibox.bg/news/id_1729623115

²¹⁶ Genov (2010).

Box 2. Right-wing political parties (continued)

to its establishing and participating in dubious coalitions such as the purportedly centrist Bulgaria without Censorship coalition in 2014. Another reason might be the affiliation of IMRO's long-term leader Alexander Karakachanov with the security services of the communist regime.²¹⁷ This is the main reason for the distrust that nationalist and far-right activists share for him.

Ideology IMRO appropriates strong nationalist ideology which is built on anti-Roma, anti-Turkish, anti-immigrant and anti-Islamic rhetoric. Minorities, foreigners and Islam are discussed as threatening to the Bulgarian nation and state. The party positions itself as proponent of a stronger state and defender and safeguard of the national rights of historical Bulgarian communities abroad.²¹⁸

Nationalist Party of Bulgaria (NPB)

History The party was founded on 9 November 2013 by 10 organisations, among which Blood and Honour, National Resistance and the football fans' faction Ofanziva (see further the next chapter). It also brings together Ataka's ex-member Pavel Chernev and several ex-members of the Bulgarian National Union (BNU). The establishment of the party met with significant public opposition. The Bulgarian Helsinki Committee together with 112 public personalities filed a complaint to the Prosecutor General stating that registering the party would violate the Constitution. Consequently, the party withdrew its registration application and was not constituted.²¹⁹ A former BNU member criticised it for "choosing the wrong tactics" by using radical and populist language, which would hinder its success in the future even if it got official registration.²²⁰

Ideology Its programme of 21 items adopts a strong nationalist and authoritarian discourse. Some of its proposed policies include: countering minority criminality and "smashing Gypsy terror with an iron fist;" ban on all "anti-Bulgarian organisations"; "crush and ban" all "separatist groups on the territory of Bulgaria"; introduction of a new constitutional model to include a presidential republic, majoritarian elections and compulsory voting; as well as the conduct of a referendum to decide whether Bulgaria should remain within EU and NATO.

²¹⁷ Христов, Х. (2011) „Досиетата на кандидат-президентите: Красимир Каракачанов“, <http://desebg.com/2011-01-06-11-34-32/443-2011-10-20-15-26-05>

²¹⁸ IMRO website at: www.vmro.bg

²¹⁹ Български хелзинкски комитет (2014) „Съдът не регистрира Националистическата партия на България“, 08 Май 2014, <http://www.bghelsinki.org/bg/novini/press/single/sdt-ne-registrira-nacionalisticheskata-partiya-na-blgariya/#>

²²⁰ Interviews with right-wing activists conducted on 10.05.2015 and 19.05.2015.

Profiles of electoral supporters

Since its appearance on Bulgaria's political scene and despite its ideological inconsistency,²²¹ Ataka enjoyed a relatively stable share of electoral support (increasing by 2009 in terms of absolute numbers)²²² until 2014, when the Patriotic Front appeared and gained wider support as a more moderately nationalist parliamentary coalition. In terms of actual attendance of party events, Ataka's actions – such as the violent protests against the loudspeakers in Sofia's Banya Bashi mosque²²³ or against the EU sanctions against Russia – manage to mobilise support at most of its events. Given the NFSB's short history and local influence in Eastern Bulgaria, it does not enjoy the support of the nationalist activists. It is not considered to be able to mobilise supporters in public events to back their policies. This is, however, not the case with their coalition partner, IMRO.²²⁴

After Ataka's surprising success in 2005, a number of surveys tried to identify the features of its electorate and their reasons for their support.²²⁵ Political scientists attribute Ataka's popularity to the protest vote and see their supporters as the "humiliated and insulted."²²⁶ The vote for Ataka is often explained as a protest vote of individuals who have pent-up aggression and who lack critical thinking and thus constitute fertile ground for populist slogans. The dualistic presentation of people and social groups as "good" and "bad", inherited by Bulgaria's totalitarian period, contributes to the right-wing tendency to condemn anyone "different", be it belonging to a different ethnicity, sexual orientation, or other.²²⁷ Ivanova²²⁸ classifies Ataka's voters under the following categories: "biographic communists", or disappointed socialist party voters; "biographic nationalists", or descendants of refugees from Macedonia and Aegean Thrace who have been raised with antipathy towards Turkish or Muslim people in general; and "people of average social status" who feel deceived for not obtaining what they believe they deserve.

²²¹ In 1991, in a commentary for *Demokratsia* daily, Volen Siderov wrote "Where Alyosha's boot [the Soviet army] has stepped people have known only slavery." в. *Демокрация*, Сидеров, В. (1991) „Да освободим Альоша от наряд“. В. *Демокрация*, 4.03.1991, с. 1. The contrary opinion can be found in: Гюзелев, Г. (2015) „Сидеров от Москва: Който е тръгнал срещу Русия, свършва като Наполеон и Хитлер“, В: *Национален информационен портал АТАКА* (www.vestnikataka.bg), 09.05.2015.

²²² Старидолска, Е. (2013) Избори 2013: „Атака: Най-важното от кампанията и обещанията на партията за парламентарния вот“, в. *Капитал*, 24.04.2013.

²²³ Климентиевна, К. (2012) „Атака“ пак протестира срещу шума от софийската джамия“, В. *Дневник*, 14.06.2012.

²²⁴ Методиева, Ю. (2015) „Вашингтон“ 5 мобилизира ултраси и рокери?“, в. *Marginalia*, 08.06.2015.

²²⁵ Иванова (2007); Рагару, Н. (2010) „Как така АТАКА? Преоформянето на лицата на българския национализъм“. В: *Преплетените времена на настоящето*. София: ИК КХ, 2010; Cholova, В. (2013) *Anti-Establishment Reform Parties in Bulgaria: A Decade of Dominant Populist Rhetoric*, CEVIPOL, Université libre de Bruxelles, ECPR General Conference in Bordeaux, 4-7 September 2013; Raгарu, N. (2011) "Voting for Xenophobic Party "Ataka" in Bulgaria. Reshaping Symbolic Boundaries after Socialism", In: *Euxinos 2* (2011); Smrčková, M. (2009) "Comparison of Radical Right-Wing Parties in Bulgaria and Romania: The National Movement of Ataka and the Great Romania Party". In: *Central European Political Studies Review*, 1/XI/winter 2009.

²²⁶ Русева, Л. (2007) „Опитомяването на „Атака“. В: *Тема*, брой 41 (312), 15-21.10.2007.

²²⁷ Томова, И. (2015) „Образът на ромите в шест електронни медии“. *Integro Association*, p. 7.

²²⁸ Иванова (2007), p. 7.

None of the cited pieces of research however provide a definitive picture of the profile of Ataka voters. They consist of people of different social and educational status, of different age groups (prevailing those between 41 and 50 years of age)²²⁹ who live predominantly in the regional cities and in Sofia (a total of 60%).²³⁰ They can also be prone to crisis-reactive nationalism²³¹ in response to specific incidents such as anti-Roma protests in Katunitsa, Gurmen and in the Sofia's neighbourhood of Orlandovtsi in 2015. Ghodsee²³² suggests that Ataka's discovery in 2005 was that the right-wing rhetoric was able to inspire otherwise apathetic people to go to the polls.

The electorate of the other nationalist parties has not been subject to extensive research as sociologists believe²³³ that they take away the support of the 2005 Ataka electorate.

The data in the Appendix shows that after Ataka's election to parliament in 2005, a relatively constant share of nationalist parties' electorate is distributed among the available players at the respective elections. The lower shares at the 2014 European Parliament elections were due to lower turnout (35.8%).

Much fewer in numbers are the far-right activists who support and vote for the above parties. Those are rather the less ideological individuals, such as the football fans.

Non-parliamentary actors

Political actors not represented in parliament are three types: skinhead-type gangs engaged in spontaneous attacks against members of minorities or foreigners often without particular ideological base; ultra-right organisations based on common interests such as music, football, sports, history, religious views or extreme ideas; and passive individuals who are ultra-right political parties' voters. It is impossible to strictly distinguish between the three types of far-right groups as usually their members are part of more than one group depending on their interests. Moreover, these groups often merge and actors move between them.

Such individuals usually associate in any organisational form based on a subculture such as football team support, or music, in particular the genres of "oi music", "Rag music" and the National Socialist Black Metal.²³⁴ Alternatively, adherents become members of a skinhead or other informal group. There is no specific form of recruitment. One respondent describes the recruitment process as a "self-reproducing system" – the boys between the ages of 12 and

²²⁹ Parapy (2010) p. 312.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ A term used in: Kiossev, A. and Kabakchieva, P. (2008) "The Privatization of Nationalism(s)". Reported at the 38th World Congress of the International Institute of Sociology, Budapest, June 2008, <http://www.seal-sofia.org/en/projects/completed/FCN/>

²³² Ghodsee (2008).

²³³ For example: *Politikata.net*, „Първан Симеонов: „Патриотичен фронт“ взима гласове от ББЦ и Атака”, 15.08.2014.

²³⁴ Some of the national socialist black metal bands are Paganblut, Ариан Арт (Arian Art), Родна защита (National Defence).

16 begin to find neo-Nazi ideas, image, and behaviour attractive and start to reproduce them.²³⁵ Thus, they begin to visit football games, music concerts, or just get acquainted with older activists. Young people appear to be attracted to greater extent by the feeling of belonging to a closed group rather than to the ideology itself.²³⁶ At this early stage, youngsters read nationalist literature, or more often far-right websites (including those based on mystifications and “alternative history”). They start to wear clothing brands perceived as popular among neo-Nazi groups as Lonsdale, Fred Perry, Hatecrime, and Troublemaker with extremist symbols such as swastikas, “SS”, the Celtic cross, or White Pride²³⁷ symbols, often without understanding their meaning. The youngsters who become members of a far-right group are often subjected to an initiation procedure or act. Such acts often include violence, and either by committing it, or by becoming its victim, the initiated candidate member should prove his (there is no evidence of female members of such groups)²³⁸ loyalty, courage or endurance. At this earlier stage, the ultra-right activists get together for a football game, a music concert or just go out together. Such groups often consume alcohol, drugs and commit random violent acts. These acts can be provoked by meeting a person of different ethnicity, sexual orientation, or belonging to a rival football team, music style, or political views.²³⁹ Such behaviour was criticised by the interviewed activists for being unacceptable and undermining the reputation of nationalists in Bulgaria. With time, these young people join one or more often several far-right groups. After reaching the age of 30 they either become criminals, or gradually abandon their involvement if they succeed to find a job or have a family, or join one of the nationalist political parties.

²³⁵ Interview with a former right-wing activist, conducted on 22.05.2015.

²³⁶ Петков, П. (2014) *Футболните агитки в България: екстремизъм, идентификация, принадлежност и разпознаване*, Автореферат на дисертационен труд за присъждане на научна и образователна степен „доктор“ по специалност „социология“. Благоевград: ЮЗУ „Неофит Рилски“.

²³⁷ Централна комисия за борба срещу противообществените прояви на малолетните и непълнолетни към Министерския съвет. (2011) Ръководство за разпознаване, идентификация, и корекционно-възпитателна работа с ненавършили пълнолетие лица, споделящи идеи или принадлежащи към организации с екстремистки или радикален характер. София, 2011.

²³⁸ None of the activists or experts interviewed reported about female activists. Although there were female participants mentioned, they were rather accompanying the participants than being equal to them. There is a Girl Code published at the Straight Edge Bulgaria blog: <http://straight-edge-bulgaria.blogspot.com/2015/02/blog-post.html>. It calls for the girls to support their male partners, to keep their natural beauty, to avoid “racial incest”, etc.

²³⁹ A number of examples were found for such extremist raids. In one of them in 2008, a 26-year man was beaten to death for “looking gay” by a 20-year-old and a 19-year-old persons who “wished to clean the park of gays.” Quoted in Георгиева, Б. (2010) „Убили студент, за да чистят Борисовата градина от гейове“, в. 24 часа, 04.06.2010.

Box 3. Nonparliamentary right-wing actors

Skinhead-type gangs

These groups are less ideological skinhead-type gangs composed of young people in the age group 16-24 who often gather together to use alcohol and drugs (sometimes these groups are joined by boys as young as 12).²⁴⁰ They are cited as the perpetrators of spontaneous attacks or harassment of Roma people or people they perceive as foreigners or gay. For them violence, spurred by substance abuse or by dormant aggression, is often an end in itself and has nothing to do with ideology. Such groups perceive their acts of violence as a form of revenge against ethnic groups and migrants for their alleged criminal activity; attacks or harassment often take place in public transport. Their notion about the Roma is that they are all lazy, do not want to work and they earn their living by receiving social benefits for their children and by stealing. Migrants are perceived similarly, as once arriving in Bulgaria they cannot find a job, therefore they steal to earn their living. The membership base of these gangs is a mixture of ultra-right football fans, skinhead gangs and isolated individuals. Those who remain active when reaching maturity either quit, or evolve to become members of one of the ultra-right organisations described below. Some also become part of the criminal world.²⁴¹

Ultra-right organisations: Bulgarian National Union (BNU)

BNU²⁴² is one of the most stable nationalist organisations in Bulgaria. It was formed in 2001 and for 15 years it has developed its own organisational structure and a set of ethnocentric ideas for the economic, social and political development of Bulgaria.²⁴³ It holds commemorations of historical events and figures, protests and calls for actions (such as protests against Sofia Pride, the anti-monopoly protests of February 2013), sports events and camps,²⁴⁴ carries out social activities (such as maintenance of nationalist monuments, food donations to socially disadvantaged people) and cultural and educational activities.²⁴⁵ BNU was part of the Ataka coalition in 2005. After it left the coalition in 2007, the BNU set up its own political entity named "Guard". At that time, it formed a "national guard" squad to patrol and protect Bulgarians from alleged Roma raids.²⁴⁶ A BNU activist admits that these vigilante groups were formed for populist purposes aimed at showing off belonging to a group with specific views without pursuing real effect. The intended effect was that the patrollers' uniforms with the BNU logo sewn on their sleeves would be recognisable to the public. This populism was introduced by Boyan Stankov-Rasate, copying Volen Siderov's strategy.²⁴⁷

BNU has close relations with nationalist activists in Germany and the Balkan countries. The Union attempted to officially register a political party, but the registration was rejected by the court. After

²⁴⁰ Interview with a representative of law enforcement/intelligence institutions conducted on 24.06.2015.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² <http://bgns.net/>

²⁴³ The Union was long known for its leader Boyan Stankov – Rasate who resigned in 2010. Boyan Stankov is a populist type of leader resembling Volen Siderov.

²⁴⁴ It has its own sports organisation: http://so.bgns.net/component?option=com_frontpage/Itemid,1/

²⁴⁵ Interview with a right-wing activist.

²⁴⁶ Христов, Н. (2007) „Прокуратурата ще провери Националната гвардия на Расате,“ Дарикнюз, 21.08.2007, http://dariknews.bg/view_article.php?article_id=172989

²⁴⁷ Interview with a right-wing group activist.

Box 3. Nonparliamentary right-wing actors (continued)

leaving the BNU, Boyan Stankov-Rasate tried to revive a political party with a similar name – Bulgarian National Union-New Democracy – registered in the 1990s in order to use it for the vote of 5 October 2014.²⁴⁸ The BNU officially denied to be linked to that registration.²⁴⁹ After Rasate's departure in 2010, the BNU's attempts to register a party ceased and it now remains a youth movement. Moreover, its membership base has strongly decreased since then.²⁵⁰

BNU recently launched their project Rodobran²⁵¹ (a kind of family guardian). The project aims at promoting Bulgarian history and historical figures who died for the Bulgarian national idea so that they become modern. Rodobran launched its own fashion line using Bulgarian ethnic design patterns and inscription fonts.

Ultra-right organisations: Blood and Honour (BH)

BH is divided into two rival informal organisations. Combat 18 is one of them, based in Sofia, and it comprises of some of the ultra-nationalists of Sofia-based football fan groups. It brings together members of the informal group gathering at the famous Sofia location Kravai since the 1990s. The officially-recognised Blood and Honour international organisation member is the second group, located in Plovdiv. Its core membership comprises of approximately 200 people, however they have the potential of mobilising more activists.²⁵² In the words of an ultra-right activist, all these organisations do is maintain a closed club where they occasionally meet and sometimes organise marches and concerts. According to an interviewed nationalist, the main difference between both organisations is that the first is dominated by football hooligans.²⁵³

Ultra-right organisations: National Resistance (NS)

NS is an informal organisation of nationalists set up in 2010-2011 with the purpose of bringing together nationalists of all factions. Its prototype is the German Nationaler Widerstand. Its core of supporters of around 100 people is dominated by skinhead youths and nationalist football fans. The movement took part in several events such as the annual far-right Lukov March,²⁵⁴ and rallies demanding "solving the Roma issue".²⁵⁵ There are data available of two branches of the movement outside Sofia – one in Pernik, "Division Pernik", and one in Plovdiv. On 18 November 2013 the National Resistance Division Pernik organised a rally against the settling of refugees in the town.²⁵⁶ It also supports a broader

²⁴⁸ Първанов, К. (2009) „Новият шифър на Расате“, В: *Тема*, брой 18 (393), 11-17.05.2009.

²⁴⁹ „Български Национален Съюз няма нищо общо с партия БНС – Нова демокрация“, published at the BNU's website at <http://bgns.net>

²⁵⁰ Interview with a right-wing activist.

²⁵¹ <http://www.rodobran.com/>

²⁵² Interview with a representative of law enforcement/intelligence institutions.

²⁵³ Interview with a right-wing activist.

²⁵⁴ The annual event of the nationalists in Bulgaria commemorating General Hristo Lukov (1887 – 1943), a leader of the Union of Bulgarian National Legions and considered among Bulgaria's most eminent fascist figures.

²⁵⁵ *Offnews.bg*, „Шествието: Над 100 искат решаване на „циганския въпрос“ (снимки)“, 21.10.2012.

²⁵⁶ „Национална съпротива – дивизия Перник“ и Националистическа партия на България организираха вчера в Перник шествие срещу бежанците“, в. *Сега*, Брой 4846 (269) 18.11.2013.

Box 3. Nonparliamentary right-wing actors (continued)

campaign against migrants.²⁵⁷ National Resistance is one of the founders of the Nationalist Party of Bulgaria. As of 2015, it is among the most active far-right factions in Bulgaria.

Ultra-right organisations: Straight Edge Movement (SEM)

SEM was founded in Bulgaria in 2012 – 2013 by the former BNU and Blood and Honour activist Nikolay Yovev. It is based in Blagoevgrad and is similar to several European movements from the 1990s such as the Hammerskins. Straight Edge Bulgaria promotes nationalist values and a life free of alcohol and drugs among young people. Its activities comprise almost entirely of the work of its founder. The movement is cited by a respondent as open to work with all pro-active nationalists in Bulgaria.²⁵⁸

Individuals

These are usually non-active ultra-right political parties' voters. Right-wing activists describe them as the "forgotten people from the villages and small towns who are with predominantly leftist political views".²⁵⁹ Social inequality and disappointment with the Bulgarian political system are among the factors, fuelling their nationalism and provoking radicalisation and aggression.

Links between political parties and extra-parliamentary actors

An interesting issue is the link between political parties and informal structures. IMRO and Ataka enjoy certain support from the informal groups of football fans and bikers' clubs (if such a differentiation is possible at all). The NFSB (which appeared last at the political scene and originating from a region other than Sofia, however enjoying highest electoral support among the three) does not generally have direct relations with the non-parliamentary groups, except in Varna where the party was formed.²⁶⁰

The nationalist organisations as well as the neo-Nazi football fans expressly distance themselves from the nationalist political parties, namely Ataka and the Patriotic Front claiming that their populism is aimed at the "easily attractable" electorate. They believe that in gaining such support, these parties use their influence for serving the interests of others (of other political parties or of certain businesses) in exchange for personal financial benefit. Another reason for that distance is the affiliation of some of the parties' leaders with the security services of the communist regime.²⁶¹ Such an affiliation is confirmed by the research of Ragaru²⁶² who notes that the networks of security services officers and political converts have supplied Ataka with political leaders.

²⁵⁷ „Листовки срещу бежанците налепиха в Перник“, <http://www.zapernik.com/>, 7.11.2013.

²⁵⁸ Interview with a right-wing activist.

²⁵⁹ Interview with a right-wing activist.

²⁶⁰ Методиева (2015).

²⁶¹ Interviews with right-wing activists.

²⁶² Рарапу (2010), p. 300.

There is a pattern in the **territorial spread** of the ultra-right groups. They have had traditionally strong positions in Sofia and Plovdiv. Besides these, active groups can be found in Pernik and Blagoevgrad. Smaller centres of nationalists groups, mostly associated with local football teams can be found in the Northern Bulgaria towns of Dobrich, Pleven, Varna, Vidin and Vratsa. The influence of NFSB among the ultra-right groups in Varna has not been researched yet. The supporters of far-right ideas in the other parts of Bulgaria are either few or isolated, or they join any of the above mentioned factions as their local branches.

1.3. Ideas and ideology

The ideas of the extreme right groups in Bulgaria are fragmented and diverse. This section will outline some of their most common features and will try to link them to the above-listed actors.

Generally, activists of most ultra-nationalist formations in Bulgaria define themselves as “patriots” or “nationalists”. As the cause of their pre-1944 predecessors – pursuing “Bulgaria’s national interest” by joining territories populated by ethnic Bulgarians – was no longer relevant after 1990, in the early 1990s they emphasised their anti-communist views and gradually formed a system of ideas concerning the country’s economic and political development based on ethnocentrism and supported by a mix of mythology, history, Nazism and patriotism.

Nationalism

The ideas that Bulgaria’s nationalist organisations and political parties share are more moderate than the neo-Nazi ideology in line with the trends described by Minkenberg.²⁶³ Generally, they believe that nationalism is a political act that should secure “normal development of the indigenous population”, preserving its traditions, developing its culture and social status.²⁶⁴ Their ideology is rather social and proclaims that protectionism (subsidising) of national agricultural and industrial production would lead to economic growth.²⁶⁵ The interviewed activists of nationalist organisations expressly distance themselves from the invocations of genocide against other races, ethnic groups, religions or people with different sexual orientation. They state that such rhetoric, used by some of the younger supporters and by the populist nationalist parties leads to the negative image of the nationalist idea in society. Instead, they focus on ethnocentrism on economic and social lines. This ideology is backed by the claim that Bulgaria is a single ethnic group country. In line with trends across

²⁶³ Minkenberg, M. (2013) “The European Radical Right and Xenophobia in West and East: Trends, Patterns and Challenges,” In: Melzer, R. and S. Serafin (eds.) (2013) *Right-Wing Extremism in Europe – Country Analyses, Counter-Strategies and Labor-Market Oriented Exit Strategies*, Berlin: Friedrich Ebert Foundation, pp. 9-34.

²⁶⁴ БНС. „Какво искаме”, <http://bgns.net/какво-искаме/>; НФСБ. Цели, <http://www.nfsb.bg/targets.php>

²⁶⁵ „20 точки на партия Атака”, http://www.ataka.bg/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=13&Itemid=51; БНС. „Какво искаме”, <http://bgns.net/какво-искаме/>; Interview with a right-wing activist.

Europe, the social and economic divisions are translated into ethnic and cultural terms.²⁶⁶

Nationalist parties declare in their official documents that the law should apply equally to all nationalities and ethnic groups.²⁶⁷ The less ideological groups, such as the skinhead groups and the far-right football hooligans, on the contrary, consider their hate and aggression towards representatives of other ethnic groups, religions and towards people of different sexual orientation as the highest manifestation of patriotism.²⁶⁸

The typical **Nazi and neo-Nazi** doctrine can be found among young right-wing supporters who are more extreme in their views. They tend to be less ideological street gangs who, in the words of “older” nationalists, do not always understand the meaning of the nationalist ideas.²⁶⁹ As most of them are self-taught in ultra-right ideas, they often interpret it in their own way. This often results in aggression against the perceived “enemies” – of other ethnic groups, nationalities or those of non-heterosexual orientation. Such aggression is sometimes also directed at the fans of other football teams or music styles free of any ultra-right ideology.

Racism and anti-Semitism

Racism in the sense of poor treatment of or violence against people because of their race,²⁷⁰ or of hatred on the grounds of ethnic belonging, exists in its most radical form among the less ideological skin head gangs composed of mostly younger activists. Their hatred is directed towards three types of people in Bulgaria – the Roma; migrants and refugees; and the Turkish minority. Skinhead gang members are generally those who commit violent attacks against persons belonging to these groups.²⁷¹ These gang members are usually led by their aggression sometimes targeting random people irrespective of their victim's personality.

Another group of far-right activists, including representatives of the political parties and some organisations such as the BNU, support the idea that ethnic minorities enjoy too many rights.²⁷² Their rhetoric follows a logic according to which minorities are the oppressors and the majority are the victims.²⁷³ The programme documents of these organisations do not make direct statements of hatred, but instead present these views through the prism of the protection of the nation's interest. Yet, anti-minority and clearly xenophobic views can be found in their

²⁶⁶ Gellner, E. (1983) *Nations and Nationalism*, New York: Cornell University Press.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Зафиров, А. (2006) „Мразя турци, цигани, евреи”, В: *Новинар*, 28.09.2006.

²⁶⁹ Interviews with right-wing activists.

²⁷⁰ As defined by the Merriam Webster Dictionary.

²⁷¹ An example can be seen in this interview: *Novini.bg*, „Скинар: Чистим центъра на София от сирийци! Пребил съм стотици „гниди”, 14.11.2013.

²⁷² Станилов, Ст. (2015) „Цигани и роми. Фактите на една отчайваща безизходица”, в. *Атака*, 12.06.2015; Interviews with right-wing activists.

²⁷³ Parapsy (2010), p. 290.

leaders' speeches.²⁷⁴ The general theses against the abovementioned three groups build on already popular stereotypes about different ethnic groups. First, they promote the belief that the Roma are lazy and they steal from the Bulgarians in order to make a living. The term "gypsy criminality" is often used by Ataka leaders²⁷⁵ as an argument in political debates.²⁷⁶ Second, they argue that migrants and refugees in Bulgaria pose a threat to the country's security in two ways – by importing radical Islam for terrorist purposes and by increasing the risk of conventional crime.²⁷⁷ Third, the negative attitude towards the Turkish minority and Muslims in Bulgaria has had a long history related to Bulgaria's territorial belonging to the Ottoman Empire in the past. The Turkish minority is perceived as Turkey's "Trojan horse"²⁷⁸ in Bulgaria. Ataka mimics the attitude of the former communist regime which tried to forcefully assimilate the Turkish minority, by organising campaigns against Turkish cultural or confessional practices, or against the use of the Turkish language in public (a popular campaign of theirs is for banning the news in Turkish on the national television), or "advising" people with Turkish names to move to Turkey.²⁷⁹ Anti-Turkish attitudes among non-parliamentary actors can be evaluated as weaker.

Far-right activists do not share the anti-Turkish attitudes of the political parties. This is explained by the lower dependence of ethnic Turks on social benefits and Turkish people's ability to earn their living.²⁸⁰ However, they elaborated similar ideas with regard to migrants and asylum seekers and the Roma minorities. Interviewees expressed the belief that ethnic groups such as the Roma and the migrants, more precisely asylum seekers, receive preference treatment by government institutions mostly social issues. They are believed to receive more social benefits than ethnic Bulgarians and not to be sanctioned when committing violations. Thus, government institutions are seen as encouraging those violations (for example, not buying tickets in public transport, or using public utilities or healthcare without paying for it). Migrants and refugees are seen as a threat to people's personal security.²⁸¹

Anti-Semitism is an interesting phenomenon in the right political space in that it is solely based on conspiracy theories. Although not popular in post-

²⁷⁴ „Валери Симеонов нарече циганите „човекоподобни“, ВPost, 11.03.2015, <http://www.bpost.bg/article/34261>

²⁷⁵ Станилов, Ст. (2015) „Катуница, Гърмен, Орландовци вещаят края на българската нация“, в. АТАКА, 19.06.2015.

²⁷⁶ Ragaru (2011).

²⁷⁷ For example: Дучев, П. (2014) Готви се халифат на територията на България: Страната ни е в реална опасност от създаване на терористични клетки и атентати, в. Атака, 29.08.2014; Interview with a right-wing activist; A famous example of a xenophobic speech confirming this prejudice is Ataka's Magdalena Tasheva TV appearance classifying Syrian refugees as "cannibals" and "murderers" (bTV Новините (2013) „Магдалена Ташева съзря Сорос в бежанската криза у нас“, bTV, 19.10.2013.

²⁷⁸ As named in Ragaru, H. (2010) „Как така АТАКА? Преоформянето на лицата на българския национализъм“. В: *Преплетените времена на настоящето*. София: ИК КХ, 2010. стр. 295.

²⁷⁹ Ragaru (2011).

²⁸⁰ Interviews with right-wing activists.

²⁸¹ Ataka's and IMRO's views can be found at: „Атака“ заплашва с гражданска война заради бежанците, ВМРО – да защити българите „както намери за добре“, В: *Mediapool*, 03.11.2013.

communist Bulgaria, it is widespread among nationalists in Bulgaria. The anti-Semitic idea is theoretically substantiated mainly by Volen Siderov's series of books published between 2001 and 2003. His 2002 "Boomerang of Evil"²⁸² questions the Holocaust and uses the widely exploited internationally "Jewish conspiracy" theory which blames the Jews for all ills in modern history. The second book, dedicated to the Jewish plans to root out Eastern Orthodox Christianity was "The Power of Mammon",²⁸³ published in 2004. These books seem to continue to have significant influence over right-wing activists, as cases of desecrating Jewish temples or schools by painting swastikas or other Nazi symbols are still an occurrence.²⁸⁴

Homophobia

Bulgarian far-right groups are strongly **homophobic**. This is to a significant extent a leftover from the homophobic attitudes of the communist regime.²⁸⁵ According to all aforementioned actors, homosexuality is overrepresented in Bulgaria's public life, and its public image is deliberately presented as positive by liberals and the media. It should, according to them, in no way be manifested in public as this manifestation serves as a negative example for young people who try to imitate it and thus spread it.²⁸⁶ Ataka went even further proposing a supplement to the *Criminal Code* incriminating the manifestation of homosexuality.²⁸⁷ NFSB is active locally, tabling numerous proposals to the city council of Burgas for banning gay pride events.²⁸⁸

These groups hold that gay people should not be allowed by the government to "tell everybody how happy and proud of themselves they are".²⁸⁹ Further, heterosexual people as a majority should have their values respected by homosexuals and "moral values" (i.e. heterosexual) should be imposed with respect to, for example, public appearance of men in female clothing. Although the general tolerance towards people of different sexual orientation has not been studied in Bulgaria, some research on tolerance in the media shows that the general public is predominantly negative towards homosexuality.²⁹⁰ Eurobarometer confirms that only 15% of Bulgarians agree that homosexual marriages should be allowed in the EU.²⁹¹

²⁸² Сидеров, В. (2002) *Бумерангът на злото*. София: Жарава.

²⁸³ Сидеров, В. (2004) *Властта на мамона*. София: Бумеранг.БГ.

²⁸⁴ For example: Георгиев, С. (2014) „Синагогата в София осъмна със свастика“, В: *SofiaUtre.bg*, 05.06.2014.

²⁸⁵ „Хомофобия в Източна Европа“. В: *Deutsche Welle*, 01.06.2006, available at: <http://dw.de/p/AuYu>

²⁸⁶ Христов, Ю. (2014) „Сидеров иска затвор за участниците в гей парада“, В: *OffNews*, 28.10.2014.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁸ „От НФСБ искат забрана на гей проявите в Бургас“, В: *Ureport*, 26.10.2014.

²⁸⁹ Interview with a right-wing activist.

²⁹⁰ Добрева, Е. (2010) „За медийния образ на хората от ЛГБТ общността.“ – В: *Кирова М. (ред.). Идентичности в преход: род, медии и популярна култура в България след 1989 г.* София: Полис, 2010, с. 76-92.

²⁹¹ EUROBAROMETER 66: Public Opinion in the European Union, September 2007.

Against the system

Non-parliamentary actors see the political class as a dangerous opponent of the nation alongside with migrants and minorities.²⁹² The theoretical background of this idea comes, among other sources, from Volen Siderov's book "Bulgarophobia",²⁹³ in which politicians are seen as practicing genocide against their own nation. At the time when the book was published, Siderov was seen as a Hitler-type ultra-right leader who had not run for parliament yet.²⁹⁴ The rest of the nationalist organisations took over his thesis and elaborated it. The BNU is among the organisations which have further developed this ideology on its website²⁹⁵ where it says that the national interest overlaps with the state's interest only when there is a nation state – a country of one ethnos. The nation state is „the most powerful instrument” to counteract “the enemy” – oligarchs who get rich at the expense of ordinary Bulgarians, politicians, criminals, and the “human rights activists who corrupt young people's morals and work towards imposing discriminatory measures towards Bulgarians in their own home”.²⁹⁶ In that sense, the BNU can be considered as an anti-system organisation.

They see the political class as corrupt and working only for its own benefit. They blame the former secret service of the communist regime for being the architects and the executors of the distorted political system working in favour of politicians' business clientele. Thus, ultra-right activists propose a process known as lustration – a ban of all former State Security agents from holding public office and pressing charges against those who are responsible for illegally or at the public's detriment privatising state-owned property after 1990. Moreover, they believe that since almost all members of the political class are re-elected at every round of elections, a radical step should be undertaken. However, they still have no idea what it should be. As a measure to break this reproduction of the political class, they propose the introduction of an educational and age threshold for those allowed to vote in order to ensure that people with “sufficient common sense” elect the politicians.²⁹⁷

Nationalism is viewed as the only source of pride for the individuals who have accumulated disappointment and aggression against the political system which they blame for the unsuccessful transition from totalitarianism to democracy. Liberalism is viewed as a counterpoint to patriotism and respectively of progress and social prosperity. This is another view that brings far-right and far-left supporters together.

All far-right activists interviewed emphasise that they are not politically represented in the Bulgarian parliament and that there is no political party which reflects their views even partially. This is particularly true with regard to the radical nationalist parties in parliament which are seen as part of the corrupt political class. The

²⁹² BNU website, „Настоящото състояние на България”, <http://bgns.net/настоящото-състояние-на-българия/>, Interviews with right-wing activists.

²⁹³ Сидеров, В. (2003) *Българофобия*. София: Бумеранг.БГ.

²⁹⁴ For example in: Вълканов, В. (2010) „Хитлер и неговите български наследници”, В: *Дума*, 30 юли 2010.

²⁹⁵ Its website has a section “Outlook”, which defines the basic notions of its ideology, <http://bgns.net/за-раздела/>

²⁹⁶ BNU website, „Настоящото състояние на България”, <http://bgns.net/настоящото-състояние-на-българия/>

²⁹⁷ Interview with a right-wing activist.

affiliation with the former State Security of many representatives of Ataka²⁹⁸ and the Patriotic Front adds legitimacy to this view.

Mysticism

The tendency towards the **occult** and the mystical is another feature typical of the far-right in Bulgaria. Occultism is at the same time one of the paths for recruiting right-wing followers. There are numerous documents and web-based content spreading mystical teachings. They promote a unique spiritual identity between Bulgaria's land and the people who have inherited that link, namely native Bulgarians. One of these movements, the Warriors of Tangra²⁹⁹ links Bulgaria's history to the occult beliefs of the Third Reich putting forward a number of analogies.³⁰⁰ In her research Goncharova³⁰¹ classifies these nationalist mystical and religious factions according to the representation strategies they use and the types of communities they create:

Sects – they attempt to adapt marginal alternative religious cults similar to the Anastasia cult in Russia;

Missions – single person projects for moral perfection;

Libraries – this is the most extensive one; it focuses on transforming the link between religion and nationalism into religion and patriotic culture with a strong educational load;

Orders – they guard the (old) Bulgarian spirituality.

One of their main tools is manipulation of historical facts and elaboration of alternative science, particularly history, which uses historical facts selectively or speculates over controversial ones.³⁰²

Alternative history is very important for the legitimacy of ultra-right organisations. Interviewed activists share complete distrust of the official history stating that, for example, German history of the 1930s is demonised because it is written by those

²⁹⁸ See for example: Parapy (2010), p. 298 et seq.

²⁹⁹ Tangra is the Bulgarian name of the pagan deity worshiped by some in the pre-Christian period: <http://www.voininatangra.org/modules/news/>

³⁰⁰ Скинхедс – новите багаини, 01.01,1998, <http://www.voininatangra.org/modules/xfsection/article.php?articleid=203>

³⁰¹ Гончарова, Г., *Тангра-национализъм: новите интернет религии*. Академичната лига за Югоизточна Европа, <http://www.seal-sofia.org/bg/projects/completed/FCN/CaseStudies/>

³⁰² For example, Kuzmanov describes this alternative science in the following way: “the promotion and popularisation of the ancient grandeur is considered a task more important than following historical authenticity; i.e. there is another component in the construction of a new national mythology. The most important and national affirmative features in both cases [when considering Thracian and Old Bulgarian history] are accepted how ancient the culture is, the depth of its religion and the scale of its civilisation. The messages of the ‘alternative’ history are predominantly aimed at young people, who are most receptive to this type of suggestions; however, there are many people from the older generations who readily read and distribute the new theories and interpretations” (Кузманов, М. „Патриотични употреби и националистически злоупотреби с археологията в България”, Академичната лига за Югоизточна Европа, стр. 27, www.seal-sofia.org/bg/projects/completed/FCN/CaseStudies/MomchilKuzmanovProekt.pdf).

who won World War II. Activists follow the abovementioned mystical factions to varying degrees depending on their personal views.

Another alternative history product is the mystification of the so called “Ran-Utt plan”³⁰³ – a conspiracy theory more typical of the far-left supporters of Soviet-type communism due to their sensitivity about the U.S. and imperialist conspiracy theories. This mystification, however, finds supporters among far-right activists too.

Anti-imperialism is another issue, inherited from the totalitarian regime, which is equally reflected in both ultra-left and ultra-right ideologies. It is closely related to anti-Semitism and conspiracy theories. Experts³⁰⁴ reckon that the totalitarian past is the base of the anti-Semitism shared by the two extreme ideologies – left and right. The abundance of anti-Semitic content³⁰⁵ which spread in the 1990s and 2000s propounds the idea that a secret society dominated by Jewish Masons rules international politics. These views provoke sympathy towards the Palestinian state and towards radical organisations like Hezbollah or Hamas.

1.4. Manifestations (repertoire of actions)

Acts not associated with violence

Far-right organisations, excluding political parties, are not active on a regular basis because of their lack of professional capacity and resources to do so. They organise events on important dates and on topics they seek to monopolise such as countering the gay prides. Their non-violent acts can be systematised as follows:

Electoral campaigns: These are a lot similar to other political parties’ campaigns. Far-right party leaders often use populist and xenophobic language combined with specific styling (black clothes, Nazi-type flags, etc.) during campaigns in order to position themselves exclusively in the ultra-right spectrum.

Protests and public gatherings: Extreme right entities often organise protests on different occasions – for example, rallies against plans to settle up refugees from Syria in the town of Pernik,³⁰⁶ or protests against the annual Sofia Pride.³⁰⁷ Ataka

³⁰³ In 1990, the then Prime Minister Andrey Lukanov asked a team of U.S. economists to elaborate a plan for the economic development of Bulgaria. The 600-page plan consisting of measures for the transition from the communist economy to a capitalist one suggested privatisation, fiscal reform, currency board, tax reform, etc. The plan was approved by the Bulgarian parliament. Afterwards, many political leaders blame the plan for the poor economic performance of the country. Some mystifications go further stating that the real content of the plan was hidden and its aim was to keep Bulgaria economically weak. This is primary a thesis of the far-left pro-Russian groups. Example: www.northstarcompass.org/nsc0604/bulgaria.htm

³⁰⁴ Interview with a former right-wing activist. The same thesis is shared in Parapy (2010).

³⁰⁵ Examples of such can be found at: http://evreite.blogspot.com/2012/04/blog-post_3208.html; <http://kolevm38.blog.bg/izkustvo/2012/04/07/kak-evreite-zakopavat-ylgariia.936051>; http://conspiracyandtruth1.blogspot.com/2013/05/blog-post_23.html

³⁰⁶ „Национална съпротива – дивизия Перник” и Националистическа партия на България организираха вчера в Перник шествие срещу бежанцит.”, в. *Сега*, Брой 4846 (269) 18 Ноември 2013.

³⁰⁷ Недкова, В. (2015) „Спри педерастията в България, зове антигей шествие в столицата”, В: *news.bg*, 27.06.2015.

occasionally uses the instruments of the nationalist groups, as a populist move aiming to secure activists' support. Such were the series of protest actions against the loudspeakers of the Banya Bashi Mosque in Sofia. IMRO also organises similar of events, for instance a rally against the "unpunished ethnic criminality" in 2012.³⁰⁸

When speaking in public radical right actors often use **hate and xenophobic speech**. It is directed against migrants and refugees, minorities and LGBT people. Although classified as a non-violent act, hate speech in non-public situations takes the form of verbal aggression and harassment against representatives of the mentioned groups committed often by skinhead gangs.

Marches: Ultra-right groups organise marches on special dates to commemorate a historical event or a person. The special annual event, organised by the BNU and supported by all ultra-right groups is the Lukov March.³⁰⁹ In addition to the controversies around the personality of Gen. Lukov, the march is widely criticised for promoting fascist ideology, for incitement to hatred against minorities and for manifestation of fascist symbols.³¹⁰ The event is organised under strict rules published on its website.³¹¹ At the event, participants usually carry burning torches.

Marches are also organised on national holidays, related to the national independence and birth and death dates of national heroes such as Vasil Levski, Hristo Botev and military officers of the period of prior to 1944.

Cultural and educational events: Some far-right organisations, among which the BNU is the most active, organise educational activities on patriotic topics such as history lessons in schools and community centres. Others, like Blood and Honour, organise closed-type or limited entry music events where bands affiliated with them perform.

Distribution of nationalist literature: Some far-right actors are engaged in the distribution of literature promoting the greatness of the Bulgarian nation and its pagan mythology. The print work is associated with the Tangra TanNakRa Bulgarian Foundation.³¹² There is a number of library websites containing resources on history, mythology, "alternative history" and memoirs.³¹³

Graffiti: Nazi symbols, nationalist paintings, anti-Semitic slogans can often be seen in Bulgaria. Graffiti as part of many sub-cultures is an often-seen manifestation of the ultra-right in Bulgaria. There are numerous cases when such graffiti are painted on Muslim or Jewish temples or schools thus demonstrating the negative attitude of the perpetrators in an offensive way.³¹⁴ There is only fragmentary

³⁰⁸ „ВМРО организира марш срещу безнаказаната етническа престъпност”, В: *30dumi.eu*, 06.07.2012.

³⁰⁹ BNU considers itself a successor of the Union of the Bulgarian National Legions which were founded by General Hristo Lukov (1888 – 1943).

³¹⁰ „Властите не разрешават Луковмарш”, *Vesti.bg*, 12.02.2015.

³¹¹ „Правила за провеждане на шествието”, available at <http://www.lukovmarsh.info>

³¹² For more information, please see: <http://tangra-bg.org/>

³¹³ One of these is National Outlook available at <https://nacionalensvetogled.wordpress.com>

³¹⁴ In one of the recent cases, a 14-year-old activist painted swastikas and "Allah is a pig" on the Gorna Oryahovitsa mosque: *Offnews.bg*, „14-годишна драска джамията в Горна Оряховица”, 14.07.2015.

information in the media on their availability as usually only the most radical of them attract public attention.³¹⁵

Acts associated with violence

There are no statistical data about the acts of violence committed by far-right groups both in term of official statistics and in the research literature. The problem with official statistics is that such crimes are usually prosecuted as bodily injury or hooliganism without distinguishing between the profile of the perpetrators or their motives. A certain number of such acts often remain unreported either due to low trust in the law enforcement authorities,³¹⁶ or to the fact that victims can be illegal migrants who fear problems with their status if they turn to the police. Thus, media reports and reports by human rights organisations are the only sources of information about hate crime. These, however, cannot give a snapshot of the intensity of such type of crime.

The so called **(fight) “actions”**, or campaigns, are comprised of gathering a group of supporters and organising a reprisal raid. These are usually acts of violence committed against Roma, migrants or people perceived as gay by skinhead activists between the ages of 16 and 25. There was a single act known to be directed against political opponents – a far-left group suspected of assisting illegal migrants.³¹⁷ The raids come as a response either to a specific incident³¹⁸ or without a formal reason.

In the second case, skinhead groups usually gather together and walk around a specific territory (town/city district). If they come across a person of different skin colour or somebody who does not fit their ideas (ethnic group, sexual orientation, even often football club affiliation or musical preferences, manifested by clothing accessories), they begin a verbal conflict which usually turns into violence. The seriousness of the conflict also depends on the responsiveness of their victim. Such incidents, especially when they are not associated with a heavy injury, often remain unreported to the police. Such incidents often happen in public transport and they provoke fear, especially in migrants and members of the minorities to go out at night. As an illustration, in July 2015, in Sofia’s largest park Borisova Gradina a 67-year-old man was beaten in front of his two grandchildren by five neo-Nazi men, one of them with a Blood and Honour tattoo. One of the children was accused by the attackers for being a begging Roma child.³¹⁹

³¹⁵ *bTV*, „Свастики се появиха отново”, 07.07.2010.

³¹⁶ According to survey data by the Center for the Study of Democracy, only 42.4% of the victims of crime reported them to the police in 2012. Source: Center for the Study of Democracy (2013), *Crime trends 2012 – 2013*, CSD Policy Brief No 41, p. 3.

³¹⁷ This is the well-known case of “the attack in the No. 20 tram”. On 6 June 2010, a group of nationalists allegedly belonging to the informal group National Resistance attacked members of the far-left movement 23 September who were on their way to protest the detention of foreign nationals in the detention centre of Busmantsi. The prosecution pressed charges against six persons for causing moderate and severe injuries, one of them of Palestinian origin. As of 2015, the case is still pending.

³¹⁸ As in this case: Цонев, Д. (2007) „Роми обявиха война на скинари в София”, в. *Сега*, 15.08.2007.

³¹⁹ Енчева, С. „Възрастен мъж е със сериозни наранявания след побой от неонацисти в Борисовата градина”, В: *Marginalia*, 21.07.2015.

Violence may follow as a result of non-violent protests or public gatherings. One of the most widely discussed cases of such violence was the Ataka-organised demonstration against the Mosque Banya Bashi in Sofia,³²⁰ which turned violent on 20 May 2011. On that day, Ataka held a protest authorised by Sofia Municipality but at a certain point the demonstrators tried to dismantle the mosque's loudspeakers. Believers who had gathered for their prayer responded to the provocation. The ensuing clash was stopped by the police arresting several Ataka activists.³²¹ However, none of the perpetrators was convicted, which resulted in a European Court of Human Rights judgment against Bulgaria for failing to guarantee the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

Another type of violent act is the desecration of Muslim or Jewish temples, cultural or historical sites.

Violence caused by a specific incident is usually provoked by a neighbourly conflict (such as conflict over loud music in Garmen in 2015) or an accident (as was the case with the hit-and-run car accident in Katunitsa in 2011) between representatives of different ethnic groups (most often between ethnic Bulgarians and Roma) in areas where two ethnic groups live. Usually, when the news is spread by the mass media far-right nationalists organise themselves in support on the side of ethnic Bulgarians. The organisation is made by means of social media where the organisers recruit usually non-active people.

Crisis-reactive nationalism, as termed by Kiossev and Kabakchieva,³²² is the widely shared nationalism of non-active people. It bursts on concrete occasions such as the car incident in Katunitsa, and it can escalate to riot-type violence. Such events are often attended by one or more ultra-right actors. In terms of proneness to violence, right-wing radical groups have strict hierarchy and it is up to the leaders whether they would allow peaceful events to escalate to violent acts.³²³

1.5. Institutional/law enforcement response

A number of government institutions are responsible for counteracting right-wing radicalisation. Different approaches are used for the different types of actors depending on their legal status and on their activities.

As mentioned above, political parties are subject to registration in court. Public prosecutors can appeal applications for party registrations or ask the courts to cancel already existing registrations in cases when they contradict the *Constitution* or the *Law on Political Parties*. The registration of the Nationalist Party of Bulgaria is the most recent and exemplary case of Bulgaria's far-right party registration practice and the main obstacles radical parties face.

³²⁰ *Mediapool.bg*, „Атака“ организира нов протест пред „Баня Башъ“, 13.06.2012.

³²¹ *bTV*, „Бой и пожар след митинг на „Атака“ пред джамията Баня Башъ“, 20.05.2011.

³²² Kiossev and Kabakchieva (2008).

³²³ Interview with a representative of law enforcement/intelligence institutions.

After the Nationalist Party of Bulgaria filed its registration application to Sofia City Court, the Sofia City Prosecutor's Office filed a negative statement asking the court to reject it on the grounds that proposed ideology and proposed activities contradicted the *Constitution* and the *Law on Political Parties*.³²⁴ The Prosecutor's opinion was backed by an open letter by the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee together with 112 public figures who publicly opposed such registration. The court did not have to decide on that registration as the party leaders cancelled their registration request.³²⁵ The cancellation was provoked, however, not by party leaders' refusal to run for parliament, but by their finding an easier way to do so. The Nationalist Party of Bulgaria joined a coalition with two other entities with already existing registrations – Political Party Liberty of former Ataka member Pavel Chernev and Political Party Libertas Bulgaria – and thus succeeded to bypass the law.³²⁶

In that respect, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) criticised Bulgaria³²⁷ for “the ease of official recognition of extremist parties as well as the possibility for them to receive State subsidies.”³²⁸ The Commission recommended Bulgaria to introduce legislation changes in order to stop public financing of organisations or political parties which promote racism.³²⁹

The institutional response against violent right radicalism is dominated by **repressive measures**. Bulgarian institutions do not use the option of prevention sufficiently.

The two institutions which deal with the acts of hate-motivated violence are the national security and counterintelligence State Agency for National Security (SANS) and the police. However, the two institutions do not coordinate their actions. Each police department on one side and the SANS, on the other, collect operational data which they do not share.

The police deal with radical groups for the purpose of maintaining public order. As already mentioned, in Bulgaria **hate and extremist crime is prosecuted as bodily injury or hooliganism without distinguishing between the profile of the perpetrators or their motives. Thus, it remains hidden within the statistics.** A certain number of such acts also remain unreported either due to low trust in law enforcement authorities or to the fact that victims can be illegal migrants who fear of problems with their status if they turn to the police.³³⁰ A number of international organisations, such as ECRI, criticised Bulgaria for either failing to prosecute racist

³²⁴ Становище от Софийска градска прокуратура относно подадено Заявление за регистрация на политическа партия „Националистическа партия на България“ по ФД №90/2014г. по описа на СГС – ТО – 5 състав, <http://www.prb.bg/bg/news/aktualno/stanovishche-na-sgp-otnosno-zaiavlenieto-za-r-4434/>

³²⁵ *Actualno.com*, „Съдът не регистрира Националистическата партия на България“, 08.05.2014.

³²⁶ *Komentator.bg*, „НПБ намери „врата“ в закона и ще участва на евроизборите“, 16.04.2014.

³²⁷ In its fifth report on Bulgaria, available at: <http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/Country-by-country/Bulgaria/BGR-CbC-V-2014-036-ENG.pdf>

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

³³⁰ According to survey data by the Center for the Study of Democracy, only 42.4% of the victims of crime reported them to the police in 2012. Source: Center for the Study of Democracy (2013).

violence at all, or defining it instead as another type of crime such as hooliganism.³³¹ There is a ruling of the European Court of Human Rights to the same effect.³³²

The focus of police attention in maintaining public order is mainly concentrated on football hooliganism. More systematic efforts to monitor the phenomenon were made in 2000 with the establishment of a specialised working group at the national police. However, in 2014 its successor, the sector “Hooliganism, extremism and sports events” within the General Directorate of National Police was dissolved, pending re-establishment in 2016. The information it had collected was archived without being used by other departments.³³³ Police officers who had gained expertise working with these groups were redirected to other departments.

In 2008, when the links between football hooliganism and ultra-right movements were assessed to constitute a growing risk, a sports hooliganisms unit was formed also within the Sofia Police Directorate.

SANS has its own approach against radical groups from the point of view of countering threats to national security. In that respect, they cover right-wing radical groups.³³⁴ SANS has created a Right and Left Extremism Department within the International Terrorism, Extremism and Migration Directorate. Given the fact that it aims at preventing acts of extremism, the Agency counts on its network of agents to monitor and receive early warning information about such threats. In order to fulfil its responsibilities, SANS monitors all formal and informal actors already mentioned but the information collected remains for internal use only and is not shared with other law enforcement or other institutions.

In terms of **prevention**, juvenile delinquency bodies exist within the municipalities where the police advise such to be open. They are created with the aim of preventing criminal behaviour by juveniles, to protect juveniles from becoming victims of crime, and to study and eliminate the factors which lead to juvenile crime or anti-social behaviour.³³⁵ The Juvenile Delinquency Offices are controlled by a Central Commission for Combating Juvenile Delinquency (CCCJD) and the Local Commissions for Combating Juvenile Delinquency.

In 2009, realising the role of prevention among minors in countering right-wing radicalisation, SANS and CCCJD launched a joint project aiming to raise awareness among Juvenile Delinquency Offices’ inspectors about the problem of right radicalisation. One of the project outputs was a manual developed to assist first-line workers in identifying right-wing recruits. These efforts can, however be evaluated as insufficient as they reach a limited number of people who work with juveniles. **Given that minors are the main group at risk, prevention is recommended to expand to other institutions such as the Ministry of Education and schools.**

³³¹ ECRI report on Bulgaria (fifth monitoring cycle), 16.09.2013, p. 19.

³³² See: *Abdu v. Bulgaria* (application № 26827/08), [http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/sites/eng-press/pages/search.aspx?i=003-4695746-5698254# {"itemid":\["003-4695746-5698254"\]}](http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/sites/eng-press/pages/search.aspx?i=003-4695746-5698254#{)

³³³ Interview with a representative of law enforcement/intelligence institutions.

³³⁴ SANS website, <http://www.dans.bg/en/about-sans-menu-en>

³³⁵ Правилник за детските педагогически стаи, Обн. ДВ. бр.92 от 7 Август 1998 г., <http://www.lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/-13059584>

Having in mind the early age of (self-) recruitment – 15-16 year olds³³⁶ – they fall within the scope of the abovementioned institutions with already developed radical views and thus are subject of predominantly repressive measures.³³⁷

The interviewed ultra-right activists³³⁸ consider themselves treated with excessive attention by the police because of their political views. In their words, every activist who attends some 4-5 marches is on the police records, as at right-wing marches the police collects data on participants' personalities such as photos and personal data obtained through ID checks. Occasionally, the police carry out searches of activists' homes. Those who do not want to be subject to police checks on the street avoid the typical nationalist clothing.

2. LEFT-WING RADICALISATION TRENDS

2.1. Background

The end of the totalitarian regimes in Central and Eastern Europe and subsequent international developments led to the de-radicalisation of much of the political left in the region, including in Bulgaria.³³⁹ The discrediting of socialism and communism and the involvement of the EU, the IMF and the World Bank in the region's transition to a capitalist economy and democracy led to the establishment of a neoliberal political and economic model in the country without any significant opposition.³⁴⁰ Although anarchist and communist movements who resorted to violence were part of the political life in Bulgaria at the turn of the 20th century,³⁴¹ there has not been a strong tradition of left-wing social unrest and direct (violent) action against the establishment in Bulgaria since 1989. Moreover, there have been no known legal cases of left-wing activists or acts brought to trial, and Europol's annual TE-SAT reports have not mentioned left-wing radicalisation as a problem in Bulgaria.³⁴²

Nevertheless, according to a 2013 study, in Bulgaria there were slightly more people supporting radical left ideologies (18.8%) than radical right ones (17.4%).³⁴³ Furthermore,

³³⁶ Interview with a representative of law enforcement/intelligence institutions.

³³⁷ Ibid.

³³⁸ Interviews with far-right activists.

³³⁹ March, L. (2011) *Radical Left Parties in Europe*. London: Routledge, p. 1859.

³⁴⁰ Nagle, J. and A. Mahr. (1999) *Democracy and Democratization. Post-Communist Europe in Comparative Perspective*. London: Sage, p. 273; March (2011), p. 1859.

³⁴¹ Благов, К. 'Атентатът в църквата „Света Неделя“'. Available at: www.krumbtagov.com/fifty/1.php; Ангелов, А. и В. „Анархизмът в България и по света в началото на XXI век.“, 31.12.2006. Available at: <http://anarchy.bg/?p=208>

³⁴² Europol, *EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Reports 2011 – 2014*, available at: www.europol.europa.eu/latest_publications/37

³⁴³ The cited study's authors define the radical left as being “to the left of social democracy,” whose supporters reject capitalism, oppose political and economic elites, and support equal opportunities, income redistribution and the protection of the rights of marginalised groups in society. See Visser, M. et al. (2013) “Support for Radical Left Ideologies in Europe” In: *European Journal of Political Research* (2013): pp. 1-18, pp. 2, 11.

the country has the second highest percentage of supporters of radical left ideas in the EU after Cyprus.³⁴⁴ In addition, 8% of young people (18-30) in Bulgaria define themselves as being on the radical left.³⁴⁵ Yet, importantly, despite the relative popularity of radical left ideas, there has been little electoral support for radical left parties in Bulgaria.³⁴⁶ On the one hand, Bulgarians are reluctant to publicly associate themselves with the political left, which remains stigmatised after the communist period.³⁴⁷ On the other hand, the low levels of electoral support demonstrate the political weakness and discrediting of left-wing parties in the country.

There is practically no political discussion of left-wing radicalisation in the country. The only political statements on the topic were provoked by the 2011 Europol TE-SAT report, which mentioned an increased risk of left-wing extremism in the EU.³⁴⁸ In response, in 2012 the Minister of the Interior stated at a National Assembly hearing that there was no threat of left-wing extremism in Bulgaria.³⁴⁹ He added that the activities of radical left-wing groups in the country are limited to the distribution of propaganda materials and participation in public events and protests attended by insignificant numbers of people. Similarly, there is little public and media discussion of left-wing radicalisation and the potential threats it might pose. For instance, a recent public debate on youth political extremism did not mention radical left-wing youth as a factor in the country's political life.³⁵⁰ Finally, there has been little research and academic debate on left-wing radicalisation in Bulgaria. The issue has been explored above all in comparative studies of the left and the decline of left-wing radicalisation in Europe,³⁵¹ and to some extent in studies of populism in Bulgaria.³⁵²

The only development that has attracted attention to radical left groups is growing pro-Russian and anti-Western attitudes in Bulgaria, including among many on

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

³⁴⁵ Онлайн Парламент (2014) Младите – 24 години след... Изследване и анализ на обществено-политическите ценности на младите хора през 2013 г., София: Фондация Фридрих Еберт.

³⁴⁶ Visser, M. et al., (2013), p. 15.

³⁴⁷ Petkova, M. (2015) "Where Socialism is a Dirty Word". In: *Al Jazeera Magazine*. June 2015.

³⁴⁸ Europol. EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report. 2011. Available at: www.europol.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/te-sat2011.pdf

³⁴⁹ Парламентарен контрол 30/03/2012, <http://press.mvr.bg/NR/rdonlyres/A4C8D988-4EE9-4DEF-B3FB-BEF7032B8A7A/0/20120330.doc>

³⁵⁰ The Red House. Debate on 25.04.2015. Available at: www.redhouse-sofia.org/Event.aspx?id=12871

³⁵¹ March, L. and C. Mudde (2005) "What's left of the radical left? The European radical left after 1989: Decline and mutation" In: *Comparative European Politics* 3(1) (2005): 23-49; March, L. and C. Rommerskirchen (2012) "Out of left field? Explaining the variable electoral success of European radical left parties.". In: *Party Politics* November 5, 2012; Visser, M. et al. (2013); Mareš, M. (2007) "Extreme Left Terrorism in Contemporary Europe: from "Communist Combatant Parties" to Militant Campaigns?". In: *Central European Political Studies Review*. 2007. pp. 294-314. p. 297. Available at: www.cepsr.com/dwnld/maresx20040404.pdf

³⁵² Krasteva, A. (2013) "Bulgarian Populism". 25.12.2013. Available at: <https://annakrasteva.wordpress.com/2013/12/25/bulgarian-populism/>; Popova, M. (2013) "Attack and Counter-Attack: Mainstream Party-Radical Challenger Interaction in Bulgaria" (forthcoming; cited with permission). 18.04.2013. In: *Social Science Research Network* online. Available at: http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2274166; Popova, M. (2015) "Who Supports Ataka?" (forthcoming; cited with permission) In: *Academia.edu*. p. 9. Available at: <https://chnm.gmu.edu/1989/items/show/235>; Interview with former left-wing activist conducted on 8.06.2015.

the left.³⁵³ The Ministry of Defence's annual report mentions the waging of a "hybrid war" that includes pro-Russian propaganda, manipulating public opinion by means of misinformation through populist leaders and the traditional and social media.³⁵⁴

2.2. Ideas and ideology

Given that "radical" is a contested concept,³⁵⁵ the choice of actors to be included in this chapter is based on the working definition of radicalisation adopted in this study as a "growing readiness to pursue and support far-reaching changes in society that conflict with, or pose a direct threat to the existing order."³⁵⁶ This process is separate from the process of violent radicalisation, which includes "the development of a willingness to directly support or engage in violent acts."³⁵⁷ Given that the study's research questions concern both non-violent and violent radicalisation, as radicalisation in most cases does not lead to violence, the actors and ideas included here are not ones who necessarily espouse violence.

The radical left-wing in Bulgaria which is not represented in parliament can be classified under four categories: the communist left, the anarchist left, the new left³⁵⁸ and the greens. They are all united by a critique of the capitalist economic model and the liberal political model that supports it, and by a concern with growing socio-economic inequalities nationally and globally. However, they differ in the social, economic, and political transformations they propose and the means they believe should be employed to achieve social change. On the one hand, using Chirot's³⁵⁹ typology of 20th century ideologies in relation to state power the new left, the anarchist and the greens lean towards libertarianism, while the communist left leans towards authoritarian statism. On the other hand, while ideologically the communist and the anarchist left espouse a vision of revolutionary socialism based on the belief that a socialist society can be created by a violent overthrow of the bourgeoisie, the new left and the greens tend towards a vision of reformist and gradualist approach to establishing democratic socialism.

Firstly, Marxist-Leninist and Stalinist organisations of the **communist left** in Bulgaria, supported mostly by disappointed Bulgarian Socialist Party followers,³⁶⁰ claim to be the continuation of the former Bulgarian Communist Party. They are firmly anti-liberal and their goals are the revolutionary replacement of the capitalist economic and political model with a state socialist one and the creation of a

³⁵³ Бояджиев, Я. (2015) „Антиамериканизъм по български“, в. *Дневник*. 18.03.2015.

³⁵⁴ Министерство на отбраната (2015), Доклад за състоянието на отбраната и въоръжените сили на Република България, София: Министерски съвет, стр. 4, www.md.government.bg/bg/doc/drugi/20150327_Doklad_MO_2014.pdf

³⁵⁵ Neumann, P. (2013) "The Trouble with Radicalization" In: *International Affairs*. 89. pp 873-893.

³⁵⁶ Dalgaard-Nielsen, A. (2010) "Violent Radicalization in Europe: What We Know and What We Do Not Know". In: *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 3:9, p. 798.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ Not to be confused with the New Left movement and student protests of the late 1960s.

³⁵⁹ Chirot, D. (1986) *Social Change in the Modern Era*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. p. 145.

³⁶⁰ Interview with a former left-wing activist.

classless society. The main enemies around which the ideology is constructed are the vaguely defined fascists, including the U.S., NATO, Israel, the EU, global capital and corrupt elites.³⁶¹ At the same time, the communist left adopts a strong pro-Russian stance and employs a Cold War rhetoric,³⁶² as well as sometimes racism and anti-Semitism.³⁶³ It is notable that the communist left-wing in Bulgaria has a tradition of nationalism and anti-minority policies such as the forceful ethnic homogenisation of the Bulgarian-Turkish population by the Bulgarian Communist Party in the 1970s and 1980s.³⁶⁴ Yet it is important to stress that there have not been any reported cases of attacks by communist groups or individuals on members of ethnic or religious minorities.

In this regard it is noteworthy that the ideas and ideology of the communist left to an extent overlap with those of the far-right populist party Ataka, which combines talk of social justice through a left-wing economic agenda with anti-minority, anti-globalisation, anti-Western and pro-Russian rhetoric.³⁶⁵ As Krasteva³⁶⁶ argues, the crisis of the left wing, which decimated the political representation of working and middle class interests, has left a vacuum in the radical left-wing space, which Ataka has used. Indeed the party's leader has been the most vocal opponent of neo-liberalism, including of the IMF's and the World Bank's structural adjustment policies that reduced public expenditure for healthcare, education and pension reform.³⁶⁷ Moreover, as aforementioned, the Ataka leader adopting a pro-Russian rhetoric increased the number of left-wing supporters from the communist left parties and groups. The ideologies of the two also overlap in their support for a strong state and proneness to authoritarianism. In addition, it has been noted³⁶⁸ that the anti-establishment nature of populist parties together with nationalism and anti-Europeanism are becoming powerful resources for mobilisation on both the left and the right.³⁶⁹ Nevertheless, representatives of the other radical left-wing groups do not regard Ataka's platform as left-wing.³⁷⁰

Secondly, the **anarchist left** aims to create one free, classless communist society without a state, through the abolition of national borders, private and state

³⁶¹ Interview with an activist from the Federation of Anarchists in Bulgaria conducted on 15.05.2015; Interview with a former left-wing activist; Кузов, С. (2010) „От „Че Гевара“ направиха фронт срещу „Кръв и чест“, в. 24 часа. 08.06.2010.

³⁶² *Blitz.bg*, „Съюзът на комунистите в България: В Украйна се извършва неофашистки преврат!“, 22.02.2012.

³⁶³ Interview with a former left-wing activist; The Red House. Debate on youth political extremism. 25.04.2015. Available at: www.redhouse-sofia.org/Event.aspx?id=12871

³⁶⁴ Genov (2010), pp. 36-37.

³⁶⁵ Бедров, И. (2013) „Нашествието на крайно левите“. Блог на Иван Бедров, 22.04.2013. Available at: <http://ivanbedrov.com/?p=3479>; Genov (2010), p. 41.

³⁶⁶ Krasteva (2013).

³⁶⁷ Ghodsee (2008); Krasteva (2013).

³⁶⁸ Popova, M. (2013) "Attack and Counter-Attack: Mainstream Party-Radical Challenger Interaction in Bulgaria" (forthcoming; cited with permission). In: *Social Science Research Network* online 18.04.2013. Available at: http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2274166

³⁶⁹ Смилов, Д. (2008) „Фрустрация на демокрацията“, В: *Обектив* No. 159, 26-27, стр. 26.

³⁷⁰ Popova, M. (2015) "Who Supports Ataka?" (forthcoming; cited with permission) In: *Academia.edu*. p. 9; Interview with former left-wing activist.

property and implementing in practice the principles of liberty and equality.³⁷¹ Anarchists see relationships between people as egalitarian, free and non-hierarchical and the state as a form of power limiting human freedom and equality.³⁷² Moreover, they fight against imperialism, nationalism, chauvinism and racism.³⁷³ The anarchist rhetoric is revolutionary but similarly to anarchists in other post-communist European states, Bulgarian anarchists “[have] not embraced terrorism.”³⁷⁴ Their programme includes actions in solidarity with workers in the country and abroad.

Thirdly, the roots of the **new left** and **greens** can be traced to the New Left movements of the late 1960s, such as protection of the environment, the rights of migrants and asylum-seekers, feminism, which have not been marked by violence as much as communist and anarchist-inspired 20th century left-wing extremism.³⁷⁵ Unlike the abovementioned two groups, the new left have a reformist rather than a revolutionary rhetoric. Representatives of this movement seek to achieve social change through education and, to an extent, participation in the democratic system. Hence they are radical in their demands but not in their stated means. The new left’s approach is also non-authoritarian and not constructed around a particular enemy. They believe that the political model should be changed only when society is ready.³⁷⁶ Their goals are achieving real social equality without repeating the left’s mistakes from the past and hence they distance themselves from the conservative and totalitarian nature of the former communist regime.³⁷⁷

Finally, the **greens** are split between a left-wing³⁷⁸ and a neo-liberal centre-right wing³⁷⁹ partly with respect to economic policy, but share support for the democratic process and the rule of law in environmental policies, regarded as central to the protection of the public interest from corporate interests.³⁸⁰ Although fragmented at the moment,³⁸¹ the environmental cause enjoys unparalleled popular support, expressed in regular and well-attended protests against (illegal) building and infrastructure projects causing serious damage to the environment.³⁸² Although nowadays the Bulgarian green movement is influenced

³⁷¹ „Декларация на принципите, целите и средствата на ФАБ”. Available at: <http://anarchy.bg/?p=98>

³⁷² Златков, А. (2012) „Що е анархизъм и има ли бъдеще у нас?”. Блог на Ангел Златков, 30.08.2012, <http://angelzlatkov.com/?p=524>

³⁷³ Ibid.

³⁷⁴ Mareš (2007), p. 302.

³⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 307-309.

³⁷⁶ „Какво е Солидарна България?” Официална страница на „Солидарна България”, 28.03.2012, <http://solidbul.eu/?p=15>; Йорданова, Л. (2013) „Новите леви”. в. *Капитал*, 01.03.2013.

³⁷⁷ „Нови леви перспективи: равенство и ляво след 1989 г.” Интернет страница на Нови леви перспективи, 17.01.2012, <http://novilevi.org/manifesto/>; Социален център „Хаспел”. „За нас”, <http://xaspel.net/about/>

³⁷⁸ The Green Party website at <http://www.greenparty.bg/>

³⁷⁹ The Greens website at <http://izbori.zelenite.bg/>

³⁸⁰ Кръстанова, Р. (2012) *Зеленото движение и зелените партии в България: между интеграция в системата и системна промяна*. София: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, стр. 4.

³⁸¹ Interview with a left-wing and environmental activist conducted on 21.05.2015.

³⁸² Кръстанова (2012), pp. 18-24.

by Western environmental movements, it is not as radical in their means as some current green movements in the West.³⁸³ Finally, it should be noted that many environmental activists do not define themselves as left-wing but rather as anti-globalists and anti-capitalists.³⁸⁴

2.3. Organisational structures and actors

This section presents the political parties and non-parliamentary actors in the left political space in order to describe the context for potential left-wing radicalisation in Bulgaria.

Political parties

After the end of the communist regime in Bulgaria in 1989, the Bulgarian Communist Party largely lost its legitimacy and adopted a democratic socialist position under the name Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP).³⁸⁵ The party has traditionally dominated the left political sphere, although it has gradually become compromised as a left-wing force and has been steadily losing votes.³⁸⁶ According to interviewees³⁸⁷ and other parties on the left BSP's policies are not left-wing,³⁸⁸ for the party continues to be politically and socially conservative,³⁸⁹ and captured by private economic interests.³⁹⁰ Due to the continuous loss of electoral support, as well as the influence of the growth in popularity of Syriza and Podemos, BSP's new leadership has announced that it will "radicalise" and break with neoliberal policies.³⁹¹ The other left-wing parties are either in coalition with the BSP,³⁹² as well as certain Russophile organisations such as the Bulgarian Anti-fascist Union,³⁹³ or have broken away from the party like the centre-left Alternative for Bulgarian Revival party,³⁹⁴ which is currently in government with 4.15% of the vote.³⁹⁵

³⁸³ Interview with a left-wing and environmental activist.

³⁸⁴ Ibid.; Кръстанова (2012).

³⁸⁵ March (2011), p. 1858.

³⁸⁶ Занкина, Е. (2014) „Лявото и дясното в Източна Европа“, в. *Култура*, 30.01.2014.

³⁸⁷ Interviews with left-wing and environmental activist and former left-wing activist.

³⁸⁸ Зайкова, Д. (2015) „Крайно леви с план за нова икономическа политика на България“. В: *news.bg*, 15.02.2015.

³⁸⁹ Тодоров, А. (2013) „Каква левица?“, 23.07.2013, <http://solidbul.eu/?p=1640>

³⁹⁰ Ibid.; Цеков, Н. (2013) „Леви, десни, да вървим напред!“. В: *Deutsche Welle Bulgaria*, 30.10.2013.

³⁹¹ Горанова, Г. (2015) „БСП тръгва с радикални леви послания към местните избори“, в. *Сега*, Брой 5251 (77) 06.04.2015; „Атанас Мерджанов: БСП скъсва с неолибералния модел и започва радикализация“, в. *Гласове*, 04.06.2015.

³⁹² Дамянов, Д. (2014) „БСП – лява България“ се разширява с 5 партии и 11 граждански движения“. В: *novavarna.net*, 17.08.2014.

³⁹³ Николова, М. (2014) „Правят обединение на русофилите в БСП“ Национално движение Русофили, 11.07.2014. <http://bit.ly/1DeYIYB>; The Bulgarian Anti-fascist Union website at: www.bas-bg.org/

³⁹⁴ See www.abv-alternativa.bg/mission.html

³⁹⁵ Централна изборителна комисия 2014. Резултати от избори за народни представители 05.10.2014 г. за страната. Available at: <http://results.cik.bg/pi2014/rezultati/>

Excluding the centre-left votes, currently the radical left parties in Bulgaria are estimated to have approximately 4% of the vote.³⁹⁶ The communist and green parties are marginal and divided, and one of them has representatives in the current parliament. The communist political formations are numerous and include Marxist, Trotskyist and Stalinist political formations, which claim to be the rightful heirs of the former Bulgarian Communist Party, and are dominated by elderly people, and defined by nostalgia for Bulgaria's state socialist past.³⁹⁷ As aforementioned, a number of communist left voters have also recognised the Ataka party as representative of their views.³⁹⁸ The two main green political parties in Bulgaria are divided along economic policy lines. On the one hand, the older Green Party (*Зелена партия*) which is based on the foundations of the Ecoglasnost movement established in 1989 has a left-wing agenda³⁹⁹ but has become largely compromised as a representative of the green movement.⁴⁰⁰ On the other hand, the Greens (*Зелените*) – founded in 2008 by institutionalising recent civic movements – is considered more genuinely representative⁴⁰¹ and favours economic neo-liberalism.⁴⁰² Finally, the party most closely related to the new left and some of the green voters is the Bulgarian Left, which formed a coalition with the Green Party in the last parliamentary elections and won 0.21% of the vote.⁴⁰³

The success of the Syriza party in Greece, and to an extent Podemos in Spain, has had an effect on the left in Bulgaria. As aforementioned, the BSP is shifting their rhetoric to the left,⁴⁰⁴ and several parties have stated their intention to form a "Bulgarian Syriza" as an authentic left alternative to the BSP, by uniting the votes for the small left-wing parties in the local elections in the autumn of 2015.⁴⁰⁵

Non-parliamentary actors

Radical left-wing actors not represented in parliament include a number of communist, anarchist, new left and green youth groups and movements most of which are not legally registered as political organisations. Neither the revolutionary,

³⁹⁶ Зайкова (2015).

³⁹⁷ Тодоров (2013); Interview with a former left-wing activist; Political scientist Parvan Simeonov cited in Цеков (2013).

³⁹⁸ Interview with a former left-wing activist.

³⁹⁹ The Green Party, www.Greenparty.bg

⁴⁰⁰ Кръстановна (2012), p. 35.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

⁴⁰² The 'Greens' <http://izbori.zelenite.bg/>

⁴⁰³ Централна избирателна комисия (2014) Резултати от избори за народни представители 05.10.2014 г. за страната. Available at: <http://results.cik.bg/pi2014/rezultati/>

⁴⁰⁴ *ClubZ.bg*, „Михаил Мирчев: БСП или става СИРИЗА, или умира“, 07.02.2015.

⁴⁰⁵ Колев, Н. (2015) „Ново ляво движение иска 10 пъти по-ниска субсидия за партиите“. в. *Сега*, Брой 5251 (77) 06.04.2015; Павлов, Ст. „Ражда се нов ляв проект в България“. В: БНР, 07.04.2015.; Българската левица (2014) „Създава се Съюз на радикалната левица в България“, 23.11.2014, www.levicata.org/bg/news/view/78/syzdava_se_syuz_na_radikalnata_levica_v_bulgarija/; *Ruse.topnovini.bg*, „БЛ гони успеха на „Сириза“ с обединение на радикалната левица у нас“, 30.01.2015; *Ruse.topnovini.bg*, „Българската левица“ инициира създаването на Съюз на радикалната левица в България“, 09.01.2015.

nor the reformist groups run for public office and participate in the electoral party system at this stage. Instead, they aim to offer and popularise alternative political models and forms of social self-organisation and to mobilise supporters through extra-parliamentary and in some cases non-partisan political engagement. Government officials identify only anarchists and communists as left-wing radicals, but agree that they are currently not a threat to national security due to the low number of followers and limited activity.⁴⁰⁶ There are no left-wing radical groups in Bulgaria banned by the government or subjected to criminal investigation and prosecution as illegal or terrorist organisations.

In the recent past the **communist left** was supported almost exclusively by the elderly, as for example the Russophile Bulgarian Anti-fascist Union.⁴⁰⁷ There are, however, nowadays stronger youth organisations,⁴⁰⁸ which include single-issue youth groups for students' rights,⁴⁰⁹ workers' rights, Marxist-Leninist pro-Russian anti-fascist and anti-Western groups. The main ones identified by respondents are the Sofia-based 23 September, particularly in Sofia University,⁴¹⁰ and Che Guevara⁴¹¹ based in Plovdiv. Notably, the Che Guevara group has attempted to run for parliament. In 2011, they formed the Radical Left coalition with the small party Union of Communists in Bulgaria,⁴¹² and later joined the BSP coalition Left Bulgaria.⁴¹³ According to official information, both organisations have membership of around 10 people.⁴¹⁴ At the same time, according to estimates by interviewees, their numbers have risen from a handful of people a few years ago to having today around 40 active members in the capital city alone and increased activity in the larger cities.⁴¹⁵ Moreover, activist interviewees agree that their numbers continue to rise,⁴¹⁶ although this information is not confirmed by official sources.

The **anarchist** movement is currently rather weak.⁴¹⁷ The Federation of Bulgarian Anarchists was re-established in 1990 after its forceful closure by the former regime.⁴¹⁸ Although there were popular anarchist movements who resorted to violence in Bulgaria at the turn of the 20th century,⁴¹⁹ the tradition has been largely

⁴⁰⁶ Interview with a representative of law enforcement/ intelligence institutions conducted on 24.06.2015.

⁴⁰⁷ See: www.bas-bg.org/

⁴⁰⁸ Interview with a representative of an informal libertarian group conducted on 22.05.2015.

⁴⁰⁹ Student movement for public and accessible education. Available at: <http://priziv.org/>

⁴¹⁰ Interview with a representative of an informal libertarian group.

⁴¹¹ See: <http://septemvri23.com/> and <http://actionredbg.blogspot.com/>

⁴¹² The Radical Left at: <http://bit.ly/1LDe1Mb>

⁴¹³ See Left Bulgaria Coalition at: <https://www.cik.bg/reshenie/?no=746&date=20.08.2014>

⁴¹⁴ Interview with Representative of Law Enforcement/Intelligence institutions.

⁴¹⁵ Interview with representative of an informal libertarian group; Interview with former left-wing activist.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid.; See also: „90 години от смъртта на Георги Шейтанов. История на анархизма в България”. БНТ, 18.05.2015. Available at: <http://bnt.bg/predavaniya/istoriya-bg>

⁴¹⁸ Златков (2012).

⁴¹⁹ „Атенатът в църквата „Света Неделя”. В: *Официален сайт на Крум Благов*, www.krumblagov.com/fifty/1.php; Ангелов, Ал. и В. Николов. (2006) „Анархизмът в България и по света в началото на XXI век.”, 31.12.2006, <http://anarchy.bg/?p=208>

interrupted. Anarchists in Bulgaria tend to be either elderly people over the age of 80, or young people.⁴²⁰ The autonomous libertarian group Anarchoresistance has fallen apart.⁴²¹ According to official sources, the reduction of members in anarchist organisations is due to activists emigrating to Greece.⁴²² Finally, the anarchists are supported largely in the bigger cities and have a strong lobby among Greek university students.⁴²³

First, members of **new left** groups organise critical discussions of issues of public significance and exchange of knowledge at events, online and through publishing, and many contribute to academic debates.⁴²⁴ Second, they manage several social centres, such as for example Haspel and Adelante in Sofia, which operate on the principle of solidarity-based self-organisation and direct democracy.⁴²⁵ Thus, they aim to stimulate critical political thinking, popularise progressive political thought, while also apply in practice the ideas and offer alternative solutions that would “grow, multiply and form the backbone of a new society.”⁴²⁶ The non-governmental organisation and informal discussion group Solidary Bulgaria can also be placed under this category and although their main aim is not to participate in the current party system, it sometimes cooperates with the Bulgarian Left party.

Historically, there has been an environmentalist tradition in Bulgaria since the end of the 19th century.⁴²⁷ Moreover, an environmental campaigning group, Ecoglasnost, established the foundations of the democratic movement by organising the first (peaceful) protests against the totalitarian regime and its environmental crimes in Bulgaria in 1987 – 1989, just before the regime’s end.⁴²⁸ In fact, Ecoglasnost became the first political party during the former regime providing an alternative to the Bulgarian Communist Party.⁴²⁹ Currently the **green left** is not centralised and there are numerous local environmental groups, many of which do not necessarily define themselves as belonging to either the political left or right wing but as non-partisan citizens’ initiatives.⁴³⁰ The green agenda is also represented by a number of nongovernmental organisations,⁴³¹

⁴²⁰ Interview with an activist of the Association of Bulgarian Anarchists.

⁴²¹ See: <http://aresistance.net/>

⁴²² Interview with a representative of law enforcement/intelligence institutions.

⁴²³ Ibid.

⁴²⁴ See: <http://novilevi.org/>

⁴²⁵ See: <http://xaspel.net/> and <http://sc-adelante.org/>

⁴²⁶ Petkova (2015).

⁴²⁷ „История”, Български туристически съюз, www.btsbg.org/informaciq-za-bts/64-istoriq.html

⁴²⁸ Jancar-Webster, B. (1995) “Eastern Europe: Environmental Problems”. In: Paehlke, R. C. (1995) *Conservation and Environmentalism: An Encyclopedia*. London: Routledge. pp. 187-192, at p. 188; Parkin, S. (1995) “Green’ Parties”. In: Paehlke, R. (1995) *Conservation and Environmentalism: An Encyclopedia*. London: Routledge. pp. 317-321, at p. 318; Кръстанова, Р. (2012) „Зеленото движение и зелените партии в България”. София: Фондация Фридрих Еберт. стр. 36-37.

⁴²⁹ Sofia Embassy to U.S. Secretary of State, (1989) “Ecoglasnost Officially Registered as Legal Organisation,” Cold War International History Project Documents and Papers, CWIHP, 12.12.1989. Available at: <https://chnm.gmu.edu/1989/items/show/235>

⁴³⁰ Interview with a left-wing and environmental activist; Кръстанова (2012), p. 24.

⁴³¹ See “Members” section at: Коалиция „За да остане природа в България”, <http://forthenature.org/members>

which are seen as protectors of the public interest against corrupt elites and the democratic deficit.⁴³²

The channels used by left-wing actors to propagate their ideas include public statements, protests, occupations, the printed press, debates and social centres, websites, blogs and social media. The reviewed sources of the aforementioned actors and organisations do not include any incitement to violence. One worrying phenomenon, however, is the publication of articles containing propaganda or conspiracy theories presented and accepted as news, which has increased in recent years according to one interviewee.⁴³³ Recruitment is done through the internet and social media, and increasingly at events and actions.⁴³⁴ Respondents also mentioned exposure to radical left-wing ideas at university, at home, at protests and through music.⁴³⁵

With regard to international cooperation, communist groups are linked to organisations with similar beliefs in Turkey, including the terrorist Revolutionary People's Liberation Party Front (RPLP/F), in Russia and Ukraine. The cooperation consists of demonstrating public support online and at demonstrations, exchanging materials and organising and participating in joint events.⁴³⁶ The Federation of Anarchists in Bulgaria are in contact with anarchist organisations in Greece, Romania and Serbia.⁴³⁷ According to official information, stolen Bulgarian guns were sold to Greek anarchist organisations.⁴³⁸ Finally, representatives of the new left are in contact with other progressive left-wing organisations from other European countries,⁴³⁹ and regularly invite foreign speakers to Bulgaria.⁴⁴⁰

2.4. Repertoire of actions

Despite the revolutionary rhetoric and ideas of some radical left-wing groups, the repertoire of actions of the radical left in Bulgaria is non-violent. The activity of radical left-wing groups is based on the belief that the political model must be changed but only when left-wing ideas have gained popularity and society is ready; hence, their current work is focused on political education and popularising left-wing ideas.⁴⁴¹ Clashes with and attacks by right-wing groups are the only violent actions, in which members of left-wing groups have been reported to participate.⁴⁴²

⁴³² Стоилова, Р. и Ф. Биери (2010) „Опазване на природата: Стратифицираното обществено мнение”. В: *Социологически проблеми* 3:4, стр. 225-249.

⁴³³ Interview with a representative of an informal libertarian group.

⁴³⁴ Ibid.

⁴³⁵ Ibid.; Interview with a former left-wing activist.

⁴³⁶ Парламентарен контрол 30.03.2012, <http://press.mvr.bg/NR/rdonlyres/A4C8D988-4EE9-4DEF-B3FB-BEF7032B8A7A/0/20120330.doc>

⁴³⁷ Ibid.

⁴³⁸ Interview with a representative of law enforcement/intelligence institutions.

⁴³⁹ See: <http://novilevi.org/links>

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁴¹ See: www.septemvri23.com

⁴⁴² Interview with a representative of law enforcement/intelligence institutions; Interview with a representative of an informal libertarian group.

This is potentially important, however, since research shows that clashes with the police, or between right and left-wing radicals can act as catalyst for “individuals who may passively support a radical worldview [to] begin to act violently.”⁴⁴³ Nevertheless, in practice, none of the interviewees consider that any violent attacks are possible in Bulgaria at the moment. Similarly, official sources do not perceive left-wing violence as a risk.⁴⁴⁴

According to official information, the activities of left-wing organisations are limited to the distribution of propaganda and participation in public events with an insignificant number of participants.⁴⁴⁵ The biggest international event organised by radical left-wing groups was the 2013 No Border Camp at the Bulgarian-Turkish border dedicated to the issues of human rights and free movement of people.⁴⁴⁶ The left-wing repertoire of actions includes demonstrations and protests,⁴⁴⁷ graffiti, propaganda over the internet, holding debates,⁴⁴⁸ publishing political literature and analyses,⁴⁴⁹ issuing statements.⁴⁵⁰ No violent content was found other than a photo of a Turkish hostage of the terrorist Revolutionary People’s Liberation Party-Front (RPLP/F) and pictures of victims in Ukraine re-posted on communist left websites and social media. Debates and political literature are seen as particularly important since education is regarded as the main means for achieving a long-term effect and for spreading left-wing ideas.⁴⁵¹ Moreover, aforementioned events and actions help establish direct connections with potential supporters.⁴⁵² An observer has also noted the increasing use of direct action by environmental groups such as protests, blockades and happenings.⁴⁵³

The causes that left-wing groups support are most often migrants’ and minorities’ rights; combating racism, fascism, neo-Nazism;⁴⁵⁴ solidarity with workers’ rights in Bulgaria and abroad;⁴⁵⁵ anti-war protests (e.g. against the war in Iraq), and

⁴⁴³ Caiani, M., D. della Porta, and C. Wagemann, (2012) *Mobilizing on the Extreme Right: Germany, Italy, and the United States*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp. 17-18.

⁴⁴⁴ Interview with a representative of law enforcement/intelligence institutions.

⁴⁴⁵ Парламентарен контрол. 30.03.2012, <http://press.mvr.bg/NR/rdonlyres/A4C8D988-4EE9-4DEF-B3FB-BEF7032B8A7A/0/20120330.doc>; Interview with a representative of law enforcement/intelligence institutions.

⁴⁴⁶ Interview with a representative of law enforcement/intelligence institutions.

⁴⁴⁷ For instance protecting the Soviet monuments in the capital city, Sofia. See: www.facebook.com/ChervenataKlika?fref=photo

⁴⁴⁸ Interview with a left-wing and environmental activist; Social Centre Adelante, <http://sc-adelante.org/category/activities/page/2/>; Йорданова, Л. (2013) „Новите леви”. В: *Кантал*, 01.03.2013; „Какво е Солидарна България?” 28.03.2012, <http://solidbul.eu/?p=15>

⁴⁴⁹ See for example: <http://www.anarresbooks.org/>; <http://lib.a-bg.net/>

⁴⁵⁰ Solidbul. (2013) „Отчет на сдружение „Солидарна България,” 22.10.2013, <http://solidbul.eu/?p=2033>

⁴⁵¹ Interview with a representative of an informal libertarian group.

⁴⁵² See: www.septemvri23.com/

⁴⁵³ Кръстанова (2012), p. 24.

⁴⁵⁴ Георгиева, Цв. (2011) „Комунистически и антифашистки движения се обяха срещу „Луков марш”. В: *live news*, 12.02.2011; Начева, М. (2010) „Акция срещу расизма ще чисти София от нацистки графити”, в. *Дневник*, 01.07.2010; *Webcafe.bg*, „Флашмоб против расизма затвори „Попа”, 11.06.2010.

⁴⁵⁵ Автономен работнически синдикат. „Апел за интернационална солидарност с работниците от фабрика ДИТА, Тузла, Босна и Херцеговина.” 21.04.2015, <http://bit.ly/1TTKbWv>; *Bezlogo.com*, „Работници от ВМЗ – не се предавайте!”, 16.01.2013.

environmental protection.⁴⁵⁶ Actions are provoked by events in the country and abroad. One respondent mentioned a case of a Marxist Ataka member who went to Crimea as an observer.⁴⁵⁷

2.5. Institutional and law enforcement response

According to interviewed experts and activists, the government in Bulgaria uses above all monitoring and intelligence gathering practices with respect to left-wing radicalisation. They all agree that left-wing activists are on file with SANS and the Ministry of the Interior. Interviewees also reported the use of phone-tapping and infiltration.⁴⁵⁸ According to official sources, SANS receives information from intelligence gathering, citizens' alerts, and to an extent monitoring online activity, although the latter is seen as an unreliable source of information.⁴⁵⁹

As reported in the interviews, repressive measures taken in relation to left-wing groups and activists include far-right groups being paid to generate fear and problems at left-wing actions and events.⁴⁶⁰ Moreover, cases of violence against left-wing activists by right-wing ones are not investigated and prosecuted.⁴⁶¹ There has only been one known case of prosecution against a 20 year-old woman who was arrested in a small town, and charged with "spreading fascist and anti-democratic ideology" by distributing anarchist leaflets and posters in 2004.⁴⁶² According to reports, her home was raided, she was questioned and allegedly had her e-mail address hacked and her phone tapped. Finally, the main weakness of the institutional response identified by the study is the lack of preventive measures with regard to left-wing radicalisation that address its root causes. This can partly be explained by the fact that state officials do not perceive left-wing radical groups as posing any significant threat.⁴⁶³

3. ROOT CAUSES AND MOTIVATIONS: CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO RIGHT-WING AND LEFT-WING RADICALISATION

The root causes and motivations for right and left wing radicalisation overlap to a certain extent. They will be presented using a three-level model of analysis (macro, meso and micro), which aims to provide a comprehensive picture of

⁴⁵⁶ Кръстанова (2012), pp. 18-24.

⁴⁵⁷ Interview with a representative of an informal libertarian group.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁹ Interview with a representative of law enforcement/intelligence institutions.

⁴⁶⁰ Interview with a representative of an informal libertarian group.

⁴⁶¹ Георгиева, Цв. (2011) „Комунистически и антифашистки движения се обявиха срещу „Луков марш“. В: *livenews*, 12.02.2011; Старидолска, Ел. (2010) „На ръба. Фашисти срещу комунисти, расисти срещу роми – агресията в обществото търси алиби“, в. *Капитал*, 11.06.2010.

⁴⁶² Кодинова, Ел. (2004) „Как 20-годишно момиче стана обществен враг номер 1“, в. *Новинар*, 29.07.2004.

⁴⁶³ Interview with a representative of law enforcement/intelligence institutions.

the contributing factors in political radicalisation.⁴⁶⁴ Moreover, the multi-level analysis is used because it places the focus on radicalisation at the group and organisational levels and not on factors in individual processes of radicalisation such as peer pressure, group loyalty and personal relationships, which this study does not examine.⁴⁶⁵

3.1. Macro-level

The macro-level of analysis refers to national and international developments, the radicalisation of public opinion or the lack of socio-economic opportunities.⁴⁶⁶ The main contributing factors to left-wing and right-wing radicalisation identified in this study are: (1) lack of socio-economic opportunities, (2) disappointment with representative democracy and party politics, (3) geopolitical polarisation.

Respondents identified marginalisation, poverty and growing inequalities as the main cause of political radicalisation. Indeed, the protests in the winter of 2013 against the effects of the financial crisis, rising electricity prices, growing unemployment and pervasive corruption, which included extreme acts of self-immolation, demonstrated the extent of popular anger and despair.⁴⁶⁷ Studies of past radicalisation in Europe have similarly demonstrated that one factor in radicalisation is a “widely shared sense of injustice, exclusion and humiliation (real or perceived) among the constituencies the terrorists claim to represent.”⁴⁶⁸ Interviewees also mentioned the lack of professional and social opportunities as a main reason for young people seeking alternatives and solutions to their problems, which some find in radical political ideas.⁴⁶⁹

A second factor identified by the study is disenchantment with the current political system based on representative democracy and party politics.⁴⁷⁰ The lack of existing political channels to effect change can be a contributing factor in political radicalisation in Bulgaria.⁴⁷¹ This is significant as the most reported factor in both right and left-wing violent radicalisation in Europe is the “perceived impotence to effect desired political change.”⁴⁷² In up to 25-50% of the studied

⁴⁶⁴ Schmid, A. (2013) *Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review*. ICCT Research Paper, March 2013, p. 4.

⁴⁶⁵ Della Porta, D. and G. LaFree. (2012) Guest Editorial: Processes of Radicalization and De-Radicalization. In: *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* 6:1, 2012, p. 7.

⁴⁶⁶ Schmid (2013), p. 4.

⁴⁶⁷ Andreev, A. (2013) “Bulgarians turn to right and left-wing parties”. *Deutsche Welle*, 25.04.2013.

⁴⁶⁸ European Commission’s Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation (2008), p. 17.

⁴⁶⁹ Interview with a representative of a libertarian informal group; Interview with a left-wing and environmental activist; Interview with a former left-wing activist.

⁴⁷⁰ Василева, Св. (2015) „Проф. Антоний Тодоров: Няма демокрация при дълбока, масова и трайна бедност”. Блогът на chara, 26.02.2015. Available at: <http://chara.blog.bg/politika/2015/02/26/prof-antonii-todorov-niama-demokracia-pri-dylboka-masova-i-1341508>

⁴⁷¹ Interview with a left-wing and environmental activist.

⁴⁷² RAND Europe (2011) *Synthesis report on the results from work package 2: inventory of the factors of radicalization and counterterrorism interventions*. Seventh Framework Programme. SAFIRE project: Scientific Approach to Finding Indicators and Responses to Radicalisation. pp. 11-12.

cases of left-wing violent radicalisation and 50-75% of the right-wing ones a proximate factor is the (perceived) lack of political clout.⁴⁷³ Both types of violent radicals are also likely to have had a history of political engagement and to resort to violence as a result of feeling politically impotent to change the status-quo.⁴⁷⁴ As political scientists agree, there is a feeling in Bulgaria that regardless of what they say politicians on the left implement right-wing policies and vice-versa.⁴⁷⁵ Hence, voters have no alternative for parliamentary political engagement in line with their beliefs⁴⁷⁶ and are mistrustful of the idea that social change can be achieved through the existing democratic process.⁴⁷⁷ This is partly confirmed by the decreasing turnout rates over the past years. The aforementioned low levels of electoral support for radical left and (“authentic”) right parties given the high levels of popular support for their ideas could be seen as evidence for this development. Moreover, the aforementioned weak performance of left-wing parties suggests that there is much political energy on the left that is not channelled through the current democratic system.

Nevertheless, while an increasing section of the electorate refuses to vote, another significant section has turned to populist parties offering quick solutions (for example, the National Movement for Stability and Progress, GERB, Ataka).⁴⁷⁸ This can be one of the explanations why some of the disappointed left-wing voters have reoriented their vote towards Ataka. Indeed experts see Bulgaria as ripe for political opportunism and populism due to the lack of a stable political party scene, in which short-term parties led by charismatic leaders are a common occurrence.⁴⁷⁹ However this sort of short-term populism is believed to raise the electorate’s expectations for quick and noticeable changes and ultimately leads to further political frustration.⁴⁸⁰

Low levels of trust in parliament, political parties and representative institutions, coupled with disappointment that the positive changes expected to follow from the transition to democracy after 1989 did not materialise, may have led some to the conclusion that democracy is not a working model for Bulgaria.⁴⁸¹ This is particularly worrying in a country that has had a short experience with democracy and was recently under totalitarian rule. In Bulgaria, there is a particularly strong correlation between authoritarianism and left-wing ideology, in particular communism and anti-capitalism.⁴⁸² In addition, the communist left and the far right in Bulgaria, especially Ataka, are united by their propensity towards

⁴⁷³ Ibid., p. 11.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 8.

⁴⁷⁵ Interview with a left-wing and environmental activist; Василева (2015).

⁴⁷⁶ Попиванов, Б. (2013) „Имат ли смисъл лявото и дясното в Европа и България?“ В: *zaman.bg*, 07.01.2013.

⁴⁷⁷ Krasteva (2013).

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁹ Занкина (2014).

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁸¹ Krasteva (2013); Бечев, Д. (2013) „Дясното и лявото в протестите“. В: *kultura.bg*, 14.10.2013.

⁴⁸² De Regt, S., D. Mortelmans and T. Smits, (2011) “Left-wing authoritarianism is not a myth, but a worrisome reality. Evidence from 13 Eastern European countries”. In: *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 44:4 (2011): 299-308, pp. 303-305.

authoritarianism and nostalgia for the state's strong hand and lost social justice.⁴⁸³ Finally, authoritarianism is found to enhance the positive image of the communist regime in particular and anti-democratic ideologies in general.⁴⁸⁴

The link between trust in democracy and political radicalisation is particularly important, as the rejection of violence as a means to achieve and exercise power is characteristic of the democratic method, which is instead based on decision-making through debate and majority consensus.⁴⁸⁵ Whereas the moderate left and right-wing are democrats and gradualists, left-wing and right-wing extremism share a rejection of democracy.⁴⁸⁶ As history has shown, non-democratic and non-gradualist strategies are more likely to justify the use of violence for achieving political ends.⁴⁸⁷

Third, the war in Ukraine and to some extent the one in Palestine have led to the formation of enemy camps and the radicalisation of black and white Cold War pro-Russian and anti-Western sentiments, especially against American hegemony. According to some sources, Russian funding for left-wing and right-wing parties seems to have contributed to this development.⁴⁸⁸ Previous studies also show that there can be an indirect link between political radicalisation and the international system.⁴⁸⁹ Indeed, 22% of Bulgarians said they would vote in favour of joining the Eurasian Union, while 40% supported EU membership.⁴⁹⁰ Although considered a left-wing phenomenon, these developments concern both the Bulgarian left and right; the left – in its current communist forms, which have been historically engaged with Russia, and the right through Ataka, which surprisingly shifted its rhetoric from anti-minority to pro-Russian focus after 2007.

3.2. Meso-level

The meso-level refers to a person's social environment that may be conducive to radicalisation.⁴⁹¹ At this level, the family and educational environment can play an important role in the radicalisation processes. On the one hand, the lack of a strong family environment makes young people more easily manipulated and prone to seeking support from and belonging to radical political groups.⁴⁹² On the other hand, school education does not develop critical thinking with respect to the content and sources of information one receives, which makes young people

⁴⁸³ Хинкова, С. „Електоратът на Атака.“ НБУ, <http://bgsociety.nbu.bg/data/00003.pdf>

⁴⁸⁴ De Regt, S., D. Mortelmans and T. Smits (2011), pp. 303-305.

⁴⁸⁵ Bobbio (1996), p. 94.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid., pp. 21-22.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁸ Папакочев, Г. (2015) „Иван Кръстев: Агресивен изолационизъм и мощна пропаганда: Русия днес“. В: *vevesti.bg*, 12.05.2015.

⁴⁸⁹ Lia, B. and K. Skjølberg (2005) *Causes of Terrorism: An Expanded and Updated Review of the Literature*, Kjeller: Forsvarets Forskningsinstitut, pp. 50-52.

⁴⁹⁰ Braw, E. (2015) „Putin Seeks to Influence Radical Parties in Bid to Destabilise Europe“. In: *Newsweek*, 09.01.2015.

⁴⁹¹ Schmid (2013), p. 4.

⁴⁹² Interview with a left-wing and environmental activist; Interview with a former left-wing activist.

more easily influenced and likely to trust charismatic leaders or propaganda they encounter in traditional and social media.⁴⁹³ Studies have found that younger generations increasingly use search engines and websites for answers, bypassing independent or third party information.⁴⁹⁴

Moreover, the lack of history education may contribute to misunderstanding historical processes and manipulation.⁴⁹⁵ Ninety-four per cent of young people between the ages of 16 and 30 state that they are not or only a little familiar with the totalitarian state socialist period in Bulgaria,⁴⁹⁶ and the majority do not have any knowledge about totalitarian regimes in general.⁴⁹⁷ Right-wing radical groups exploit that, creating and popularising their own alternative history. Nevertheless, the research showed that people with anarchist, new left and green views are well educated, young and are active in bigger towns.⁴⁹⁸ These findings are in line with studies which have shown that both higher and lower educational attainment could be contributing factors to left-wing radicalisation.⁴⁹⁹ Concerning right-wing radicalisation, the level of education was not identified as a factor. On the one hand, young skinhead groups recruits have not been subject to research. On the other hand, surveys have not found any correlation between adults' support for right-wing ideology and/or parties and educational status.⁵⁰⁰

Another phenomenon closely related to violent right-wing radicalisation is a school environment favouring role models who espouse violence. According to one respondent working at a school, schoolchildren appreciate "the bad guys"; girls like them and boys try to emulate them.⁵⁰¹ Moreover, the youngsters appreciate aggressive talk; they find fighting heroic and admire those who deliberately demonstrate low culture and illiteracy. Going to football games to deliberately clash with the police and attacking Roma are seen as opportunities to manifest that "heroism." As aforementioned, in homes where a strong family environment is missing, young people are more likely to find such role models in the school or the neighbourhood.

Finally, as left-wing parties continue to be dominated by elderly people,⁵⁰² according to a former left-wing activist some young people in the communist left are socialised into Marxist-Leninist ideas by older generation communists who

⁴⁹³ Interview with a representative of a libertarian informal group.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁵ „Защо не знаят истината за комунизма“. Deutsche Welle Bulgaria, 20.09.2013.

⁴⁹⁶ Алфа Рисърч (2015) „Преходът: митове и памет, 25 години по-късно“, национално представително проучване на Алфа Рисърч, част от инициативата „25 години свободна България“.

⁴⁹⁷ Стоянова, В. (2013) „Младежите не знаят нищо за комунизма, но го харесват“. в. *Сега*, Брой 4796 (219) 20.09.2013.

⁴⁹⁸ Interview with a representative of an informal libertarian group.

⁴⁹⁹ RAND Europe (2011), p. 11.

⁵⁰⁰ For example in: Парару, Н. (2010) „Как така АТАКА? Преоформянето на лицата на българския национализъм“. В: *Прелетените времена на настоящето*. София: ИК КХ, 2010.

⁵⁰¹ Interview with a representative of a libertarian informal group with experience as a teacher with a close look at radical right-wing and left-wing groups.

⁵⁰² Interview with a former left-wing activist.

carry the dogmatic and conservative left-wing ideas of the Bulgarian Communist Party.⁵⁰³ Right-wing activists, on the contrary, are most radical and less ideological at a younger age, between 14 and 22, when they take part in skinhead gangs and/or football fan groups. They soften their views over time and there are few right-wing activists over the age of 32.⁵⁰⁴ In time, they become part of the so-called latent radical right supporters discussed above.

3.3. Micro-level

The micro-level refers to individual perceptions and experiences such as feelings of injustice, moral outrage, alienation, or identity issues.⁵⁰⁵ Indeed, respondents reported the sense of injustice provoked by growing inequality and poverty as a root cause for supporting radical left-wing and right-wing ideas and programmes.⁵⁰⁶ Due to the failure of the current system to ensure justice, including social justice, people are seeking solutions and alternatives.⁵⁰⁷ In line with previous research,⁵⁰⁸ one interviewee argued that the general anomie and the disintegration of social ties in Bulgaria which appeared during the country's transition to capitalism and democracy has pushed young people to search for communities where they can develop a sense of community and belonging.⁵⁰⁹ Similarly, in her study of the influence of the skinhead subculture over the formation of personalities among Bulgarian teenagers, Pesheva⁵¹⁰ identifies youngsters' need for belonging to a group which makes them feel valuable and special. In addition, belonging to a subculture makes teenagers feel visible to others, even if that is in the negative sense of being criticised, and provides young people with a sense of autonomy and freedom.⁵¹¹

4. GROUPS AT RISK OF RADICALISATION

Studies on radicalisation have concluded that profiling potential violent radicals is futile.⁵¹² Nevertheless, some common features of groups at risk of radicalisation in Bulgaria can be identified and are presented below. It is important to stress, however, that these features of the radicalisation processes are correlational and not necessarily causal factors.

⁵⁰³ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁴ Interview with a former radical right group activist and with SDI.

⁵⁰⁵ Schmid (2013), p. 4.

⁵⁰⁶ Interview with left-wing and environmental activist.

⁵⁰⁷ Interview with representative of an informal libertarian group.

⁵⁰⁸ European Commission's Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation (2008), pp. 12-13.

⁵⁰⁹ Interview with a former left-wing activist.

⁵¹⁰ Пешева, П. (2010) „Скинхедс: чувството да си специален и свободен.” В: *www.seminar-bg.eu*, 17.05.2010.

⁵¹¹ Ibid.

⁵¹² RAND Europe (2011), p. 11; European Commission's Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation. (2008), p. 11.

4.1. Groups at risk of right-wing radicalisation

In order to go deeper into the motives which push individuals into the process of right-wing radicalisation it should be noted that two significantly different types of persons are prone to support it. These are juveniles between the ages of 14 and 18 who encounter radical ideologies at a time when they form their personality and adults who, due to certain factors which are considered below, change their views.

Youngsters

Social transitions of adolescence focus on identity, independence, gender roles, moral code and values. The development of mental processes and personal qualities enable adolescents to reflect on perspectives of life and to create a certain relationship with their social environment.⁵¹³ The influence of radical political ideologies over juveniles in Bulgaria has been insufficiently explored.

Unlike other extreme right supporters for whom social factors count, teenagers choosing this subculture have not faced factors like **social inequality** or unemployment so that it could become a motivation. Instead, the abovementioned meso-level factors concerning the violence-prone environment at schools and weak family environment are particularly relevant for this group's radicalisation.

“Angry and disappointed people”

A number of studies have attempted to identify the motivations of the so-called “latent nationalism” in relation to the surprising electoral support Ataka obtained in 2005 and later. Kabakchieva⁵¹⁴ explores the relation between social status and nationalism using the thesis that the socially-justified inability to travel (the financial factor) leads to ideologisation and substantialisation of the location one inhabits. The survey finds that such a relation exists but is not as direct as previously believed. Based on a representative survey, Kabakchieva concludes that approximately 15% can be classified as “patriots” – highly educated upper middle class people valuing history and national symbols. These are not far-right party voters. Another group which “can develop aggressive nationalist attitudes”⁵¹⁵ based on hate for what is “foreign” are primarily people with lower social status, low level of education, limited opportunities to travel abroad and sceptical about Bulgaria's EU membership. They are estimated to constitute about 40% of the population and are predominantly supporters of Ataka and the Bulgarian Socialist Party. However, among members of this group Kabakchieva observes strong national pride related more to the family and relatives than to the nation state due to the low trust in the political system. This “re-ethnisation” is considered to be a dangerous process that might cause disputes between ethnic groups.

⁵¹³ Мирчева, К. (2007) „Психологическа характеристика на непълнолетните правонарушители”, в: *Психология журнал*, бр. 34.

⁵¹⁴ Кабакчиева, П. (2008) „Социален статус и национализъм”. Академична лига на югоизточна Европа, <http://www.seal-sofia.org/bg/projects/completed/FCN/CaseStudies/>

⁵¹⁵ Ibid., p. 32.

Ivanova⁵¹⁶ studied the Ataka voters in smaller towns and villages in particular. Her findings show that they tend to be people of average education, employed and relatively successful. Finally, Ragaru⁵¹⁷ defines Ataka voters as people who radically denounce the political, social and moral order of post-communism.

Genov⁵¹⁸ is skeptical about the relation between social status and the rise of nationalist attitudes. In 2005, Bulgaria was not in any type of economic, political or cultural crisis so Genov assumes it might be the result of the elimination of the major reasons for national crises. One of these reasons is the strategic orientation of Bulgaria towards NATO and the EU. Bulgaria had passed through political and economic crises and recoveries which, however, did not give rise to radical political entities. Genov explains that with the fact that there was no “attractive political platform promising an easy way out of the grievances”.⁵¹⁹

In her research on the Ataka electorate,⁵²⁰ Ivanova points out several motivations which made people support a radical party:

Social anger of the social inequality between “honest” people who work hard to earn their living and the “rich” who are somebody’s relative, spouse, etc. Rich people are visible in smaller towns which stirs resentment against them. Demand for justice and retribution cannot be attributed to poor and ignorant people, rather to middle class entrepreneurs, for example small hotel owners. There is a wish for a strong government which takes care of all and sustains order. Ragaru⁵²¹ confirms this motivation claiming that a significant share of Ataka voters hold negative attitudes towards the post-communist period seeing themselves as its victims.

Political motivation is related to blaming the existing political class for not taking care of them with a strong hand.

Nationalist motivation is based on the fear that the Bulgarian ethnos is “disappearing” and other ethnic groups, mostly Roma are assimilating it. This motivation comes also against newcomers in smaller towns rather than against other minorities. The notion is that foreigners are here “to take our lands from us”.⁵²²

Ivanova attributes the above motivations to two factors: fear and the desire for revenge.

4.2. Groups at risk of left-wing radicalisation

Unlike the right-wing, left-wing actors are not prone to violent action. In terms of ideas, the communist left best fits the characteristics of (violent) extremist groups

⁵¹⁶ Иванова (2007).

⁵¹⁷ Ragaru (2011).

⁵¹⁸ Genov (2010).

⁵¹⁹ Ibid, p. 46.

⁵²⁰ Иванова (2007).

⁵²¹ Ragaru (2011).

⁵²² Ibid., p. 4.

identified by Schmid,⁵²³ due to their authoritarian and anti-pluralist programme, utilising black-and-white rhetoric, and expressing an ends-justify-means philosophy. Nevertheless, although ideology has been found to be “a constant feature in the radicalisation process,”⁵²⁴ and political beliefs correlate with political action⁵²⁵ they do not in most cases lead to violence.⁵²⁶ In fact, ideology is not always relevant in violent radicalisation,⁵²⁷ and importantly, ideology may be secondary, used to justify the use of violence.⁵²⁸

In addition, in line with previous research,⁵²⁹ young men were identified as the main group prone to left-wing radicalisation. According to interviewees, the older generation’s potential for radical political action was suppressed by the repressive measures of the former regime, while the younger generation carries more potential for radicalisation. However, interviewees identified two sub-groups involved in the process – youths, perceived as naïve, who are undergoing a phase and older “leaders” who may manipulate and use the young people for their own ends.⁵³⁰

⁵²³ Schmid, A.P. (2011), “Glossary and Abbreviations of Terms and Concepts relating to Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism”. In: A.P. Schmid (Ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research*. London: Routledge. p. 630; Midlarsky, M. (2011) *Origins of Political Extremism*, Cambridge University Press. p. 7.

⁵²⁴ European Commission’s Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation. (2008), p. 14.

⁵²⁵ Neumann, M. (2013) “The Escalation of Ethnonationalist Radicalization: Simulating the Effectiveness of Nationalist Ideologies”. In: *Social Science Computer Review*. December 27, 2013, p. 873.

⁵²⁶ Della Porta, D. and G. LaFree (2012) “Guest Editorial: Processes of Radicalization and De-Radicalization,” In: *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* 6:1. p. 7; Borum, R. (2011) “Rethinking Radicalisation”. In: *Journal of Strategic Security*, 4:4. p. 2.

⁵²⁷ European Commission’s Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation. (2008), pp. 14-15.

⁵²⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵²⁹ Visser, M. et al. (2013), p. 13.

⁵³⁰ Interview with a left-wing and environmental activist; Interview with a former left-wing activist.

IV. FOOTBALL HOOLIGANISM

1. BACKGROUND

Compared to other European countries, Bulgaria has a relatively short history of football hooliganism, which in its contemporary form emerged during the 1990s and has not been subjected to in-depth academic study. Over the past 10 years, acts of violence, xenophobia, ethnic and religious intolerance, as well as extremist and radical attitudes among football hooligans have intensified.

During the communist period, public information about organised football fans was scarce. Media reported only sporadic incidents of sports-related violence, and overall football hooliganism was not considered a significant security threat. One of the first more violent acts occurred in 1977 in Haskovo, where local fans attacked the referee and damaged the bus of the football club CSKA.⁵³¹ Interviews with football fans, media publications and internet forums suggest that actually there have been other serious incidents not only in Sofia and Plovdiv, but also in smaller towns with less significant football teams, such as Bourgas, Stanke Dimitrov (Dupnitsa), Vratsa, Blagoevgrad.

The enormous popularity of football in Bulgaria was viewed by the ruling communist party as a useful ideological and social instrument for control of the population. The Soviet model of football teams closely associated with certain institutions or sectors was applied in Bulgaria as early as the 1940s.⁵³² The general idea was that if significant resources were invested in professional sports, the return would be medals from Olympic Games and world championships. The ideological gain would be to demonstrate the advantages of the “socialist model” against the western one. Various ministries and regional party leaders were involved in sports clubs. The two clubs where most resources were concentrated were CSKA and Levski-Spartak, both based in Sofia and affiliated respectively with the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Interior. Thus, beginning at the end of the 1960s the sports battles became closely monitored and controlled. While in other sports athletes from socialist countries – being de facto professionals – dominated at the international arena as they usually faced amateurs, the success of football clubs were much more modest as they played against professionals. In Bulgaria, despite the relatively good performance of the national team, losing matches was perceived as a source of political risk. In the national football championship, the popularity of the game also created problems for the authorities. In the 1970s and 1980s, the average attendance

⁵³¹ Димитров, П. (2015) *Футболното хулиганство в България, част 1*. 23.08.2015, available at: <http://eurocom.bg/sport/article/futbolnoto-huliganstvo-v-bulgaria>

⁵³² Борисов, Т. (2015) *Държавна сигурност и българският футбол* 25.04.2015. available at: <http://desebg.com/2011-01-16-11-42-13/2262-2015-04-25-08-06-36>

of football matches was 12,000 people, while matches between top clubs (CSKA, Levski-Spartak, Trakia, Lokomotiv Plovdiv) could muster crowds of up to 50,000.

As a response to the risks of large crowds, the security services and the police set up special units to work with the informal fan clubs (the so called "agitka") in various neighbourhoods. The perceived threat was that the football confrontations could escalate to political protests against the communist party, so the authorities developed techniques to control the various types of football fan structures. A huge network of informers and agents emerged, with criminal charges pressed against risky fans, investigations against club leaders, etc.

With the beginning of the democratic transition in Bulgaria in the 1990s, the government discontinued its financial support for professional sports and the old system of sports clubs started to collapse. As in the economy, the assets of football clubs became targets of criminal entrepreneurs. Criminal bosses and businessmen with shady reputation entered the football club business. Both the fan clubs and the security service networks got intimately involved in the battles to capture control of the football clubs.

From the beginning of the 1990s two trends have shaped Bulgarian football clubs. The first one is their use as a tax evasion and money laundering tool. The second one is exploiting football clubs and their fans for political purposes. Football clubs are involved in a special social network involving politicians, magistrates and businessmen. Furthermore, fan clubs can become the core of groups exerting street pressure. Small and mid-size towns can be effectively controlled by the social network and the fan club of a football team. In large cities like Plovdiv and Sofia the two rival clubs of CSKA and Levski can be utilised for national political causes.

At the same time, authorities were not prepared to deal with the rising level of violence at stadiums, especially in the first years of the phenomenon. The formation of factions – sub-groups with their own identity – among the fans of a football club was an attempt to catch up with western trends and lifestyle, which is characteristic of all youth subcultures that emerged in Bulgaria after 1989. In the mid-1990s, hooligan acts by fans grew more frequent and more violent. The lack of attention from government and the sharp increase of crime in large industrial cities gave birth to organised criminal groups in the core of fan clubs.

Parallel to the criminalisation of football fan clubs and the rise of violence in the mid-1990s, the overall popularity of the national football championship in Bulgaria declined drastically. From average of 6,000 to 7,000 per game in the mid-1990s, attendance in the mid-2000s fell to 3,000 to 4,000. Football fan clubs were reduced to cores of fans with typically violent behaviour, and ever smaller periphery of regular spontaneous fans. This inevitably led to several major incidents in 2000, which marked the beginning of violent football hooliganism in the country. However, the issue was deliberately covered for a long time, as football fans were used for political purposes during protests. A series of mass incidents between fans of CSKA and Levski followed,

including wounded and killed fans. Eventually, special measures against football hooliganism were adopted in the *Law on the Protection of Public Order during Sport Events*.⁵³³

The implementation of the law faced some difficulties caused by the economic crisis of 2008 – 2011, as a result of which the most influential Bulgarian football clubs experienced sharp reduction in sponsorship. With the political instability in 2013 – 2014, a new stage in the evolution of fan clubs began. The growing importance of the hard cores was recognised by politicians, business lobby groups and former officers of the security services. The cores got actively deployed in protests and counter-protests, and as a “security shield” around political leaders.

This analysis is based on desk research, including a review of academic sources and publications in Bulgarian and European media. In-depth interviews were conducted with two groups of respondents. The first one included experts on sports fan violence and football hooliganism from specialised structures within the Ministry of Interior and SANS. The second group comprised of football hooligans/ultras, representing the four main football clubs in the country, and sports journalists. In addition, a questionnaire about the tools applied in the registration of radical behaviour was distributed among 30 police officers from Sofia, Plovdiv, Varna, Bourgas and Stara Zagora. This chapter analyses the risks of radicalisation associated with the various formations of football supporters in line with the definition of radicalisation adopted in the overall study (see Introduction). It does not aim at providing an in-depth analysis of the economic and subcultural characteristics of football factions.

2. ROOT CAUSES AND MOTIVATIONS

The causes for football hooliganism are complex and can be traced back to various factors of individual and societal nature. Due to the lack of sufficient empirical data and studies on football hooliganism in Bulgaria and the fragmented descriptions of its causes, the analysis in this section applies the three-level model of analysis (macro, meso and micro) as the most practical approach, which is usually applied in academic studies to analyse radicalisation root causes more generally. This model is used here as a basis for systematisation of the evidence gathered from the interviews, but also from other national studies exploring the factors contributing to sports hooliganism.

Macro level

Most scholars link the main macro-level factors contributing to radicalisation to the overall political and economic situation in the country: the low level of economic development and the accompanying unemployment, poverty, high level

⁵³³ Law on the Protection of Public Order during Sport Events, *State Gazette No. 96/29.10.2004*, amended *State Gazette No. 88, 9 November 2010*.

of corruption in the country, and political crises. Although these political and socioeconomic problems should not be underestimated, they can only be viewed as aggravating factors contributing to the increase of manifested violence in society as whole.⁵³⁴

The analysis of the social and economic factors believed by experts to shape football hooliganism in Bulgaria indicates that the country should be one of the most badly affected in Europe. According to respondents interviewed for this study and a special survey of football hooliganism,⁵³⁵ there had been no major incidents until 1998. The period between 1997 and 2001 was the time when the key factors emerged.

Unemployment and low income are among the most oft-quoted reasons for the radicalisation of football fans in that period. The social and economic hardships experienced by Bulgarians were especially acute in the period 1998 – 2001. Until 1997, the reforms in the labour market were slow and massive layoffs were delayed. As the crisis deepened and outside pressure for reforms, especially from the IMF, grew the government launched a major restructuring of the economy. The resulting layoffs and closures of enterprises could be said to have been the most drastic in Eastern Europe. Thus, unemployment grew from 10% in the summer of 1996 to 19.3% in the spring of 2001,⁵³⁶ research by NGOs and trade unions even claims that unemployment had been as high as 23-24%.⁵³⁷ The share of those out of work in some regions and regional centres reached 40%. Bankruptcies and chaotic liquidations after 1997 led to almost complete loss of employment in small towns which had relied on one or two enterprises as employers, while in larger cities between half and two-thirds of the employed were laid off. It was Levski and CSKA fans in precisely these cities as well as fans in cities with clubs which had long traditions in football that were most often involved in serious incidents.

Not counting countries which had been involved in armed conflict (Serbia, Georgia, Armenia), Bulgaria is the East European country with the sharpest drop in household income. Some estimates put the 1997 income at 30% of that in 1989. Although in the late 1990s there were countries such as Albania, Moldova, and Ukraine where the average income was lower than in Bulgaria, the rate of decline in Bulgaria was the most pronounced. The fall was steepest in large industrial cities, besides Sofia.

The deep and long economic crisis affected badly the two institutions with key responsibilities for children and youth – the education and the family. The family in Bulgaria suffered considerable disintegration in the period 1990 – 2003. While in 1989 there were 63,000 marriages, the numbers dropped to 35,000 in the late

⁵³⁴ Šuput, D. (2012). "Problemi u primeni propisa namenjenih borbi protiv nasilja i nedoličnog ponašanja gledalaca na sportskim priredbama," *NBP Žurnal Za Kriminalistiku I Pravo*, 16(2), pp. 93-103.

⁵³⁵ Радева, М. (2009) *Разгневени млади мъже. За футболното хулиганство и социалната криза*, непубликуван ръкопис.

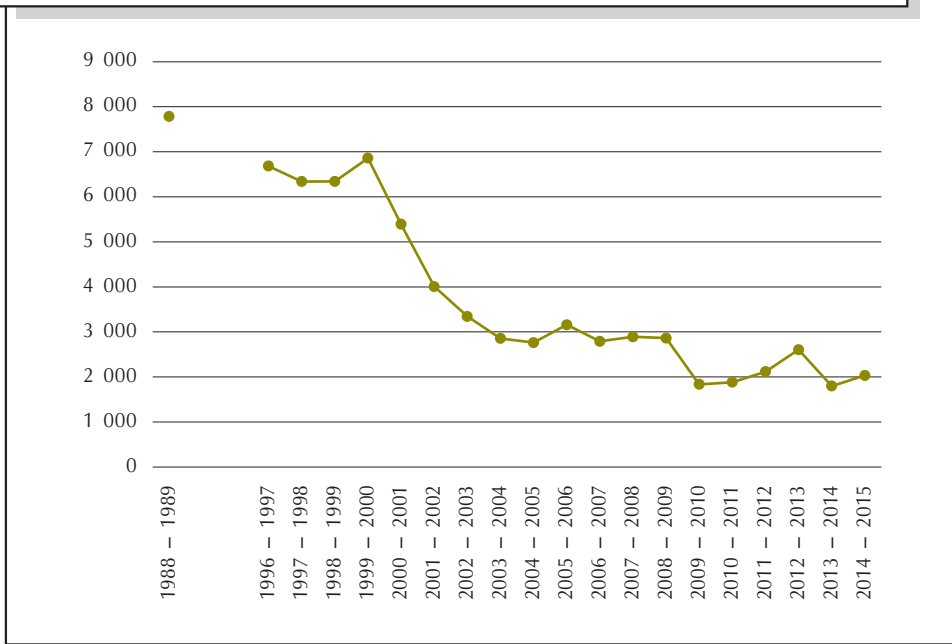
⁵³⁶ Based on data from the Employment Agency.

⁵³⁷ Gotchev, A. (2001) *Annual Early Warning Report 2001*. Sofia, UNDP, USAID, Open Society Foundation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

1990s and even below 30,000 a year in 2001 – 2002. Further, in 1989 11% of children were born out of wedlock, with their share steadily rising to 25.8% in 1995, 38.4% in 2000, 46.1% in 2003, to reach 59.1% – the highest share in the EU – in 2014.⁵³⁸

The impact of the 1996-1997 crisis and the subsequent 1999 – 2001 stagnation is also traceable in the secondary and higher education. In 1996 – 2000, Bulgaria had the highest percentage of early school leavers in the 15-19 age range among the East European countries – 38-39% compared with 16% in Poland and 19% in Hungary and the Czech Republic. The average truancy rate in that period was 20%.⁵³⁹ In the TIMSS ranking Bulgaria climbed down from a 5th place in the sciences in 1995 to the 17th in 1999 and then to the 24th in 2003.⁵⁴⁰ None of the other 40 countries surveyed had had such a decline.⁵⁴¹ There has been some improvement since 2005 which, however, does not make up for the collapse of the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Figure 2. Average attendance of football matches



Source: Authors' calculations based on data from various sources.⁵⁴²

⁵³⁸ National Statistical Institute.

⁵³⁹ OECD (2002) Education at a glance – OECD Indicators. Paris, OECD; National Statistical Institute.

⁵⁴⁰ National Center for Education Statistics (2004) *Highlights from the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) 2003*. Washington DC, National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, p. 1. Available from: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2005/2005005.pdf>

⁵⁴¹ Ibid.

⁵⁴² Data on attendance was compiled based on review of the following sources: http://football24.bg/leagues/attendance/league_id/4/season_id/1
<http://www.european-football-statistics.co.uk/attn.htm>
<http://www.fanface.bg/glasat-na-fena/itemlist/tag/посещаемост.html>

Attendance of football matches is another factor which influenced the conduct of fan clubs. As seen in Figure 2, the turnout had been in steady decline between the 1999 – 2000 and 2004 – 2005 seasons. Various accounts for this drop were given during the interviews, although these could not be empirically tested: a) reduced interest in football because of the effect of the crisis on local economies; b) poor performance of teams outside Sofia due to lack of funding; c) more matches – both Bulgarian and foreign – being broadcast live on television; d) increased emigration, particularly among young people following the introduction of visa free travel for Bulgarians in Europe; e) last but not least, violence at stadiums discouraging non-organised fans from attending.

Low attendance rates makes the police task of maintaining order easier but enhances the role of hard core fans. The first serious consequence of such a development is the capacity of these fans to influence club management and owners, who start paying off fan leaders. The second consequence is that individual fans had to start seeking “protection” by belonging to fan club factions (more on these developments below).

Meso level

The social environment could play a vital role in the formation of individual motives to commit a violent hooligan act. The correlation between attendance rates and violence differs between regions in Bulgaria; it could even be said that there are local fan subcultures. Data on match turnouts in the period 1999 – 2015 show a different picture than police statistics and media coverage.

There are also considerable variations in the attendance of the matches of some clubs.⁵⁴³ During these 15 years, Beroe Stara Zagora, for example, had the highest attendance on two occasions and overall its matches have had 10 times bigger audiences than some of the most popular clubs such as Levski and CSKA. Similarly, Botev Plovdiv and the Bourgas-based Naftex and Chernomorets beat the bigger clubs on attendance in that period. Since the late 1990s, clubs with long traditions suffer ups and downs, being relegated and then returning to the premier league.

These changing fortunes were due, among other things, to frequent changes in club ownership and sponsors. Among the latter there have been businessmen of shady reputation, and sometimes even criminals. There have been occasions of club presidents and owners being shot,⁵⁴⁴ while others have been indicted or convicted for various offences.⁵⁴⁵ These controversial owners often sought to exert influence on fan leaders and use fan clubs for business and political purposes locally. Conflicts between management and owners were mirrored by fan clubs.

⁵⁴³ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁴ E.g. Iliya Pavlov (president of CSKA and Chernomorets Varna), Georgi Iliev (Lokomotiv Plovdiv and Velbazhd Kyustendil), Alexander Tasev (Velbazhd Kyustendil), Stoil Slavov, Milcho Bonev and Dmitrii Minev (Slavia Sofia), Yuri Galev (Rilski Sportist Samokov) and others.

⁵⁴⁵ Ivan Slavkov (Spartak Varna), Kostadin Hadzhiivanov (Belasitsa Petrich), Hristo Portochanov (Naftex Burgas), Ivaylo Drazhev (Chernomorets Burgas), Grisha Ganchev (Litex Lovech) and others.

As a result, violence on or around stadiums and towns became a routine tool in achieving victory. The government, the police, non-organised fans and fans of rival teams were considered enemies.

This subculture of permanent conflict also affected relations within fan clubs. Thus, factions established on territorial and ideological principle emerged in the early 2000s. For youngsters, the neighbourhood determined their club allegiance – it was the place where they grew playing football with their friends, where they went to school and where they were surrounded by graffiti and stickers about a football club. Asked why he supports this particular club and why he has become part of a faction, a fan just said that he was born in “such a neighbourhood”.⁵⁴⁶ The school environment could also be linked to youth aggression. Poor organisation of work in class, uninterested teachers, inadequate educational materials are all factors that diminish the preventive effect that the school should have. Peer pressure at school and on the streets of the neighbourhood and association with juveniles prone to aggression and crime are also important factors leading to radicalisation, since as a person prone to aggression displays less aggressiveness when in a group of non-aggressive peers. Furthermore, a law enforcement expert claims that Levski’s and CSKA’s factions have a large influence in some schools in Sofia; this also applies to fans of Plovdiv-based clubs Botev and Lokomotiv. According to law enforcement officers (confirmed by interviewed young fans), it is perceived as “trendy” among school pupils to be part of a “secret society.” The age group of those joining the hooligan scene is between 15-23 years. Young members need to undergo rites of passage to be accepted as part of a faction under the watch of “commissions” of senior members. This often involves spraying graffiti, breaking windows of the enemy club, beating up a schoolmate supporting the rival club, and can escalate into beating up a member of ethnic minorities.

As far as the family environment is concerned, a few respondents linked their affiliation towards a particular football club and its fan club to the fact that their parents are supporters of the same club.

Micro level

For the majority of interviewed football fans violence is a determining factor for the identity of hooligans. Violent conduct of some football supporters is sometimes interpreted as being determined by one’s “nature”. As one football fan put it: “I’m just that kind of person. Even if I wasn’t a football fan, I would have committed hooligan actions. This is my nature”.⁵⁴⁷ Another respondent compared football hooliganism with war in peacetime and the desire of men to fight with opponents, make ambushes, dispatch scouts, capture banners and scarves.

Interviews suggest that by becoming a member of a fan club, the supporter enjoys the feeling of belonging to a particular group, which they even perceive as “family”. They seek support, understanding and the respect of others within the group. The group is deemed to share the same values as the individual – prowess, bravery, honour and a sense of justice. Recent research concludes that exactly

⁵⁴⁶ Interview with a football fan.

⁵⁴⁷ Interview with a football fan.

the impairment of such values could become a cause for their “defence” through aggressive behaviour.⁵⁴⁸ By joining a fan faction, people are trying to identify themselves by differentiating from others.

Characteristics such as low level of education, poor professional realisation, maladjusted behaviour in childhood (behavioural problems), and attention difficulties are also predictive of potentially aggressive behaviour. However, the research showed that within the ultras and hooligans community there are people with higher education and a very good standard of living, which suggests that such individual characteristics are not always decisive.

As to how the eruption of violence happens at stadium, according to all interviewees some of the major violent hooligan acts have occurred owing to alcohol and drug abuse. There is a firm relationship between alcohol and violence.

Furthermore, belonging to a group waters down the sense of responsibility and makes football fans ready to commit criminal offences they would be reluctant to commit outside the group. Thus very often violence at stadiums is a result of minor incidents in which gradually non-aggressive people are embroiled in escalating fights.

3. IDEOLOGY AND IDEAS

Ultras and hooligans in Bulgaria supporting different football clubs share similar ideas and demonstrate preference towards the same ideologies.

Typical for all extreme supporters is to explain their affiliation with the football club with the love they feel for the team and the football game. A respondent shared that he puts the interest of the team as one of the top priorities in his life, next to his family and friends. Thus ultras often refer to the stadium as their home and to their fellow faction members as close relatives. The community feeling within fan groups is of paramount importance. They appreciate solidarity (in the sense of the unity within the stadium sector and the faction, the mutual support and loyalty to the club), masculinity (in the sense of courage, power, resilience and fearlessness), triumph through choreographies, singing, placards, outfits and territorial sovereignty.⁵⁴⁹ Thus the community plays a vital role in shaping one’s individual ideological system.

Nationalism

Today, the majority of ultras and hooligans in Bulgaria incorporate in their ideology elements of extreme nationalism. Research for this paper suggests that the individual’s support for nationalistic ideas form as a consequence of the individual being part of a football faction. Support for nationalist actions was

⁵⁴⁸ Димитров, С. (2013) *Футболни фенове – образ и идентичност*. Bachelor’s thesis, New Bulgarian University, Sofia.

⁵⁴⁹ Pilz, G., S. Behn, A. Klose, E. Lehnert, W. Steffan and F. Wölki (2006) *“Wandlungen des Zuhauerverhaltens im Profit Fußball – Notwendigkeiten, Möglichkeiten and Grenzen gesellschaftlicher Reaktion”*, Schriftenreihe des Bundesinstituts für Sportwissenschaft, Band 114, Bonn.

unanimously mentioned as one of the causes behind which rival factions would unite.⁵⁵⁰

The particular way in which nationalism is understood by these ultras include the idea that the Bulgarian nation – given the rich history that the country possesses – should have a greater role than the one it currently plays internationally. On the basis of the interviews it could also be suggested that some football supporters consider aggression towards the Roma a manifestation of patriotism, as they consider Roma people a burden to Bulgarian society.⁵⁵¹ Protectionist views were also expressed as some of the foreign investors in the country are considered to hamper the economic growth of Bulgaria.⁵⁵² In addition, the rapidly developing globalisation processes led to a backlash against globalisation in many countries. In this regard football supporters who consider themselves “unique and genuine” nationalists and patriots could be seen as proponents of these tendencies.⁵⁵³

Anti-communism

Nationalist sentiments of football supporters go hand by hand with anti-communist ideas as they consider the socialist period the darkest period of Bulgarian history. Levski’s supporters often claim that the rationale behind their views is that their team was oppressed by the communist regime and they were not allowed to form supporters’ clubs. Although CSKA was the army’s official sports club⁵⁵⁴ and a leading football team during the socialist period, its ultras also share the anti-communists rhetoric. CSKA’s past is still used in the rival rhetoric with Levski, whose supporters often refer to CSKA’s fans as communists. The reason for the anti-communist views of some of the factions is that they follow the example of Western fan clubs, mainly Italian, which in the majority of cases share anti-communists views.

Extreme right views

According to a respondent’s estimations,⁵⁵⁵ around 90% of ultras and hooligans in the country are right-wing. The extent to which a person shares the extreme right views is individually determined. A fan with a higher education degree in political science explained that the majority of ultras and hooligans with right or extreme right views have only a shallow understanding of the ideas they are supposed to advocate for.⁵⁵⁶ Although being right-wing is not a prerequisite for being part of a faction, the way the hierarchy of the organisations is established suggests that a person cannot become a core member if he is not right-wing. Ring-leaders of factions are often members of radical right associations such as Blood and Honour

⁵⁵⁰ Interviews with football fans.

⁵⁵¹ Interview with a football fan.

⁵⁵² The respondent mentioned firms managing the electricity distribution network and a company involved in coal mining.

⁵⁵³ Йорданова, К., (2015) *Субкултура на футболни запалняковци в България (края на XX – началото на XXI век*. PhD thesis extract, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”.

⁵⁵⁴ The Bulgarian abbreviation „ЦСКА” stood for “Central Sports Club of the Army.”

⁵⁵⁵ Interview with a football fan.

⁵⁵⁶ Interview with a football fan.

and National Resistance.⁵⁵⁷ According to one respondent, very often football hooligans who start engaging more actively with extreme right ideas, at some point abandon their active fan life.⁵⁵⁸ One reason cited by a faction member is that the typical Nazi and neo-Nazi ideas are not approved by the majority of faction's members and often acts such as waving a Nazi flag are reproached within the fan group.⁵⁵⁹ However, other interviewees were of the opinion that although there is no deep cognitive understanding and self-identification with such ideologies by faction members and fans, their symbols are often used as image-boosting. Furthermore, displaying Nazi symbols during football matches might be used as an instrument of a completely different agenda, e. g. to provoke fines for the club thus undermining the position of incumbent owners/management in leadership battles.

Nevertheless, racism in the sense of intolerance and violence against people because of their race or ethnicity is widespread among ultras and hooligans. The respondents mentioned that these attitudes are mostly directed towards the Roma, but during the last two years refugees and migrants have also been targeted. In a media interview a famous Levski supporter explained that he does not like African-Americans, Turks people and Arabs, but he does not mind the dark-skinned football players of Levski.⁵⁶⁰ Skinheads sharing racist views used to be very popular in CSKA factions, but nowadays Rossen "The Animal" Petrov – a key fan leader – has managed to diminish their influence.

Against modern football

One of the most debated topics among ultras are the problems of modern football, specifically its excessive commercialisation (overpaid players, high ticket prices, a general trashing of tradition and a commodification of a collective culture). Although the problem is not topical for Bulgaria because of the low income from football,⁵⁶¹ the movement against modern football has evolved into general disapproval of the management of Bulgarian football clubs. Supporters want to take an active role when important decisions about their team are taken. With regard to the recent revocation of CSKA's license, two respondents mentioned that the fans of the club approve the measure as it would allow the team to clear itself from corrupt practices.

Anti-system views

The research showed that nationalistic views are combined with hatred towards the state's political system and the police. Respondents mentioned that a lot of ultras and hooligans in Bulgaria are propagators of the so-called ACAB⁵⁶²

⁵⁵⁷ More information on these associations can be found in the chapter "Right-wing and left-wing radicalisation".

⁵⁵⁸ Interview with a football fan.

⁵⁵⁹ Interview with a football fan.

⁵⁶⁰ *Webcafe.bg*, „Владо Трола: Българският хулиган е на добро ниво“, 19.03.2010.

⁵⁶¹ Димитров, С. (2013) *Футболни фенове – образ и идентичност*. Bachelor's thesis, New Bulgarian University, Sofia, p. 49.

⁵⁶² All Cops Are Bastards.

subculture and even identified anti-police actions as a cause that might unite the supporters of rival clubs.⁵⁶³ The interviewed fans suggested that they do not feel politically represented in the Bulgarian parliament and that they consider that all parties are corrupt.

4. DEVIANT BEHAVIOUR AND CRIMINAL ACTIVITY OF HOOLIGANS/ULTRAS

The economic and political crisis of the early 1990s paralysed law enforcement and the judicial system and unleashed an escalation of crime in the country.⁵⁶⁴ Officially registered crime in the period 1989 – 1992 grew 3-4 times, with some types of crimes registering a 10-fold increase. Still, violent incidents among members of fan clubs were few in that period. This changed following the 1996 – 1997 crisis when violence at stadiums and among fan factions escalated rapidly.⁵⁶⁵ Experts attribute such a development to three reasons. First, the early 1990s crisis did not affect significantly employment as many state-owned enterprises remained operational thus providing Soviet style mass employment. The chaotic privatisation and liquidation of entire industrial sectors in the late 1990s created a large number of young people who had never been employed. The second reason is that the disciplining influence of schools and the family inherited from the pre-1989 period began to crumble and was no longer capable of curbing deviant behaviour among children and adolescents. Third, by the late 1990s the criminal markets of cigarettes, alcohol, oil and contraband consumer goods had already been well established, and the networks of drug dealers were capable of reaching smaller towns. Criminal markets create “jobs and clients”⁵⁶⁶ and youngsters from fan clubs appear to be suitable candidates for these jobs.

Interviews with law enforcement officers and journalists⁵⁶⁷ suggest that since the establishment of the new type of organisation of fan clubs in the late 1990s the violent behaviour of their members has been varying in form and severity. The town, neighbourhood, faction and subculture determine the range of expected deviant behaviour. The position of the member and his reputation depend on his readiness to take risks: starting with spraying graffiti through scuffles with the police to drug use⁵⁶⁸ and even drug dealing and membership in the “punitive squads” of the faction.

Fan club hangouts and neighbourhood bars frequented by fans become recruitment and coordination hubs for various criminal types and crime planning. Still, a distinction needs to be made between deviant behaviour and various types

⁵⁶³ Interview with a football fan.

⁵⁶⁴ Center for the Study of Democracy (2011) *Crime Trends in Bulgaria 2000 – 2010*. Sofia, Center for the Study of Democracy.

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁶ Center for the Study of Democracy (2007) *Organised Crime in Bulgaria: Markets and Trends*. Sofia, Center for the Study of Democracy.

⁵⁶⁷ Interviews with law enforcement officers and sports journalists.

⁵⁶⁸ Радева, М. (2009) *Разгневени млади мъже – за футболното хулиганство и социалната криза*. Непубликуван ръкопис.

of criminal actions, the perpetrators of which fall into four groups: a) users of illegal excise goods, psychoactive substances and stolen goods; b) perpetrators of hooligan acts; c) perpetrators of petty crimes such as burglaries, theft of objects from cars and car parts, robberies; d) organised crime involving illegal trade in excise and stolen goods, loansharking, VAT fraud, car theft, drug dealing, etc. These types overlap only to a limited extent.

Information on the involvement of fans in criminal networks is scarce. According to the interviewees, there is a clear demarcation between perpetrators of hooligan acts and those of crimes such as thefts and robberies. Criminals stay clear of street hooliganism in order to avoid scanning by police. Those who often get involved in scuffles and vandalism are recruited for the punitive squads of fan clubs.

Arguably, one of the key factors influencing the radicalisation of fan groups is the drug market. Since the late 1990s, police reports have noted that in addition to alcohol drugs have started to appear more often at football events. This accounts for the growing use of violence and serious incidents. The more serious problem is that some fans are not only users of psychoactive substances but are also involved in drug dealing.

Police reports indicate that some fan club leaders have been involved at the middle and senior level in drug dealing networks since 2002 – 2003.⁵⁶⁹ Individuals mentioned in this respect are Rossen “The Animal” Petrov (CSKA),⁵⁷⁰ Hristo “Itso the Jesus” Varterjan (Levski), Lyubomir “The Youngster” Kostadinov (Levski).⁵⁷¹

Since the early 2000s, drug dealing networks in Bulgaria have been organised on a territorial basis. In the capital Sofia, for example, there are seven districts each having a “boss” who ensures the supply of psychoactive substances and controls the whole chain from warehousing to retailing. The boss also controls the quality of the substance in his district, and the sale of low quality substance or sales in someone else’s district are punished by breaking bones that are difficult to heal. Each district boss has his own punitive squad.⁵⁷² The boss of one of Sofia’s seven districts is Rossen Petrov, who is also the leader of the faction The Animals (hence the nickname) in the CSKA fan group. It is difficult to establish the extent to which the organisation of drug dealing in several Sofia districts influences the control of fan club factions. It is also not entirely clear whether fan subculture – the closed nature of the group, mutual trust, access to youngsters with experience in violence – makes it easier to get influence in the criminal world.

⁵⁶⁹ Center for the Study of Democracy (2003) *The Drug Market in Bulgaria*, Sofia, Center for the Study of Democracy; Center for the Study of Democracy (2007) *Organised Crime in Bulgaria: Markets and Trends*.

⁵⁷⁰ Center for the Study of Democracy (2007). Since August 2015, **Rossen Petrov has been serving two prison sentences for an overall of five years and three months. The first sentence is for membership in an organised crime group for delaing drugs in Sofia led by Zlatomir Ivanov. The second is for involuntary manslaughter.**

⁵⁷¹ He serves a 4-years prison sentence for participation in an organised criminal group for drug distribution and reprisals against disobedient drug dealers. Interviews with law enforcement officers.

⁵⁷² Center for the Study of Democracy (2003), *The Drug Market in Bulgaria*, Sofia, Center for the Study of Democracy.

The key question here, therefore, is why the symbiosis between organised crime and football fans is allowed to happen. Although there is no single answer, two factors stand out. The first relates to the political use of fan clubs. During the political protests in January and February 1997, key figures in the opposition UDF recruited fan clubs to participate in the storming of parliament and creating street tensions. Interviewees claim – although this is difficult to verify – that fan leaders were rewarded by making them untouchable by law enforcement during the UDF government (1997 – 2001). The second factor relates to the overlapping of drug dealing districts and the territorial units of the police, indicating possible systemic corruption.⁵⁷³

There is also overlapping of drug dealing districts and the neighbourhoods of fan factions, which results in the fan club acquiring control over local football-related businesses. Interviewees indicate that fan leaders receive a “cut” from almost all deals. This could include profit from the travel expenses of fans when accompanying the team at away matches, food, drink, football paraphernalia, etc. Since 2006 – 2007, the most influential fan factions have managed to extract rent from the big football clubs. The deal is that factions are paid off for ensuring that matches proceed without incidents. As an example, the two big Sofia clubs – Levski and CSKA – would pay their fan groups half the amount of the fines imposed on the teams when playing away during the preceding season.⁵⁷⁴

An understanding of the fan subculture and the influence of crime networks on the conduct of fans needs also to take into account a related phenomenon – protection racket. It is an imitation of violence and is restricted mostly to intimidation. According to interviewees, mass and extreme violence is avoided as it brings about pressure from the police. Intimidation turns out to be much more efficient.⁵⁷⁵

A feature of fan groups that is exploited by criminals is anonymity – these groups consist of a large number of persons who know how to hide their faces. Given the big crowds involved in clashes, fans are easily “shuffled” by the leaders. Shuffling – which involves the rotation of fans at various places in the crowd in order to minimise their exposure to police surveillance – makes the task of identifying perpetrators of crimes very difficult. Additional techniques applied to those at the fringes of the fan groups are “sacrifice” and “trial.” A fan explains: “They would get one of the kids that hang around and throw him to the police; if he doesn’t “sing” he can be admitted in the faction.”⁵⁷⁶ Sacrificing is an important mechanism of the “peaceful coexistence” with the police. Senior police officers would “shelter” fan leaders from investigation in exchange for receiving the identities of perpetrators. As a result, crime networks operating among fan groups remain intact, while the police acquire control over the fans.

Deals between club owners and fan groups are made legal through the organisation of public order during matches. The faction of Levski Sofia-West, for example,

⁵⁷³ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁴ Interviews a fan from the core of an influential faction and a police officer.

⁵⁷⁵ Interviews with MoI officers.

⁵⁷⁶ Interview with a fan from the hard core of an influential faction.

would establish a private security company which would sign a protection contract with the football club. The company would then legally employ fans, while control over the fan group is achieved by paying off the hard core and using punitive squads against unruly fans.

Gradually, these deals with the club owners turn into systematic protection racket. If not paid, fans stage incidents and the football clubs are fined. The examples provided at the interviews were of the 2013 – 2014 season when Levski Sofia was facing financial difficulties and the owner declined to pay off the fans as before. A series of incidents at away and home matches followed and the club was fined and penalised to play behind closed doors. A similar incident occurred during a match with Croatia when organisers fans “captured the flags” of the Croats and blackmailed the BFU that they would burn them (thus risking a UEFA disciplinary proceeding) if not paid.

This kind of protection racket, however, escalates beyond football and enters other business areas and politics. Examples of the use of “pressure groups” by fan leaders involve business conflicts, when entrepreneurs pay fans to destroy facilities of the competition (usually in the catering business). On one occasion, an entrepreneur paid fans to attack members of the public who were protesting against development plans in a local park. Apart from physical intimidation, the cars of local residents were burned down.⁵⁷⁷

5. ORGANISATIONAL FORMS AND ACTORS

Categories of football supporters

There are different types of football fans depending on the degree of their commitment, the degree of identification with the club and the extent to which they demonstrate violent behaviour. One of the most widely used classifications is based on criteria centred on identification and attachment, and identifies five types of sports supporters: temporal, local, devoted, fanatical and dysfunctional.⁵⁷⁸ Temporary supporters are committed as long as the team is winning, while local fans support the team because it represents their city. As for the devoted fan, the attachment to the team endures beyond time and place. The fanatical and dysfunctional fans demonstrate strong team identification in very public ways. The dysfunctional fans are so attached to their team that it dominates their lives, and they often engage in anti-social behaviour.

Over the past years the Bulgarian police have used a similar 3-level scheme. The fan supporters are classified based on the level of risk. The first category A represents the lowest level of risk and includes the general public at stadiums. Category B represents medium level of risk for security, which in Bulgaria self-

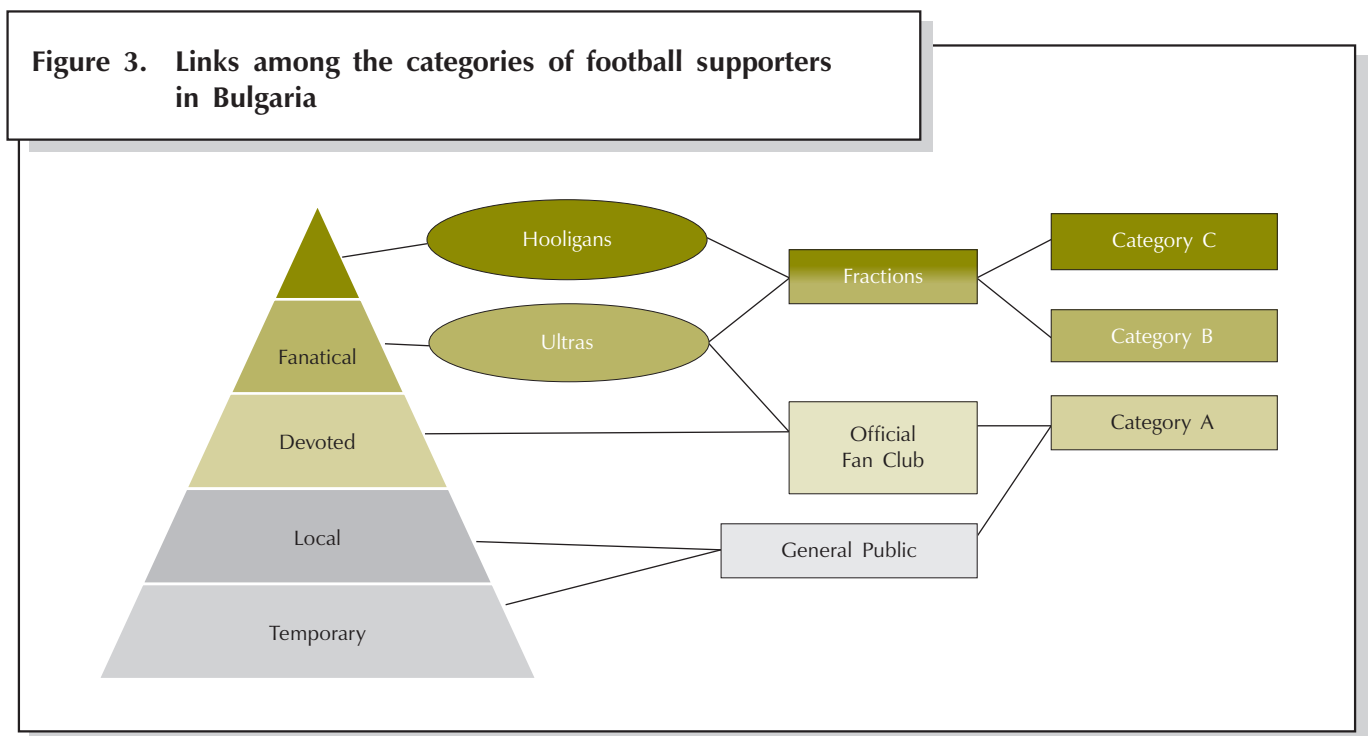
⁵⁷⁷ *Btv Новините*, „Подпалени коли на протестиращи за квартална градинка”, 20.10.2014; *Offnews.bg*, „Запалени коли и протести заради строеж върху детска площадка”, 20.10.2014.

⁵⁷⁸ Hunt K., Bristol T., Bashaw E. (1999) “A Conceptual Approach to Classifying Sports Fans,” *Journal of Services Marketing*, Vol. 13, Issue 6, 1999, pp. 439-452.

identify as “ultras.” The hooligans – or persons with the highest level of risk – are in category C.⁵⁷⁹

The interviews confirmed that supporters who define themselves as ultras correspond to the fanatical type. They attend football games of their favourite team very frequently and demonstrate their support through the use of flares, choreography, vocal support in large groups and the display of banners. The use of violence, however, is not their primary characteristic. Football hooligans, on the other hand, correspond to the dysfunctional type, for whom violence is a way to express their support to the team. Their behaviour is predominantly led by hate towards the rival team and the police. In practice, the distinction between the two types is not very clear, as very often ultras participate in hooligan acts.⁵⁸⁰

The links between the various categories of supporters in Bulgaria is illustrated in Figure 3.



Source: Authors.

The current chapter is focused on hooligans and ultras as they are the groups prone to radicalisation. Ultras and hooligans are usually part of factions and may not be members of the official fan group of a football club, which is much more numerous. Some ultras are not well disposed towards the official fan group as they consider them financially and organisationally dependent on the football club. Thus a faction that is not part of any official fan group allows them to belong to a band of supporters and at the same time feel independent and free of obligations. One interviewee defined himself as “an independent fighting unit with

⁵⁷⁹ Interview with a police officer.

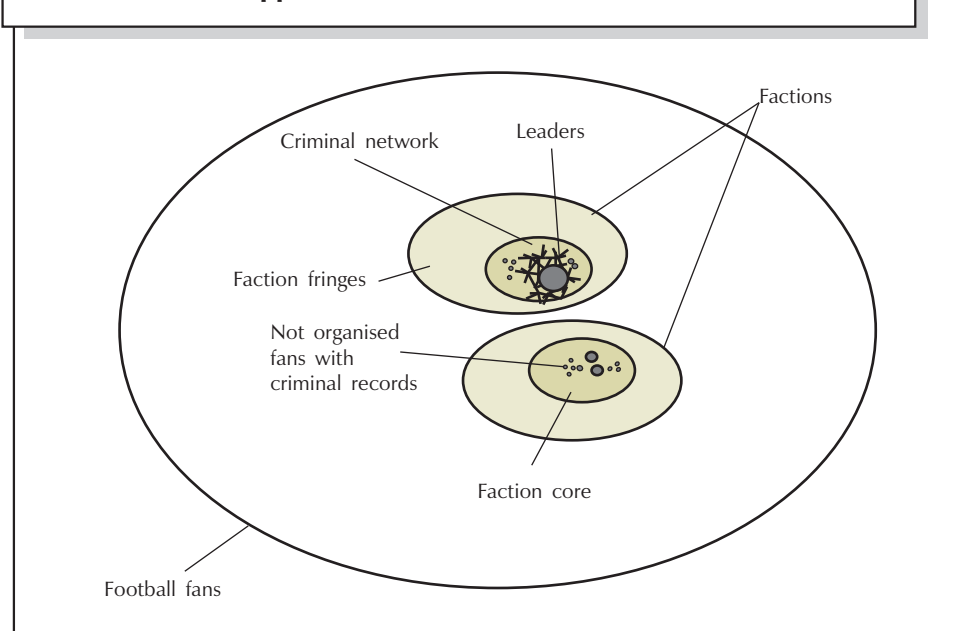
⁵⁸⁰ Interview with a sports journalist.

several people behind his back”⁵⁸¹ and denied being part of any faction, which confirms that some of the most extreme fans are not part of any organisational structure.⁵⁸²

There is also the category of dysfunctional fans who are engaged in criminal activities. They fall into two groups: those who commit occasional or regular crimes but are not involved with organised criminal structures and those who are part of crime networks and use the faction as an environment and tool for their criminal as well as legal income.

Survey data on this topic in Bulgaria are scarce and outdated. The shares, therefore, of the various categories of fans in the overall fan population can only be estimated on the basis of statistics on football match attendance, surveys conducted in 1999 – 2000 and police estimates. Thus, given that in the period 1998 – 2000 the average match attendance was at 6,000-7,000 persons, an estimate of 20% of the B and C categories of “risk” fans would correspond to around 1,200-1,400.⁵⁸³ Police estimates for that period claim that around 300 persons fall into category C. Reduced attendance in the 2012 – 2015 period (to around 2,000-2,500 spectators) changed the ratio between high-risk and low-risk fans. According to the sources, the share of risk fans is now at 30-35%, or around 600-900 persons of category C. It should also be taken into account that in recent years high-stakes (and thus risk-prone) matches have been attended by 3-4 times larger audiences.

Figure 4. Organisational structure of fan factions and supporters



Source: Authors.

⁵⁸¹ Interview with a football fan.

⁵⁸² Ibid.

⁵⁸³ Радева (2009).

Leading fan clubs and factions

The number of ultras factions today is estimated at around 76⁵⁸⁴ located in most major Bulgarian cities (see Table 1). It should be noted that their organisation, leadership and membership base are very dynamic. The trends since the late 1990s indicate that within 2-3 years they undergo mergers, divisions, name changes. The most numerous and most interesting in terms of risks and potential for extreme behaviour are the fan groups of the two leading rival football clubs in Sofia – Levski and CSKA. The other two leading teams and their groups of supporters are based in the second largest city in the country, Plovdiv – Lokomotiv and Botev. Other strong factions are to be found in Stara Zagora (Beroe) and Varna (Cherno More), as well as some other clubs with long tradition in the bigger cities.

Table 4. Football clubs and fan factions in Bulgaria

Football club	Factions
Naftex Bourgas	Green Fighters, Old Dirty Dogs, HGU, The Young Company, Hate Front Burgas, Meden Rudnik Firm`13, Italian Hood
Dunav Rousse	Danube Forever, Riverside Boys, Zdravec Iztok Front
Cherno More Varna	Chaika Hools, Green Brats, Green Demons, The Alcoholics
Lokomotiv Plovdiv	Napoletani 1995, Lauta Hools, Gott Mit Uns, The Usual Suspects, Lauta Youths
CSKA Sofia	Ofanzica (including faction "14", known also as Northside 14p and The Young Ones), The Animals, Red Mladost, Ultra Pernik (Red Religion), Boys Vidin, Varna Firm, Proud, Ultra Front Vratza, Torcida Plovdiv, Office Boys, Lyulin Boys, Armeitsi Dobrich, Pleven Group, The Great Tarnovites, Bourgas Brigade, Executors – Haskovo, Shoumen Group, Rousse Defends CSKA (Forever Red)
Levski Sofia	Sofia West, South Division, Blue Junta, HD Boys, Blue Lads Sliven, Ultra Varna, U.L.R., Vandals Pleven, LSL, Blue Huns Pernik, Blue Warriors Plovdiv, Old Capital Boys, Blue Terror Ruse, Blue Blood Asenovgrad, Club Dobrich, Ultras Blagoevgrad, Torcida Kyustendil, Varna Crew, Bad Blue Boys Blagoevgrad, Blue Zone Gorna Oryahovitsa, The Gabrovo Blues
Etar Veliko Tarnovo	Hells Ultras, Young Boys V.T., E.G.F.
Spartak Varna	Semper Fidelis (Always Loyal), Flower Hood, Brigade Hools, Spartak Youth, Vladislavovo Front, Mladost Boys 95
Lokomotiv Sofia	Iron Brigades, Drinking Boys

⁵⁸⁴ Data from Bulgarian's ultras website, available at <http://bulgarian-ultras.com>, accessed on 05.08.2015.

Table 4. Football clubs and fan factions in Bulgaria (continued)

Football club	Factions
Botev Plovdiv	The Wild Bunch Kitchuka, Izgrev Boys, Trakia Brigade, Bunta North, SCB, CSC, Youth Group, Centrum Crew, Patriots
Spartak Pleven	Always Loyal, SPSS (Spartak Pleven Sofia Supporters), Pleven BoySS, S.P.U.Y. (Spartak Pleven Ultras Youths), Storgo Firm,
Beroe Stara Zagora	Zara Boys, CP12, Rakia Power
Litex Lovech	Ultras Lovech, Sofia Lads, Young Brigade, Youth Crew, Lovcheans, Litex Drink Team, North Town Boys
Minyor Pernik	Teva Boys, Ultras Moshino, Central fan Club, U.A, Pashov Boys
Slavia Sofia	Boys Sofia, La Vecchia Scuola
Montana	Ogosta Boys
Lokomotiv Gorna Oryahovitsa	Jolly Roger Firm
Asenovets Asenovgrad	South Squad, Wasted Life Crew (WLC), Headbreakers
Chernomorets Bourgas	Blue Sharks, Blue Brigade Bourgas, Grudowo Boys
Sportist Svoge	Svoge Boys
Pirin Blagoevgrad	Green Eagles, Pirin SS

Source: *bulgarian-ultras.com*

The first conflicts within the fan groups of the various football clubs which led to the formation of sub-groups took place in the mid-1990s. The newly formed factions sought to affirm their identity through confrontation with the others. Until 2007-2008, the Levski Fan Club (LFC) was dominated by the core, although it was not associated with the hooligan culture as was the case with Sofia West. The leaders of the LFC are personalities well known to the public. When the owners and management started to pay off the Sofia West faction in order to avoid disturbances, young people in LFC started to become more radical imitating the more extreme conduct of Sofia West. The LFC leaders attempted to check this process but failed and had to quit, as a result of which LFC fell apart. Some of its former members joined Sofia West.

The faction Sofia West was established in 1999 by residents of the largest Sofia district Lyulin.⁵⁸⁵ While in 2006 it was one of the smaller fan groups, today it has gained significant influence and is the most numerous, with 200-300 – or more,

⁵⁸⁵ Lyulin is a district of Sofia which is situated in the western part of the city, hence Sofia West. Its current informal leader is Lyubomir “the Youngster” Kostadinov.

depending on the performance of the football club – active core members.⁵⁸⁶ On the basis of the interviews and media reports it could be suggested that one of the reasons for this development is the involvement of its core members in criminal activities, mainly drug distribution. The faction is involved in private security services (stewards at stadiums) and the insurance business through a firm of a leader⁵⁸⁷ of the organisation.⁵⁸⁸ A respondent referred to the fan group as “the firm” referring to its involvement in selling official merchandise of the club and receiving payment from the club.⁵⁸⁹

The second and more influential among Levski supporters faction is the South Division. It was established in 2006 and is constantly attracting new supporters. The South Division seeks to clearly differentiate itself from Sofia West. Its members are younger, believe to be idealists – they turn down money offers – and are bigger nationalists than Sofia West. The latter, interviewees claim, “perform” at events only when paid. They would attend events only formally but would take no part. The police estimate that the South Division is about 500 strong. When Levski performs well, however, their number doubles.⁵⁹⁰ One of the most extreme Levski fan groups is Blue Junta. It was established in 2010 and has attracted a lot of younger people. The faction is very small with less than 50 people, but is famous for being very active in hooligan actions before and after Levski matches. In addition to the Sofia factions, there are Levski fan groups in almost every Bulgarian town. Although these groups have their own names and symbols, they participate in one of the Sofia factions (for example, in 2012 Levski’s factions in Pazardzhik and Kyustendil joined the Division). Levski has large and very active fan clubs in major cities in the country, such as Ultra Varna, Bad Blue Boys Blagoevgrad and Blue Huns Pernik.

CSKA’s fans are the other large risk-posing group. Its Central Fan Club was established in 1990, but was based on the supporter’s club founded during the first win games of Bulgarian army’s football club in the 1950s. The development of the CSKA fan factions resembles that of Levski’s – initially very fragmented and warring with each other, through various coalitions in 2013 to the current two large factions – Ofanziva (Assault) and the Animals. The Animals is an old faction, which in many ways resembles Sofia West – commercialised and having leaders involved in shady activities. Their influences waxes and wanes depending on how active their leader Rossen Petrov is.⁵⁹¹ Interviewees confirm that the Animals are the most violent CSKA fan faction and their members are responsible for most of the hooligans and ultras actions associated with the team. Ofanziva is the faction of nationalists and idealists among the CSKA fans. It is an example of a faction growing in significance because of the mergers of smaller factions – it was created by the merger of „14“ (known also as Northside 14) and the Young Ones. “14” used to be a leading faction, but after having its banner captured by Levski

⁵⁸⁶ Interview with a police officer.

⁵⁸⁷ Anton “Toni the Insurance” Kalchev.

⁵⁸⁸ Interview with a police officer.

⁵⁸⁹ Interview with a sports journalist.

⁵⁹⁰ Interview with a police officer and a sports journalist.

⁵⁹¹ As mentioned above he is currently serving a sentence for drug dealing.

hooligans, their members joined others existing factions.⁵⁹² The police estimate that the core of Ofanziva consists of around 100-150 persons, with around 500 wearing their jersey at big matches. The changes in the factions in the last three years are an example of the “efficiency” of the faction model. For a dozen years (2000 – 2012) there was only one official fan club managed by Dimitar “the Duce” Angelov. The clashes among the factions started with the crisis in the CSKA finances. When its owner – who also owns the waste management company Titan – started to reduce the funding and sell players in 2011, the faction leaders started to challenge each other. Dimitar Angelov supported the owners as they paid for being on good terms with the fans. Ofanziva was the faction which wanted the Titan owners to withdraw because they were believed to be bringing the club down. Dimitar Angelov was accused by CSKA’s fans for misusing the club’s funding and the income made from selling catering and merchandise around stadiums. When the owners stopped paying, Dimitar Angelov and his people turned against Titan and started to pay Kaloyan “the Goldfinch” Stoyanov – a shady character and member of a former security company thought to be a front for a criminal organisation – for protection services. Stoyanov in turn started to pay off Rossen Petrov. In 2012, Dimitar Angelov resigned as the leader of CSKA’s fan club after being publicly humiliated by Petrov. After the dissolution of the official fan club, CSKA fans fragmented into multiple factions, estimated to be between 10 and 14 during the 2013 political turmoil. These then started to merge since smaller factions were no match for the two large Levski factions. At that time, CSKA factions started to participate in political rallies and to get paid for that (more on this below). The Animals became the dominant faction. As with the Levski fans, CSKA factions from outside Sofia tend to affiliate themselves with either Ofanziva or The Animals. Among the more active and independent CSKA factions around the country are Torcida Plovdiv, Varna Firm, Ultra Front Vratza, Ultra Pernik (Red Religion), Boys Vidin, Red Lions Pazardjik.

Lokomotiv Plovdiv’s main factions are – Got mit uns (1998), Lauta Hools and Napoletani Ultras Plovdiv (1995). Members of Got mit uns and Lauta Hools are responsible for the majority of fights during the club’s games. Got mit uns’ members are mostly older skinheads, while Lauta Hools members are younger hooligans and ultras. Napoletani’s members are more involved in ultras actions, rather than hooligan ones.

Botev Plovdiv’s current leading factions are Centrum Crew and Young Group, consisting primarily of younger hooligans. In the past, the leading factions of the team were Izgrev Boys and the Wild Bunch Kitchuka. The members of the latter factions were mainly older anarchist hooligans, who had lost influence among supporters.

Although having limited human and financial resources, factions of other major Bulgarian football clubs have participated in a number of incidents and mass brawls which resulted in bodily injuries. Beroe Stara Zagora’s supporters are believed to be the fifth supporter group on the Bulgarian ultras scene in terms of influence. Their leading factions are called Green Vandals and CP12, united under the Zara Boys banner. The members of the factions, supporting the two rival

⁵⁹² Тарандова, Е., Б. Къртунов, „Войната на знамената,“ в. *Капитал*, 02.03.2011.

Varna football teams – Spartak and Chernomorec are organized on a hooligan basis, while ultras actions are rarely seen on their stadiums. Naftex enjoys the largest fan base in Bourgas. The main supporters' organisation Green Fighters often participates in hooligan actions in the city and has members that hold key positions in the right-wing National Front for Salvation of Bulgaria.⁵⁹³ One of the currently top football clubs Ludogorets is gradually building up a stable fan base, although its loyalty to the team has yet to be proved.

Ultras and hooligans of the five most popular clubs in Bulgaria have established an Association of Football Supporters. It is headed by Elena Vataškova, a former director of the supporters' sector at the Bulgarian Football Union (BFU), who is known for her connections with radical factions of football fans.⁵⁹⁴ Although one of the priorities that the Association was the establishment of a positive fan culture, in practice the organisation has supported several nationalistic actions of football fans.

Outside Sofia, the risk posed by local fan factions is not easily discernible. Although they are not publicly visible, they are an important resource for the local business and political clientelistic circles. There are several reasons for this lack of clarity. First, violence takes place mainly in Sofia or is explained by the involvement of Sofia factions. In fact, non-Sofia factions would travel for matches to the capital and join the action on behalf of some Sofia group. The second reason is the lack of independent local media seeking to investigate this phenomenon. Third, the police are reluctant to share information as it would jeopardise the career prospects of officers and is also possibly related to rent seeking.

Relationship among the main fan groups

A typical characteristic of football clubs and their supporters' club is that they tend to develop great rivalries with other clubs and fan groups. While this is often caused by regional diversities and past events, the reasons why a particular club is considered a rival are not always clear to supporters. Each team and supporters group has identified an opponent to whom they are more tolerant. They also establish connections with international fan clubs and sometimes travel to support them during matches.

As mentioned, the two leading rivals in Bulgaria are Levski and CSKA. It could be argued which is the second biggest rival of Levski, but surely it is either Botev Plovdiv or Minyor Pernik. In recent years, a new strong rivalry has emerged between Levski and Beroe Stara Zagora. Interviewees mentioned that there are personal contacts between hooligans of Levski and Lokomotiv Plovdiv, but it is not clear whether their supporters could be considered allies. The only international twin club of Levski is Lazio (Italy). Unlike Levski, CSKA's supporters are on good terms with Botev Plovdiv. Internationally, CSKA fans support Steaua Bucharest, Partizan Belgrade and since recently Liverpool's fan faction – Urchin. The main rivals and twin teams of the two main rival clubs in Plovdiv are illustrated in Figure 6. The other main rivalries in the country are between Lokomotiv Sofia

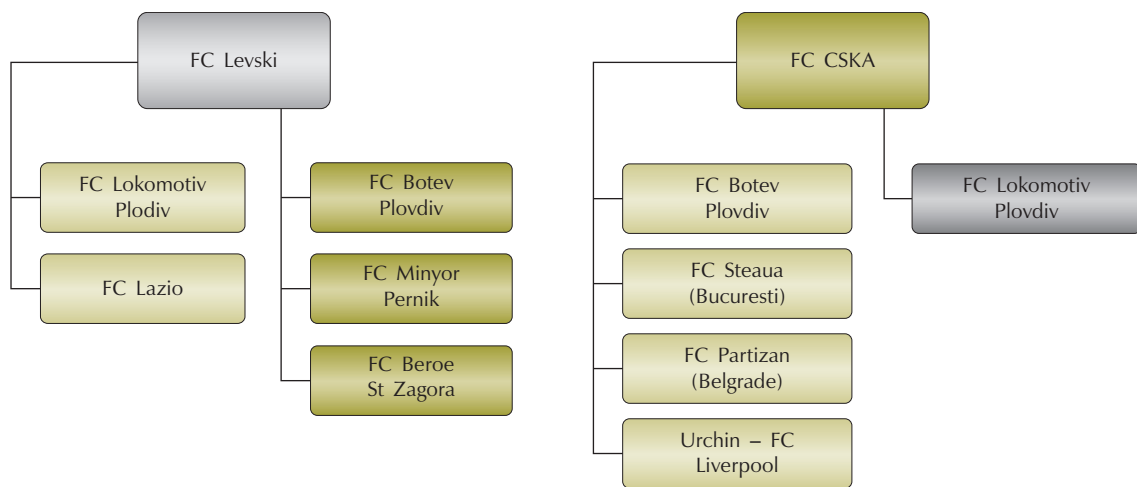
⁵⁹³ A member of the supporter's organization was a candidate for municipality councillor.

⁵⁹⁴ *Webcafe.bg*, "Футболни фенове за политическа употреба," 22.02.2014.

and Slavia Sofia, Spartak Varna and Chernomorets Varna, Neftokhimik Burgas and Chernomorets Burgas.

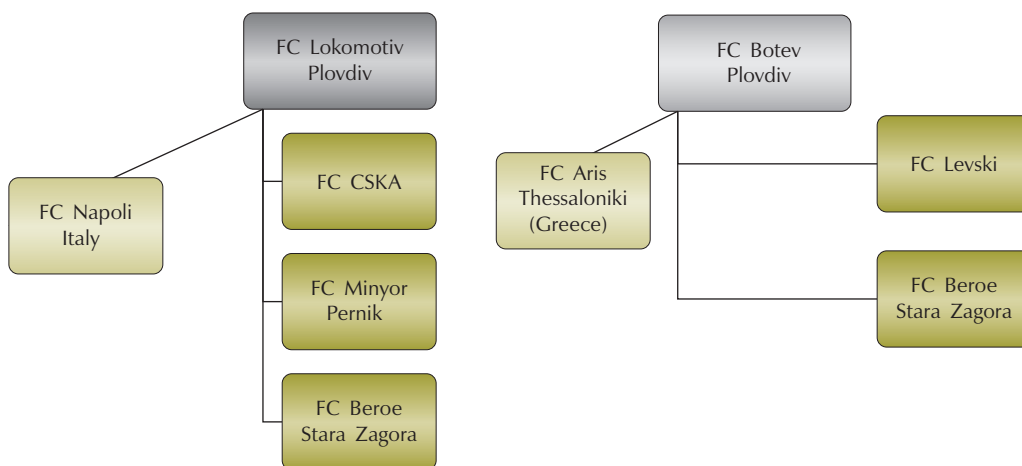
Interviews with police officers confirm that the main rivalries between football clubs' supporters are known to them and that this information is taken into account when assessing the risk of hooligan actions at a particular game.

Figure 5. Rivalries and friendships of Levski and CSKA



Source: Authors.

Figure 6. Rivalries and friendships of Lokomotiv and Botev



Source: Authors.

The structure of factions

There are a number of common elements between the organisational structure of football factions and street gangs: the internal hierarchy, the leader, rules of conduct within the group, regular meetings of members and territoriality.

Each fan group has three structural elements with clear hierarchy – leaders, core of the fan group and supporting members. Hierarchies, however, can vary. Sofia West and the Animals have one leader who controls the membership with the use of “captains.” Only well trusted people are allowed in the core of the faction. These are people submitting to a relatively rigid hierarchy of “lieutenants” each commanding a number of “foot soldiers.” The punitive squads are an important discipline enforcement tool – they guard the leaders and exercise control both of the criminal business and within the faction. Ofanziva and South Division are headed by 20-30 “natural” leaders each having his own informal network, thus forming a core of 100-150 persons.⁵⁹⁵

Each level of the hierarchy of the factions has a specific demography:

- The faction fringe usually includes the youngest ones, teenagers from poorer neighbourhoods. They would come from troubled families and would not do very well at school. They follow the leaders of the gang, this is their family. They are prone to deviant behaviour.
- The next level is the core, consisting of young men up to their late 20s who have climbed the hierarchy ladder. They usually have police records for thefts, battery, drugs, etc.
- The inner core, the third level, are individuals aged 30 and over with crime records. This is the middle management of the group – they deal with both the fringes and the top leaders.⁵⁹⁶

Greater reputation is enjoyed by fans who regularly attend matches of the club at home, often travel to away matches, engage in procuring fan equipment and are very active in the support choreography at stadiums. Special reputation is enjoyed by those who demonstrate readiness to fight with other fans and the police.⁵⁹⁷ Several interviewees mentioned that the hierarchy within the group is also dependent on the age of supporters. Older ultras are respected, followed and imitated by younger ones as this is perceived as a way to climb in the hierarchy of the faction.

According to interviewees, the core members of the leading factions in the country number around 50-100. Actions by the ultras are usually organized by a somewhat larger supporters’ group – 100-200 people.⁵⁹⁸ In Sofia, the police has identified around 4,000-5,000 ultras falling under category B (medium level of risk) and around 300-400 hooligans falling under category C (high level of risk).

⁵⁹⁵ Interviews with police officers and fans from the core of factions.

⁵⁹⁶ Вълков, И. (2013), „Футболно хулиганство и политически натиск.“ *Newmedia21.eu*, 09.09.2013.

⁵⁹⁷ Interview with a sports journalist.

⁵⁹⁸ *Btv*, Interview with a CSKA fan, 01.03.2011, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eTj8q_hTS-c (accessed 25.08.2015).

Within the factions, category A fans can also be seen as enemies and battered if they don't comply with the faction order. There have been many incidents involving individual fans who attend matches only occasionally but have violated some internal rule, e.g. used some banned pyrotechnic.

Factions also have internal division of labour. The most general distinction is between „singers“ and „soldiers.“ There is also the special group of pyrotechnic experts. Other fans are specialised in fights which are arranged according to certain rules of engagement (e.g. groups of equal numbers – 10, 30, 50 – fighting each other). Some of them are also hired as security guards as part of the security services provided after 2006 – 2007 by the factions leaders under deals with club owners.

Although each faction has a leader, none of the interviewees mentioned any formal procedure for his election by the faction. A respondent explained that his group has a ringleader, who organizes the joint singing and chanting, takes the lead in the organization of choreographies and excursions. His leadership was established as a gradual process, during which he proved as one of the most serious, loyal and charismatic within the group.⁵⁹⁹ The leaders of the most influential factions, however, are often linked to criminal networks and their control over the group is one based predominantly on fear.⁶⁰⁰ Unlike factions, official fan clubs have put in place a formal procedure for the election of leadership – a chairman, a board of directors and a control board. However, the case of Dimitar Angelov illustrated in the previous section, shows that these procedures are not always applied.

Although the majority of factions have not adopted any codes of conduct, a respondent mentioned that there are specific rules of behaviour within the groups. These rules might require certain behaviour at stadiums or ban participation in political activities for money or the hitting of women and children. A common rule for most factions is the prohibition to disclose information on planned activities to the police. The compliance with these rules is controlled within the group and a respondent mentioned that some of the internal fights within factions at stadiums are initiated exactly because of disobedience.⁶⁰¹

The majority of factions have been established on a territorial basis. This territoriality principle is then transferred to the stadium. Levski's core supporters, for example, are located in Sector B of the national stadium, while CSKA's supporters in Sector G. Each faction's meetings are usually held in an office in the neighbourhood from which the group originates. Many Ultras meet during the week in their own fan rooms or local pubs to plan choreographed displays or prepare banners.

Membership

The majority of factions have not endorsed a formal procedure for becoming a member. Several respondents mentioned that a fan should prove themselves as worthy of becoming a member. There is a trial period, during which one should

⁵⁹⁹ Interview with a football fan.

⁶⁰⁰ Sofia West and the Animals could be mentioned as an example.

⁶⁰¹ Interview with a football fan.

prove that the others can count on him/her in critical situations (fights with police and/or opponents) and in the organization of support activities.⁶⁰² Once a new member has won the trust of the group, he should strive not to let down the others. None of the respondents mentioned a case of terminating a membership on these grounds.

Some factions are more open to new members than others. This is usually in direct correlation to the extent to which the faction is involved in hooligan acts. The larger the fan base of a club, the more difficult it is for an individual to become part of the core group of supporters and vice versa. This is because more popular supporters' organizations attract more candidate members and could afford to be more selective. It is much easier to be accepted in the faction, if a trusted member takes you to the designated sector at the stadium or other supporters' events.⁶⁰³ A respondent suggested that it is extremely difficult to become a core member of the most influential and leading Levski's factions – Sofia West and South Division.⁶⁰⁴ In order to become a member of Sofia West, one should gain the trust and be recommended by at least three prominent members.⁶⁰⁵ It could be suggested that one of the reasons for the particularly strict selection procedure lies in the fact that the faction is involved in criminal activities,⁶⁰⁶ which requires higher level of secrecy in the organisation.

According to all interviewees no special recruiting tactics are needed to attract new members as usually there are more than enough candidates. Only interviewed supporters of Lokomotiv Sofia mentioned that being right-wing is an important precondition for becoming member of their factions.⁶⁰⁷

Role of social media

Ultras actively use social media outlets to advertise the idea of being a member of a particular faction.⁶⁰⁸ They often produce visual materials – pictures of the faction at stadiums and YouTube videos, which represent the life of an ultra. Although most of the respondents deny that this is a tactic for recruitment, the presence of factions on the internet is certainly an inspirational factor for young people. In addition, old methods of distributing information about factions (leaflets, graffiti) are still widely used. All respondents claimed that one cannot become a member of a faction only by being active on social media. The perpetual testing of one's loyalty in real-life situations is a necessary prerequisite for being a member.

Private messages on social media platforms are often used as a means of communication between younger members of a faction. This has been confirmed by interviewed football fans and police officers. A respondent mentioned that

⁶⁰² Ibid.

⁶⁰³ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁴ Interviews with Levski supporters, 19.05.2015.

⁶⁰⁵ ВЪЛКОВ (2013).

⁶⁰⁶ Interviews with police officers, media reports.

⁶⁰⁷ Interview with a football fan.

⁶⁰⁸ ДИМИТРОВ (2013).

younger ultras often engage in hate talk with rival supporters only on the internet. This has been viewed by older fans as a symptom of cowardice.

There are two major ways in which social media are used by Bulgarian football fans – for recruitment of future members and for the coordination of clandestine actions. The recruitment application of social media has gone through several stages. Until 2011 – 2012, there was no clear distinction between recruitment and coordination. Events, including staged fights between rival factions were arranged in online forums. Outsiders or deliberate troublemakers could be identified by the use of key words and jargon. The accounts of unwanted outsiders would be blocked. Later, these forums became accessible only through a password, which was provided only after a vetting process. Various precaution measures were introduced, such as changing participants and regular checks by phone.

Facebook became an increasingly popular recruitment platform around 2010 – 2011. In September 2011, during a week-long protest against a controversial Roma leader fans created a Facebook page which became both an organisational and ideological platform. It was used to coordinate the protests all over the country with faction affiliation avoided as an issue. Before the police discontinued the forum, it had over 50,000 participants, while street demonstrations were growing. A comparison of police surveillance of events and the number of commitments to participation in Facebook indicates a high ratio of actual turnout – the police estimated that around 30% of those committing through the forum actually did take place. This is particularly high when contrasted with the turnout at environmental events – only 10% of those committing through Facebook actually attend.⁶⁰⁹ No social media alternative was found following the closure of the Facebook page since Twitter had not yet been popular in Bulgaria at the time.

The growing availability of smartphones and increasingly successful efforts by police to crack forum passwords led to gradual abandonment of members-only forum platforms. New technologies allow greater privacy through mobile applications such as Viber, Skype, WhatsApp, and sometimes even more specialised software. Fans are aware that the police have problems accessing encrypted communications.⁶¹⁰

During the political protests in early 2013, the factions did not follow any explicit ideological line but generally supported the protests, although there is little reliable information given the closed nature of their discussion forums. The same applies to their participation in other political events in the summer and autumn of 2013.

Similarly, in the summer of 2015, there was no solicitation of public support through open Facebook groups. According to the police, in members-only groups there had been little effort to organise fans, possibly because of the lack of significant funding.⁶¹¹

⁶⁰⁹ Interview with an expert on Bulgarian social media.

⁶¹⁰ Interviews with police officers.

⁶¹¹ Ibid.

6. REPERTOIRE OF ACTIONS

Acts not associated with violence

The non-violent conduct of ultras and football hooligans are related to their various football support activities at stadiums. The acts can be classified as follows:

Graffiti, stickers and wall inscriptions all over the cities; development of video content. Graffiti usually illustrate the favourite club's emblem and/or name, or the name and emblem of the faction. They are usually placed on trains, abandoned construction sites, etc. Inscriptions are written everywhere, including on public buildings. The stickers are often seen on road signs, buses, metro trains. The aim of the ultras is to fill the city with images related to their favourite football club. As mentioned in a previous section this is used to attract new supporters. The visualisations, however, can also have offensive, racist or homophobic content.

Wearing certain brands, fan scarves and other clothing. The casual dress code has always been a distinctive characteristic of ultras and hooligans. While it has evolved as a way to conceal from the police one's affiliation with a particular faction, nowadays the dress code is well known to the authorities and the general public. In Bulgaria, ultras do not stick to the usual brands (Fred Perry, Lacoste, Ben Sherman, etc.) strictly, but choose clothes with large hoods and long zips to conceal their faces from the police and shield from the smoke at stadiums.⁶¹²

Fan choreography: chanting, waving banners and singing at stadiums. Ultras invest significant efforts and time in the preparation and display of fan choreography, including the composition of songs, writing lyrics and preparation of banners. The lyrics and banners are usually focused on favourite club's triumphs or are offensive to rival teams. Sometimes, the banners concern topics of interest to ultras. For example, with the banners ultras express their attitude towards the club's owners or their attitude towards the *Law on the Protection of Public Order during Sport Events*. The chanting or shouting at competitors or other spectators of messages whose content displays or incites hatred based on racial, national, regional or religious affiliation should be seen as a violent act.

Protests and marches. Ultras and hooligans participate in parades, commemorating historical persons such as the Lukov March.⁶¹³ In 2015, the march was attended by supporters of both Levski and CSKA and was guarded by fans of Beroe Stara Zagora. Each year, football hooligans take part in the protests against the annual Sofia Pride. At such demonstrations, rivalries are set aside and participants from different factions are united by a common nationalistic or patriotic cause. Supporters of rivaling factions march together and follow strict instructions from their leaders on how to behave.

Travel. Ultras often organise trips to other Bulgarian or foreign cities in order to attend a game of the favourite team.

⁶¹² Interview with a football fan.

⁶¹³ See footnote 254.

Donation campaigns. Although this is not widely known, ultras factions often organise or engage in donation campaign, such as collecting money for paying the debts of their club.

Acts associated with violence

Violent acts can be grouped into several categories:

Use of pyrotechnics and other objects on sports grounds or among spectators, which may jeopardise people's lives. The most common violation at stadiums is the use of pyrotechnics. Ultras see pyrotechnics as a way to create atmosphere at the stadiums and often include it in their choreographies. Very often, however, the pyrotechnics turn into a weapon and they throw them at the pitch. In 2000, a handmade bomb killed a 30-year old man who had nothing to do with faction rivalries. On 26 February 2011, CSKA's hooligans bombarded the police with pieces of iron and concrete, studs, torches and bombs. Thirty-two police officers were injured and as a result all CSKA supporters were expelled from the stadium at halftime.

Pitch invasion with the aim to impede or stop the sports event. A landmark act of football hooliganism was the successful invasion by CSKA's supporters of the pitch in the town of Mezdra during a game with a local team on 21 March 2010. The match was inadequately guarded – in fact, there was practically no security at all – and CSKA's ultras seized the opportunity to express their discontent.⁶¹⁴

Destroying or damaging public infrastructure (installations in the sports facility, vehicles, commercial facilities, etc.). This is one of the most common violent hooligan acts and almost each major derby in the country is accompanied by breaking of stadium seats and damaging vehicles. It is worth mentioning that football hooligans sometimes use vandalism as an expression of their position towards certain policies. In 2013, CSKA's hooligans caused serious damage to the BFU building. They broke windows and stormed the building causing further damage. The reason was dissatisfaction with the Union's management decisions.⁶¹⁵

Not paying bills in cafes and restaurants. This is a very common practice before and after matches. Ultras and hooligans usually sit at cafes and restaurants around stadiums in large groups, often abusing alcohol and drugs, intimidating the staff and fleeing without paying.

Group fights between rival factions. Group fights between rival fan groups usually happen not only before, during and after football matches, but also when specifically arranged by the rivalling factions. Several interviewees confirmed that there is a practice of organising fights in various formats.⁶¹⁶ An interviewed minor mentioned a case of an organised fight between young supporters of Levski and CSKA next to a school building. According to a law enforcement expert, 'gentlemanship' and old values are declining among football hooligans. The older skinheads used to organise

⁶¹⁴ *24chasa.bg*, „Съдят 10 фенове на ЦСКА за скандала в Мездра (видео)“, 26.03.2010.

⁶¹⁵ *Dnevnik.bg*, „Съдят постанови домашен арест за фенове, потрошили централата на БФС“, 02.07. 2013.

⁶¹⁶ Interviews with football fans.

fights between matching groups and would shake hands after the fight. Now this is often not the case, and 10 fans would engage in fights against only 2 from the rival club; there are attacks on the property and cars of rivaling supporters, young hooligans use knives, make selfies and pose on social media.⁶¹⁷ According to police officers, some factions pay martial arts fighters and athletes to take part in organised fights. Some of the factions have also formed their own “fight clubs” – they hire sports facilities and their members receive combat training.

One of the major group fight took place in 2006 before a derby between Levski and CSKA. Over 100 fans were involved in a fight close to the National Palace of Culture after CSKA’s hooligans attacked an office of Levski fans.⁶¹⁸ A post-match act of hooliganism that gained public attention was Levski supporters’ cruelty against Chernomorets fans after the game between the two clubs on 13 August 2011 in the city of Varna. Chernomorets fans celebrated the win of their club at a bar in the city, when a dozen masked Levski hooligans invaded the bar and attacked the home supporters. They used prohibited weapons such as knives, hammers and wrenches. Five people – one of whom a young lady – were seriously injured.⁶¹⁹

In 2012, there were ethnic tensions related to group fights between hooligans of Levski Sofia and Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina). On the night before the game, the Bosnian ultras began violating public order and provoked the police. Levski hooligans came to the place and the fight was inevitable. There were injured people, including a journalist and a policeman. The next day Levski ultras displayed extremely insulting banners during the match.

Thefts, including banners of rival factions. On 26 February 2011, Levski’s hooligans stole the flag of CSKA’s leading faction “14.” Since this was considered by ultras as a significant humiliation, CSKA supporters responded by arranging a fight where a CSKA hooligan was stabbed with a knife. This event became a turning point for the Bulgarian hooligan community since it led to the de facto disbanding of the extreme far-right CSKA faction “14.”⁶²⁰ An interviewee also mentioned that his fellow fans would often be robbed by rival football fans.

Individual physical assaults on other fans, passers-by or members of minority groups. Individual physical assaults are often motivated by hatred based on racial, national, regional or religious grounds. The predominantly hate nature of these violent acts turns them into one of the most serious hooligan actions. Individual physical assaults committed at stadiums could easily grow into group fights.

An example illustrating the intolerance of ultras/hooligans towards certain ethnic minorities is the case of 29-year old Muslim of Turkish origin Georgi Dimitrov who was battered into a state of coma in 2013.⁶²¹

⁶¹⁷ Interview with an expert from the Mol.

⁶¹⁸ Йотов, С. „На мач – с паве“, в. *Капитал*, 21.09.2006.

⁶¹⁹ *Dnevnik.bg*, „Установени са двама от улtrasите след мача „Черно море“ – „Левски“ във Варна“, 25.08.2011.

⁶²⁰ Тарандова, Е., Б. Къртунов. „Войната на знамената“, в. *Капитал*, 02.03.2011.

⁶²¹ *Dnevnik.bg*, „Липсата на стратегия за борба с футболното хулиганство доведе до погрома в Пловдив“, 25.05.2003.

Participation in violent protests. Very often there are escalations to violence during protests, in which football supporters take part. In 2008, hundreds of hooligans protested against the first Sofia Pride and tried to attack the participants. More than 60 people were arrested and lots of knives, bombs, and Molotov cocktails were found and confiscated.⁶²²

In 2014, football hooligans attempted to assault a mosque during a protest in the Bulgarian city of Plovdiv.⁶²³ The demonstration which gathered around 2,000-3,000 people, mainly nationalists and supporters of football clubs, started in front of the Judicial Palace and protested against the return of the ancient and inactive Kursum Mosque to the Chief Muftiate upon which the court in Plovdiv was about to decide that day. The rally escalated as the mob of protesters started throwing stones, bottles and flaming rockets at the historical Dzhumaya Mosque, smashed its windows, tried to storm it and clashed with the police.

Hooligans then attempted an attack on the Turkish Consulate in Plovdiv and the office of the ethnic Turkish party Movement for Rights and Freedoms but were disbursed by riot police. The police arrested 120 people, 4 received light sentences.

7. POLITICAL AFFILIATIONS AND THE USE OF HOOLIGANS

Affiliation with political organisations and ideologies

The interviews conducted with football fans and Mol representatives indicate that fan clubs are not directly linked to any parties. A respondent mentioned that individual members of factions probably support right-wing and nationalist political parties (in particular Ataka and NFSB), but there are no core circles in the factions formed on the basis of affiliation to a certain political party. A few years ago, Ataka used to be very popular among ultras and hooligans but they have realised that this is not a true nationalist party.⁶²⁴ Another interviewee explained that the existing nationalist parties are populists and fail to take any practical steps. Nevertheless, he mentioned that ultras share a lot of Ataka's ideas.⁶²⁵

At the regional level, there are cases where local factions support a particular politician.⁶²⁶ A supporter of Naftex Bourgas mentioned that one of the leading figures of the fan club is a municipal councillor from NFSB which, in his opinion, undoubtedly affected the political affiliations of the whole club.⁶²⁷ An expert

⁶²² Чалева, Л., „Десетки в ареста след гей парада в София”, В: *dn.es.dir.bg*, 28.06.2008.

⁶²³ *Mediapool.bg*, „Футболни хулигани вилняха в Пловдив”, 14.02.2014.

⁶²⁴ Interview with a football fan.

⁶²⁵ The interviewee mentioned as an example that he approves Ataka's idea to nationalise all companies that are currently operated under concessions by foreign investors.

⁶²⁶ Interview with a football fan. He mentioned that this has happened in Plovdiv, Stara Zagora, Veliko Tarnovo but failed to provide any names.

⁶²⁷ Interview with a football fan.

also suggested that all factions are politically dependent. Parties have specially designated persons in charge of communication with the factions and instruct them what to do in certain political situations.⁶²⁸

Political ideologies and street protests “for hire”

The crisis in public support for political parties and the declining efficiency of political engineering in creating new parties prompted the search for ways to use fan groups. Still, football fans participate in political rallies not only because they have been paid to do so.

The involvement of fan groups in political affairs can be traced to the early days after the collapse of the communist regime in late 1989. Football was a motivating factor for joining protest marches and sit-ins – there was a Levski fans command post in the tent camp that was set up by protesters in front of the President's Office in 1990.⁶²⁹ Levski fans were motivated to join street protests by their experience with violence by communist militia (police) against active football supporters. There was little ideology involved in this kind of motivation – the opposition's banners were blue and so were Levski's. Urban football myths were mixing with actual historic events in a kind of ad hoc creed. Claims surfaced that the football club had been subject to persecution by the communist regime and that club leaders had been killed or imprisoned after 1944.

All interviewees confirm that members of fan clubs are politically active whenever there are mass protests or other events where they can express their views. There were, however, differing opinions as to whether these participations were driven by genuine personal beliefs or because fans are paid off and controlled by certain political/business circles. According to an expert, there is a sort of “marketplace” where fans are hired for participating in public protests, but it is not organised through the faction's core and is rather diverse in terms of participation. While the expert suggested that in 1997 Levski's supporters were used in the protests against the then government, an interviewed hooligan mentioned that this was the only “genuine” protest in which he took part. He defined the protest as genuine because he participated in it on his own convictions and because of the violence that erupted.⁶³⁰

Thus, it could be claimed that in 1997 there was a mixture of reasons for the participation of Levski fan groups in the occupation of a major Sofia intersection, the assault on the National Assembly building and the subsequent street violence. On the one hand, they were against the “communist Videnov government” and wanted to bring down “the government which caused the banking collapse, economic crisis and mass poverty among the people earning an average of \$30 a month.” An additional non-pecuniary reason for the fans to join in was the opportunity to fight the police. At the same time, they had purely monetary incentives. According to a long-term Levski fan, key opposition politicians started to pay fans for joining street protests:

⁶²⁸ Interview with an expert from the Mol.

⁶²⁹ *Trud.bg*, „Футболните агитки – юмрукът на масите“, 29.04.2013.

⁶³⁰ Interview with a football fan.

„[Evgeni] Bakardzhiev⁶³¹ would pay anyone, would also pay compensation in case of injuries, would pay for every fight. Even those who did not care for UDF⁶³² participated. Payments created order and discipline. If it weren't for the money, some would come, others wouldn't. Bakardzhiev's people paid in Germans Marks – it was a lot of money and was also reliable money since the lev was devaluing by the day.“⁶³³

According to the interviewees, 1997 had been a turning point in the remunerated participation of organised fans in protests. The people around Bakardzhiev – a key figure in the UDF and the UDF government – understood the potential of organized fan groups and kept open the channels of communication with the fan leaders. This could arguably be the reason why no football fans participated in protests during the UDF government (1997 – 2001).

The issue of the political use of fan groups resurfaced at the time of the next economic crisis. During the protests against the so called “tripartite coalition” government on 14 January 2009 category C fans challenged the police guarding the parliament building. The core of the challengers consisted of members of Sofia West and the Lokomotiv Plovdiv fan group; the police also apprehended two fans from Bourgas. Around 30 young men wearing black hoods or scarves hiding their faces penetrated the crowd and formed a closed circle. They were armed with stones, chains, snowballs. The ensuing scuffles with the police compromised the peaceful nature of the protest. According to interviewees, this was the beginning of the use of fan factions to sabotage protests.⁶³⁴ “The troublemakers are always ‘financially incentivised.’ All it takes is to bring in a dozen agitators who would provoke the protesters to turn against them. This attracts media attention and is sufficient to create havoc.“⁶³⁵

Police records from 2009 show that there were representatives of various factions during the protests that year. The presence of unemployed supporters from around the country who could not usually be able to pay their way to come to the capital suggested that the fans had not been there because of their ideological beliefs. The fact that there were no representatives of the faction's core during the protest suggested that the organisation of the support was not paid through the factions.⁶³⁶

A boom of the remunerated use of football fans took place in 2013. The participation of ultras and hooligans in the 2013 protests against the caretaker government was a subject of public discussion as it was believed that certain political parties paid ultras and hooligans to participate in the protest and provoke the police.⁶³⁷ The parties alleged of doing that were the Bulgarian Socialist Party,

⁶³¹ A future Deputy Prime Minister in the UDF government.

⁶³² Union of Democratic Forces, the then opposition party.

⁶³³ Interview with a long-term supporter of Levski.

⁶³⁴ Interview with an expert from the Mol.

⁶³⁵ ВЪЛКОВ (2013).

⁶³⁶ Interview with an expert from the Mol.

⁶³⁷ МИТОВ, Б., „Планът ‘Сидеров’ с ‘криминалните банди,’ който ‘ignorevolen’ провали”, В: *Media-pool.bg*, 21.06.2013.

the nationalistic Ataka and GERB. It was widely discussed that these parties paid individual ultras and hooligans, mostly CSKA supporters.⁶³⁸ Although most of the interviewees from the factions refused to discuss this question in greater detail, some claimed that during the 2013 protests Ataka paid money to CSKA's ultras and hooligans and GERB paid to Levski's ultras and hooligans in order to participate in the protests.⁶³⁹

A number of differences in the relationships between various fan factions and political parties can be summarised on the basis of interviews with law enforcement officers. Levski factions did not participate in the February 2013 protests which brought down the Borissov government (2009 – 2013) and triggered early elections. According to interviewees, not only is the Levski fan group considered close to Borissov's party GERB but at that time a fan leader was paying off fans not to participate in protests. Indeed, there had been no South Division or Sofia West members at the protests.

The situation with CSKA was quite different. There, factions were multiplying rapidly, reaching 12-13 despite attempts by the police to stem the process, with only 2-3 getting involved in street fights. In 2013, CSKA fans turned into a supply pool for small nationalist groups and political engineering. They were driven to participate in the February street clashes by both ideological and commercial reasons. Ofanziva had traditional ties with IMRO through the "14" faction, which had not yet merged with Ofanziva. The Animals support Ataka and its leader Volen Siderov through its sub-faction in Samokov.⁶⁴⁰

The interviewees indicated that during the protests of early 2013 a special effort was made to bypass the information sources which the police had among the Sofia factions. In addition to "14" and 2-3 other CSKA factions, there were also fans from outside Sofia – from Plovdiv, Pazardjik, and Rousse through Bisser "the Blot" Milanov.⁶⁴¹ In Sofia, in demand were young men who had not been registered by the police as high risk fans. Thus, individuals frequenting fitness facilities and those training in martial arts were recruited. In addition to nationalist parties such as Ataka and IMRO, there were also smaller radical right-wing parties led by controversial businessmen, such as Slavi Binev's GORD and Svobodni Narod (Free People).

⁶³⁸ Interview with an expert from the Mol.

⁶³⁹ Interview with a CSKA supporter, 09.06.2015.

⁶⁴⁰ It should be noted that the anti-government protests started from Varna – the third largest city in Bulgaria with two popular football clubs – Cherno More and Spartak (which was relegated from the premier league). Usually, the local police would not qualify local fan factions as falling into the risk categories. Thus, some observers believe that what happened was organised by intermediaries who knew how Mol worked. Notably, the fans had already participated in protests against high electricity prices in previous years. Varna is also the city where football fans joined protests on uncharacteristic issues, such as against shale gas fracking. This suggests that the organisers of the protest around Ataka have interests coinciding with those of Russian government funds financing campaigns against fracking. The fans who participated in the January 2012 protests are believed to have also been part of the protests in January 2013. It is not clear whether they had been paid for by Ataka (or some other nationalist group) or it was a spontaneous reaction to the high cost of electricity and heating.

⁶⁴¹ Milanov has a police record for drug dealing in Rousse (Center for the Study of Democracy, 2003).

There were various examples of fan factions used by political parties and politicians during the political turmoil of 2014 – 2015. Following the May 2013 elections, a left of centre government of the BSP and the MRF, supported by Ataka, came to power. On 14 June 2014, the biggest protests since the beginning of transition erupted in Sofia and other major cities prompted by the nomination of Delyan Peevski – a controversial businessman, media mogul and MRF MP – for Chairman of SANS. Counter-protests were staged from the very beginning in which football fans were used.

Initially, attempts were made to use seasoned troublemakers such the political formation SILA and Bisser Milanov.⁶⁴² These failed because were anticipated by the protesters and intervention by the Mol.⁶⁴³ A new form of fan engagement which appeared at that time was guarding politicians. Ataka leader Volen Siderov and other MPs started to be use football fans as guards after the Ataka headquarters were surrounded by protesters.⁶⁴⁴ These services were preformed by a Samokov sub-faction of the Animals (CSKA) together with other Animals members.⁶⁴⁵

Later, when the government strategists assumed that there had been sufficient BSP supporters in the capital who – although elderly – could maintain the momentum of the counter-protests, it was decided to establish a new populist party as a tool for propping up the BSP-MRF coalition. The political party Bulgaria without Censorship (BwC),⁶⁴⁶ was created from the ground up through funding provided by the Bulgarian Corporate Commercial Bank (CCB)⁶⁴⁷ and with the support of Peevski; it was led by the former TV presenter Nikolai Barekov. The intention was to substitute Ataka with a new centre-right party which would help BSP and MRF stay in power after the next elections.

Making BwC popular and building its local structures was an interesting example of political engineering which was the first of its kind in the post-1989 period. The technology included a mixed format of rally-and-concert where prominent singers, actors and politicians appeared, and covered by TV7.⁶⁴⁸ Initially, the main organiser of football fans was IMRO. Later, when the majority owner of CCB Tsvetan Vassilev bought Botev Plovdiv, political rallies were attended by

⁶⁴² *Fakti.bg*, „Пети ден в защита на Орешарски,” 01.07.2013.

⁶⁴³ It is not clear why the policy makers at the Mol decided to restrain these provocations since it was obvious that they would subvert the protests. It was speculated that the protests would soon die down or would lead to violence, which would further weaken the government.

⁶⁴⁴ Ataka was resented by both protesters and opposition because despite its professed nationalism it backed the government together with the MRF – a party of ethnic Turks and supported by the Roma.

⁶⁴⁵ Interviews with police officers in Sofia and fans from the core of Ofanziva.

⁶⁴⁶ BwC received 10.66% of the vote – the fourth biggest number of votes – at the European Parliament elections in May 2014. At the national parliamentary elections that followed BwC won 15 seats and was renamed Bulgarian Democratic Centre (https://bg.wikipedia.org/wiki/България_без_цензура/).

⁶⁴⁷ The fourth largest bank in Bulgaria, which was driven to bankruptcy in 2014 because of its exposure to risky investment and involvement in political conflicts, thus triggering the most severe financial instability in the country since the 1996 financial crisis.

⁶⁴⁸ The TV channel where Barekov had been executive director and which is believed to be owned by Tsvetan Vassilev.

members of all Botev factions. At some rallies in Sofia, Botev fans would number 3,000, while in other cities where BwC held rallies they would be around 1,000. According to various sources,⁶⁴⁹ there was **cooperation among the fan factions of a number of football clubs**, for example between Botev Plovdiv fans and CSKA's the Animals arranged through the leader of the latter Rossen Petrov.

Some restrictions on the public conduct of fans were introduced following the establishment of BwC. It was claimed that "Tsvetan Vassilev did not allow" organisers to direct fans to anti-Borissov and anti-GERB actions⁶⁵⁰ (at the time GERB had been in opposition).

Throughout the BSP-MRF government, the other major party GERB made almost no use of football fans. GERB would bus in young men from around the country to participate in Sofia rallies but avoided football fans. There are a number of reasons for this. It is believed that the Mol had been controlled by BSP and MRF and could therefore easily identify participants in the rallies. Fan participation could also lead to incidents which would cause public outrage.⁶⁵¹

Following the CCB crisis, fans were gone from political protests. The two leading Sofia clubs – Levski and CSKA – entered very difficult times, with CSKA declared insolvent and relegated to the amateur league, and Levski ending in seventh place in the premier league at the end of the 2014 – 2015 season. As a result, audience numbers at their matches fell sharply and their fan factions lost membership. As a result of the 2014 – 2015 crisis, four leading clubs with large fan groups – Levski, CSKA, Botev Plovdiv and Lokomotiv Plovdiv – changed owners.

One of the least known elements in this process is the **intermediary**. All interviewees agree that political parties have designated persons dealing with football fans and ensuring their participation in political events. These are usually former police officers who are experienced in working with fans⁶⁵² or "former football players who are drinking buddies with the crime bosses in the fan groups."⁶⁵³ How the financial flows are directed by the parties and how exactly the organisation of street protests takes place are known only in very general terms. Low level participants claim that participation fees are "miserly,"⁶⁵⁴ other sources speak of "20 to 50 leva (€10-20), sometimes pizza and beer."⁶⁵⁵ These intermediaries are trusted by members of the factions as it is known that they "pay up"; which is why they also control attendance. On occasions, hired participants are expected to meet certain criteria. For example, those hired to protect the headquarters and MPs from Ataka are required to weigh over 80 kg.⁶⁵⁶ Fans not meeting their side of the bargain as well as those breaking discipline are punished by the punitive squads. There have been occasions

⁶⁴⁹ Interviews with police officers in Sofia and Plovdiv and fans from the core of Ofanziva.

⁶⁵⁰ Interviews with police officers.

⁶⁵¹ Interviews with police officers.

⁶⁵² Interview with a police officer.

⁶⁵³ Interview with fans from the core of South Division.

⁶⁵⁴ Interviews with football fans.

⁶⁵⁵ Interviews with police officers.

⁶⁵⁶ Interviews with fans from the core of South Division.

when recruiters switched to another faction when the first one failed to ensure sufficient turnout.⁶⁵⁷

Ethnicity-based protests with political support

Three incidents are exemplary in this regard – Katunitca of 2011, and Garmen and Orlandovtsi of 2015.

As noted, the nationalist cause often unites rival factions and leads to joint actions such as (violent) protests and demonstrations. The most well-known example of such an action were the events in the village of Katunitsa in 2011. Hooligans supporting all the major clubs assembled in the village of Katunitsa in order to seek revenge over the death of a young boy who was killed in a hit-and-run car accident following previous conflicts with the local Roma community, and more specifically with an influential and controversial Roma family. The incident provoked public disorder and a series of acts of vandalism, arsons and clashes between football hooligans and ultra-right supporters, on the one side, and local Roma, on the other. Football hooligans rushed into the village chanting “death to the Gipsy scum,” caused riots and set two properties owned by the local informal Roma leader on fire.⁶⁵⁸

The Garmen events took place in the spring of 2015, followed by protests in the Sofia district of Orlandovtsi. Garmen is a small municipality with a population of 16,000, situated close to the border with Greece and the town of Gotse Delchev. Following an attack by several dozen young Roma men against some ethnic Bulgarians, local residents – supported by residents of Gotse Delchev and neighbouring villages – started a protest demanding that the government deal with “Roma criminality” and that Roma dwellings with no construction permits be demolished. Media attention was drawn to the fact that members of a CSKA fan faction from Garmen together with Levski fans and some persons with criminal records joined the protests. Until that moment, there had been no cases of fans participating in clashes in small towns and villages, as they would typically engage in such actions in large cities. Next, fan factions from Sofia and Plovdiv started to arrive in Garmen. This was due to the fact that a local businessman had old contacts with a CSKA sub-faction.⁶⁵⁹ IMRO supporters also joined the action.⁶⁶⁰ Eventually, the police managed to prevent an escalation of fan participation in the disturbances.

Shortly after the Garmen incident, a similar protest was launched following a clash between Roma and ethnic Bulgarians in the Sofia district of Orlandovtsi. Football fan factions were mobilised again, and the protest was joined by politicians from nationalist parties. The police sent in considerable forces and the MoI exercised behind the scenes pressure on faction leaders.

In the wake of the events, there were two serious incidents of Roma persons being battered by football fans causing fears that this could trigger a wave of violence.

⁶⁵⁷ Interview with a police officer.

⁶⁵⁸ *24chasa.bg*, „Измъкнаха цар Киро от Катунца, футболни фенове нападат“, 24.09.2011.

⁶⁵⁹ Interviews with police officers.

⁶⁶⁰ Interview with a police officer.

The fact that the perpetrators were quickly identified indicates that Sofia police have sufficient capacity to react and they know the identities of high-risk fans.

In summary, the use of football fan groups at the September 2011 (Katunitsa) and May-September 2015 (Garmen and Orlandovtsi) incidents indicates that confrontation with the Roma is becoming an issue with serious concern regarding the radicalisation of football fans. This includes the emergence of permanent zones of conflict between the Roma and ethnic Bulgarians, such as the outer districts of large cities where incidents could become a usual form of demonstration by the Roma. In this context, nationalist groups seek the support of football fans resulting in coalitions which had been unknown 3-4 years ago. Factions which are otherwise hostile to each other join forces to use violence against large groups of people. Nationalist politicians use such incidents to get media exposure and attract public attention to their cause.⁶⁶¹

The use of football fans in political protests or in conflicts among ethnic groups threatens not only to radicalise fans but to escalate the conflicts in which they are recruited to participate. These risks make the expert analyses of this process all the more important, especially as such analyses are indispensable for making preventive measures better informed.

8. INSTITUTIONAL/LAW ENFORCEMENT RESPONSE

The main institution responsible for tackling football hooliganism is the Ministry of Interior. The first attempt to introduce systematic monitoring over football hooliganism was made in 2000 through establishing a working group at the Mol General Directorate of National Police, which later – given the growing seriousness of the phenomenon – was extended to include employees from other Mol departments. Such groups were also established at the territorial units of the Mol. The working group at central level was tasked with conducting analyses and forecasts on the development of football hooliganism, including through the use of data from sociological population surveys.⁶⁶² Police statistics at that time showed that most football hooligans were from the two biggest fan clubs of Levski and CSKA and located in Sofia. In 2002, the police was monitoring around 546 active football hooligans and some 300 individuals prone to such behaviour (especially after alcohol use).⁶⁶³ The number of minors (12-14 years of age) involved in anti-social behaviour related to football hooliganism was 126.⁶⁶⁴ Hooligan acts in other sports were (and still are) isolated and associated with much lower risks for public safety.

At that time, the police and the BFU started conducting risk evaluation of football matches in accordance with established international practices in order

⁶⁶¹ At the time of both the 2011 and 2015 incidents there were local elections held at which nationalist parties performed well.

⁶⁶² Радева (2009).

⁶⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁴ Ibid.

to deploy the necessary measures for maintaining public order before, during and after matches. The factors taken into account when determining the risk level include: the importance of the match for the championship, level of activity of the supporters, received information on expected attendance, organised trips by supporters from other localities, etc.

In 2004, the *Law on the Protection of Public Order during Sport Events* (LPPOSE) was adopted. It introduced a number of provisions aimed at ensuring better security and safety at football matches, as well as stricter sanctions for acts of football hooliganism (see further the section on the legal framework below). Law enforcement experts expressed concern that a centralised automated register on football hooliganism that was prescribed in the LPPOSE has not been established to date. The register was supposed to contain all data pertaining to sanctions imposed under the law, investigated persons and offences related to football hooliganism.

In 2014, the sector “Hooliganism, extremism and sports events” within the General Directorate of National Police was dissolved and is undergoing reorganisation at the time of writing, pending re-establishment in 2016. The sector performed the functions of a National Information Centre in charge for conducting analyses, prognoses, risk evaluations of matches, and also for cooperation with foreign police agencies in relation to international matches. During this restructuring period its functions have been divided between the economic police, which deals with fixed matches,⁶⁶⁵ and the security police, which however has no operational function (gathering of information and investigations). This disrupted the continuity of monitoring and systematisation of information relating to football hooliganism at the national police, as the data collected over the years was archived without being updated or accessible during this period.⁶⁶⁶

The Sofia Police Directorate appears to have one of the most specialised units for tackling football hooliganism, established in 2008 in response to growing increasingly stronger links between football fans and far-right movements. The unit has in recent years improved its effectiveness in terms of number of police charges for football hooliganism upheld by the court.⁶⁶⁷ It has a separate well maintained database with operational information, but it is not clear to what extent it is available to other police units, and to what extent data from the territorial police units (including Sofia) are systematically entered into the centralised criminal statistics database. A similar unit exists in the second largest city Plovdiv, which also reported growing effectiveness in processing sanctions (due to good cooperation with the courts) and preventing violent incidents.

Ever since the early 2000s, when more systematic efforts were undertaken by police in tackling football hooliganism, the main problem in monitoring and statistically

⁶⁶⁵ In organized sports, match fixing occurs as a match is played to a completely or partially pre-determined result, violating the rules of the game and often the law.

⁶⁶⁶ Interview with a police officer.

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid. While a few years ago only 10% of the police acts ended in convictions for hooliganism, today this percentage is 90%. This is so because the unit developed a regular practice of sending a police officer to each court hearing together with the defendant, in order to be well informed of the court's motives and improve their work.

measuring the scope of the phenomena has been the lack of *Criminal Code* provisions which differentiate football hooliganism from other violations of public order. Acts of football hooliganism are recorded by police and courts under the heading of “general” or “serious” hooliganism, which does not allow the authorities to take stock of the actual size of the problem. Despite legal developments and the specialisation of law enforcement in tackling football hooliganism, **there are still no systematic police statistics and analysis of the phenomenon.**

The responsible authorities apply several **preventive measures** in their efforts to prevent football hooliganism acts at stadiums:

- **Risk assessment of matches** informs the planned and organisation of security not only in and around the stadium and during the match, but also before and after and around the city, in order to prevent damages to public property and endangering citizens’ safety by football fans. This often requires disbursing police officers around the city who conduct preliminary checks and monitor the behaviour of fans.
- **Strict security checks at stadiums** and preventing access to the facility of blacklisted or drunk football fans, and entry with banned objects (alcohol, drugs, pyrotechnics, weapons, etc.). Different security levels are applied to different matches, with the main derbies in the country being assigned the highest security level. This is probably why during the last couple of years the most violent hooligan acts happened during unpopular matches that usually take place in smaller towns.⁶⁶⁸ According to law enforcement officers, the maintenance and investments in the stadiums and sports facilities is another area that needs urgent improvement in order for the facilities to comply with international safety standards (for example having CCTV).
- **Stewards at stadiums** are actually selected from within the hooligan circles without the necessary screening and vetting as international best practice requires, and do not have the necessary security and safety training, which according to respondents undermines their role at stadiums.⁶⁶⁹ There are media-reported cases in which the stewards themselves initiate the violent behaviour at stadiums.⁶⁷⁰
- An effective approach to preventing violent incidents is for police officers specialised in tackling football hooliganism from Sofia and Plovdiv to travel together with the fans to matches of bigger football clubs hosted in smaller cities. The local police that guards such matches is not familiar with the high-risk individuals from the big factions and do not have experience in preventing violent incidents.⁶⁷¹
- **Preliminary questioning** of suspected perpetrators and their temporary detention. Several respondents mentioned that the police often conduct questioning prior to football matches in case it has any inside information.⁶⁷²

⁶⁶⁸ For example, in July 2015 a serious fight took place among CSKA supporters at a match in a small town in Bulgaria (see <http://www.sportal.bg/news.php?news=556431>)

⁶⁶⁹ Interview with a sports journalist and a football fan.

⁶⁷⁰ For example, <http://www.sportal.bg/video.php?video=46552>; <http://www.blitz.bg/sport/article/138062>

⁶⁷¹ Interview with a police officer.

⁶⁷² Interviews with football fans.

- **Preventive talks with the leaders of prominent factions.** The police often engage fan club leaders in preventive talks. Although fan leaders cannot always be trusted to deliver on their promises, the dialogue with the factions is perceived by law enforcement as being crucial.⁶⁷³

Engagement of faction leaders in prevention measures by the police often raises the question of the line between prevention of violence and sheltering wrongdoers from investigation in exchange for information. Informants are not registered in line with standard procedures and are handled rather informally.⁶⁷⁴

Due to the political sensitivity of football hooliganism, it would appear that police avoid working on prevention or disruption of high-risk relationships between political parties and fan factions. Even if there is sufficient information that politicians from ultra-right/nationalist parties are actively looking to cause trouble during street protests with the participation of football hooligans, police tend to work “asymmetrically”. This means that they caution the football fans, but leave the political intermediaries out. A similar line of passive behaviour can be observed on the part of the specialised intelligence agency SANS, which is supposed to tackle political radicalisation and extremism.

Repressive measures applied by authorities include 24-hour detention, fines, prohibition to attend matches and imprisonment. A senior police manager mentioned that fines are not an effective measure, as football hooligans often do not have the financial capacity to pay them and the government does not have a proper fine collection system. According to him, bans on attending football games is a much more effective measure compared to fines, since it takes the hooligan out of the scene.⁶⁷⁵ The ban can be imposed for a period from 1 to 3 years, but to be effective, compliance needs to be monitored. Indeed, a few respondents mentioned that the ban is not always enforced.⁶⁷⁶ According to the Sofia Police Directorate, in 2015 there were 25 bans imposed on fans to attend matches, while their number had been much higher in previous years. LPPOSE allows offenders in football hooliganism to be indicted and brought to court by the police without the involvement of a prosecutor. At the same time, both criminal and administrative offences are to be adjudicated in court and the police has no powers to impose administrative sanctions, as it is the case in many other EU member states; this makes administrative sanctioning more cumbersome.

Football clubs and the BFU play a supporting role in the implementation of measures for countering football hooliganism. Football clubs are required to appoint a security coordinator who should cooperate with fan clubs, the police and security managers of sport venues. A respondent explained that since recently some fan clubs have also appointed a person in charge of cooperation with the football club and the police – a Supporters Liaison Officer.⁶⁷⁷ Such a

⁶⁷³ Interview with a police officer.

⁶⁷⁴ Interview with a former police officer specialised in tackling football hooliganism.

⁶⁷⁵ Interview with a police officer.

⁶⁷⁶ Interview with a football fan.

⁶⁷⁷ Interview with a sports journalist.

measure was also envisioned in the *Law on the Protection of Public Order during Sport Events*.⁶⁷⁸ The effectiveness of this institutional novelty is yet to be assessed, although doubts were expressed about the extent to which a person from the hooligan circles could collaborate with the police effectively.⁶⁷⁹ The chronic lack of material capacities of sports clubs often results in failing to take all statutory measures to prevent violence at the matches that they organise.

In its *Strategy for the Development of Football 2012 – 2016*⁶⁸⁰ the BFU sees football hooliganism as a threat to the development of sports in the country. In an effort to implement the Strategy the Union supported the introduction of a steward system at matches and the establishment of the National Association of Football Supporters. The Bulgarian Football Union is also in charge of the application of sanctions to clubs for acts of hooliganism caused by fans, mainly in the form of monetary fines or banning players of the respective football clubs from participating in matches. According to official statistics of the Union, in the period 2010 – June 2015, the institution has penalised Bulgarian football clubs from the two main professional leagues **897** times (Table 5).

Table 5. Sanctions imposed by the Bulgarian Football Union⁶⁸¹

Season	'A' League	'B' League	Total
2014 – 2015	167	34	201
2013 – 2014	153	17	170
2012 – 2013	186	39	225
2011 – 2012	104	46	150
2010 – 2011	133	18	151
Total	743	154	897

Source: BFU.

There is no information on any preventive programmes aimed at educating young football supporters or preventing recruitment of youngsters into hooligan circles.⁶⁸²

⁶⁷⁸ LPPOSE, Article 17a.

⁶⁷⁹ Interview with a sports journalist.

⁶⁸⁰ Bulgarian Football Union (2012) *Strategy on the Development of Football 2012 – 2016*. Available at: <http://gong.bg/football-sviat/euro-2016/comment/bfs-predstavi-strategiia-za-razvitie-na-futbola-do-2016-g-205347>

⁶⁸¹ Official statistics provided to CSD by the Bulgarian Football Union regarding the penalties imposed on football clubs as a result of hooliganism actions of their supporters for the period of 2011 – 2015.

⁶⁸² Examples of such programmes in other countries are lectures by police officers and football players of rival teams at schools, the organisation of charity football matches between rival fan factions, etc.

A number of good practices for improving the effectiveness of measures against football hooliganism are already applied in many EU member states and could easily be adopted in Bulgaria.⁶⁸³ Concerns were raised by law enforcement experts that although specific legislation on tackling football hooliganism now exists in Bulgaria and a number of measures are applied, they are not accompanied by a consistent government policy and strategic approach towards this problem. Football hooliganism needs to be seen and prioritised by policy makers in a broader perspective that also takes stock of the risks stemming from its links to right wing extremism and its misuse for political purposes.

High staff turnover and restructuring at the MoI have had a disruptive effect on the continuity and sustainability of monitoring activity, collection of operational information, handling of informants and accumulation of skills and expertise for tackling football hooliganism. Furthermore, the police are currently the main line of defence against this phenomenon, while other institutions, such as the educational system, are not involved in efforts to prevent recruitment and radicalisation of football hooligans.

⁶⁸³ Interview with a sports journalist. Examples of such measures are an electronic system for access to the stadium, named tickets, professional stewards, etc.

V. LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND INSTITUTIONS

1. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Definitions

Bulgarian legislation does not use the term “radicalisation” and therefore there it is not legally defined.⁶⁸⁴ Similarly, there is no legal definition of the term “extremism,” although the latter can be found in some laws like the *Law on the State Agency for National Security* and the *Law on the Ministry of the Interior*.

The *Criminal Code* (CC) defines the crime of terrorism. According to this definition, terrorism is the act of committing a specific crime in order to create confusion and fear in the population, or to threaten or force a public authority, a public figure or a representative of a foreign state or international organisation to do or omit something within the scope of their functions (CC Art. 108a, Par. (1)). The crimes which, if committed with that purpose, can be regarded as terrorism are exhaustively enumerated in the law.⁶⁸⁵ No crime outside this list, even when committed with a terrorist purpose, can be prosecuted as terrorism.

The terms “political violence” and “religious violence” are not defined in the legislation. However, both political and religious violence are incriminated in the *Criminal Code*, which describes them as the acts of using violence against other persons or damaging their property because of their race, nationality, ethnic belonging, religion or political beliefs (CC Art. 162, Par. (2)).

Offences related to radicalisation

Although the *Criminal Code* does not use the term radicalisation, there are a number of provisions that can be used for prosecuting such behaviour.

Some particularly extreme manifestations of radicalisation can be prosecuted as treason, subversion or sabotage. According to the law, treason is the act of

⁶⁸⁴ In September 2015, the parliament discussed a set of amendments to the *Criminal Code*, among which a proposal for lifting the statute of limitations on crimes motivated by or committed on the basis of a radical religion. The proposed legal definition accompanying this provision defined radical religion as any “religion which is used for achieving political goals through terrorism.” When the parliament voted on the amendments these provisions were not adopted.

⁶⁸⁵ These crimes include: homicide, heavy body injury, abduction, coercion, hostage taking, destroying or damaging property, sending false or misleading signs for help or accident, explosion, flooding, crimes related to weapons and ammunition, crimes against vehicles or transport and communications infrastructure, cybercrime, poisoning of water, food or drinks, environmental contamination, crimes related to poisonous substances and crimes related to nuclear energy.

committing a specific crime⁶⁸⁶ with the purpose of bringing down, undermining or weakening the government (CC Art. 95-97a). Subversion is the act of destroying or damaging public property in order to weaken or obstruct the government (CC Art. 106). Sabotage is the act of disrupting or undermining economic sectors or enterprises with the purpose of weakening or obstructing the government (CC Art. 107).

Certain acts of radicalisation can be prosecuted as terrorism if they fall within the scope of the legal definition of terrorism (CC Art. 108a).

The *Criminal Code* also incriminates the act of preaching fascist or other antidemocratic ideology or forcible change of the public order established by the *Constitution* (CC Art. 108, Par. (1)). However, there is no legal definition of the term “anti-democratic ideology” and it is not clear what ideologies would fall within the scope of this criminal offence.

All of the crimes described above are classified as “crimes against the republic” and the law envisages very heavy sanctions for most of them, including long-term or life imprisonment and, in particularly grave cases, life imprisonment without parole. The only exception is the preaching of fascist or other anti-democratic ideology, which is punishable by imprisonment of up to three years combined with a fine.

Other offences that can be used for prosecuting acts of radicalisation are the crimes against equality of citizens and the crimes against religious denominations. The crimes against equality of citizens include the incitement to racial or ethnic discrimination, violence or hate (CC Art. 162, Par. (1)), violence based on race, ethnicity, religion or political beliefs (CC Art. 162, Par. (2)), leadership or participation in an organised group established to commit such crimes (CC Art. 162, Par. (3)), and participation in a crowd gathered to commit racist or ethnic violence (CC Art. 163, Par. (1), (2) and (3)). The crimes against religious denominations include the acts of preaching or inciting to religious hatred, violence or discrimination (CC Art. 164, Par. (1)), desecration of religious temples (CC Art. 164, Par. (2)), violent obstruction of practicing one’s religion (CC Art. 165, Par. (1)), forcing others to practice a certain religion (CC Art. 165, Par. (2)) and the establishment of political organisation on religious basis (CC Art. 166). The sanctions for the crimes against equality and against religious denominations are lighter compared to the ones for the crimes against the republic and do not exceed six years of imprisonment, usually combined with a fine. For some minor cases the offender can be sentenced to probation instead of imprisonment.

In line with Bulgaria’s obligations under international law, the *Criminal Code* also provides for heavier sanctions for some violent crimes (homicide and heavy body injury) when they have been motivated by racist or xenophobic attitudes (CC Art. 116, Par. 1, Item 11 and Art. 131, Par. 1, Item 12).

⁶⁸⁶ The crimes include: participation in an attempted coup, rebellion or uprising; homicide or heavy body injury of government official or public activist; explosion, arson, flooding or another similar act resulting in casualties; poisoning of water, food or drinks; hostage taking.

Criminal law provisions related to radicalisation also include those dealing with the crimes against peace and humanity such as genocide (CC Art. 416), apartheid (CC Art. 417), holocaust denial (CC Art. 419a), etc.

Liability of legal entities

Legal entities can be sanctioned when they have enriched themselves from a crime committed by their managers or legal representatives and, in some cases, by their employees. The liability applies also to legal entities that are not based in Bulgaria, if the crime has been committed on the territory of the country.

Liability of legal entities applies to a limited number of crimes. Of the crimes related to radicalisation described above liability of legal entities is envisaged for: terrorism (including preparation for terrorism); incitement to racial or ethnic discrimination, violence or hatred; preaching or inciting to religious hatred, violence or discrimination; violence based on race, ethnicity, religion or political beliefs; and holocaust denial (Art 83a, Par. (1) of the *Law on Administrative Violations and Sanctions*). The envisaged sanctions are fines up to 1 million levs.⁶⁸⁷ They are imposed independently of the sanctions on the individuals who have committed the crime (Art 83a, Par. (1) and (3) of the *Law on Administrative Violations and Sanctions*).

Freedom of religion

The *Law on Religious Denominations* (LRD) includes a set of provisions aimed at prevent and counter religious radicalisation. It forbids the use of religion against national security, public order, public health, morality or the rights and freedoms of other persons (LRD Art. 7, Par. (1)) and reaffirms the constitutional principle that religious communities or institutions cannot be used for political purposes (Art. 13, Par. (4) of the *Constitution* and LRD Art. 7, Par. (2)).

If these rules are violated, the law lays down a set of countermeasures including: a ban on dissemination of printed works; a ban on publishing; limitation of public activities; cancelation of the registration of educational, health or social institutions; suspension of activities for up to six months; and revocation of the religious denomination's official registration (LRD Art. 8, Par. (1)). The public prosecutor and any other concerned person are authorised to request the imposition of such measures. The institution responsible for the imposition of the measures is the court (LRD Art. 8, Par. (2)).

Political parties

The *Constitution* forbids the establishment of political parties on ethnic, racial or religious basis as well as political parties that aim to forcibly seize the power of government (Art. 11, Par. (4) of the *Constitution*).

Additional provisions aimed to prevent radicalisation, particularly religious radicalisation, of or through political parties are laid down in the *Law on Political*

⁶⁸⁷ Approximately €500,000.

Parties (LPP). Political parties are not allowed to use as their symbols the national coat of arms or the national flag of any country including Bulgaria and any religious signs or images (LPP Art. 5, Par. (1)). Political parties are also not allowed to receive funding from religious institutions (LPP Art. 24, Par. (1)).

As a measure to prevent the establishment of political parties in violation of the legal rules the law lays down a special registration procedure. Political parties are registered by the court, which holds an open court hearing with the participation of the applicant and a public prosecutor (LPP Art. 5, Par. (1)). The public prosecutor is authorised to appeal against the court decision in case he/she believes that registration must have been rejected (LPP Art. 18, Par. (1)). The public prosecutor can also request the dissolution of any registered political party, which violates the constitutional or legal provisions (LPP Art. 40, Par. (1)). The institution authorised to order the dissolution is the court (LPP Art. 40, Par. (2)).

Football hooliganism

Bulgaria has a separate law, the *Law on the Protection of Public Order during Sport Events* (LPPOSE), which deals with the acts of hooliganism during sports events.

The law defines sports hooliganism as any indecent act violating the public order which does not constitute a crime and which has been committed intentionally in the sports facility or its surrounding area during or immediately after a sports event, or on the way to or back from the sports facility in relation to a sports event (LPPOSE Art. 21). Sports hooliganism includes but is not limited to: cursing or using other inappropriate language and gestures that are particularly vulgar; causing or participating in a fight; sports ground invasion; destruction or damage of property; use of prohibited items; and refusal to comply with instructions given by the official responsible for the sports event or by the police (LPPOSE Art. 21).

The sanctions provided for in the law are detention, fine and community service (LPPOSE Art. 22, Par. (1)).

Sanctions can be imposed on persons who have reached 16 years of age and who can understand the nature of their actions (LPPOSE Art. 23, Par. (1)). Persons below the age of 16 are excluded from the scope of the law but can be sanctioned according to the *Law on Combating Juvenile Delinquency* (LPPOSE Art. 23, Par. (2)). For violations committed by persons placed under guardianship sanctions can be imposed on their parents or guardians (LPPOSE Art. 23, Par. (3)).

Sanctions are imposed according to the following criteria:

- For hooliganism involving destruction or damage of property or participation in a fight, the sanction is detention of 10 up to 20 days or a fine of 500 to 1,000 levs. The sanction is combined with a ban on attending sport events in Bulgaria and abroad for one up to two years (LPPOSE Art. 25, Par. (2));

- For repeated hooliganism⁶⁸⁸, the sanction is detention of 15 up to 25 days or a fine of 1,000 up to 2,000 leva. The sanction is combined with a ban on attending sports events in Bulgaria and abroad for two up to three years (LPPOSE Art. 25, Par. (3));
- For hooliganism committed by a juvenile between 16 and 18 years of age, the sanction is detention of up to 10 days. The sanction can be combined with a ban on attending sports events in Bulgaria and abroad for two up to three years (LPPOSE Art. 25, Par. (4));
- For hooliganism committed by a person placed under guardianship, the sanction imposed on their parents or guardians is community service for 40 up to 160 hours or a fine of 50 up to 1,000 leva (LPPOSE Art. 25, Par. (5));
- For any other act of hooliganism, the sanction is detention of 10 up to 15 days or a fine of 200 up to 500 leva. The sanction can be combined with a ban on attending sport events in Bulgaria and abroad for one up to two years (LPPOSE Art. 25, Par. (1)).

In addition to the sanction, the objects used for committing the violation as well as any other objects the possession of which is forbidden are confiscated (LPPOSE Art. 24).

After establishing an act of sport hooliganism the police collect evidence and present the case to the court (LPPOSE Art. 26-30). The court holds an open hearing with the participation of the perpetrator, who can be assisted by a lawyer (LPPOSE Art. 32, Par. (1), (2) and (3)). If the perpetrator is a juvenile, his/her parents are also summoned for the hearing (LPPOSE Art. 32, Par. (4)). The decision of the court cannot be appealed (LPPOSE Art. 34, Par. (1)).

The law also envisages sanctions for violations, which are not defined acts of hooliganism. Thus, a fine of 500 up to 1,000 leva is envisaged for failure to respect an imposed ban on attending sports events (LPPOSE Art. 50) while for obstructing the control exercised during sport events, for violating the rules for attending sport events and for not complying with the instructions of the competent authorities there is a fine of 100 up to 300 leva for the first violation and a fine of 200 up to 600 leva for repeated violations (LPPOSE Art. 49, Par. (1) and (2)).

The law does not provide for the sanctioning of sport clubs for acts of hooliganism committed by their supporters. Sport clubs can be sanctioned only for not complying with their obligations as organisers of sport events and for not appointing security coordinators as prescribed by the law (LPPOSE Art. 45-48).

Football clubs can be sanctioned for the behaviour of their supporters according to the *Disciplinary Regulation* of the Bulgarian Football Union. The regulation lists the types of violations and determines the applicable sanction for each of them (Art. 37 of the *Disciplinary Regulation*). Violations include invasion of supporters on the field, throwing of objects, violence against players, referees

⁶⁸⁸ A repeated case of hooliganism means any act of hooliganism committed within one year after a previous sanction for hooliganism (§ 1, Item 3 of the additional provisions to LPPOSE).

or club officials, damaging of property, illegal use of pyrotechnics, etc. The regulation specifies the amount of the fine to be imposed for each type of violation and the number of matches, if any, which must be played either behind closed doors or in another city. Fines range between 1,000 and 40,000 leva depending on the type of violation. In some particularly serious cases the regulation also allows for the exclusion of football clubs from the league they are playing in.

The regulation defines as a separate violation any act that offends the dignity of a person or group of persons through contemptuous, discriminatory or derogatory words or actions related to race, gender, colour, language, religion or origin (Art. 37, Par. (2) of the *Disciplinary Regulation*). The sanctions for such behaviour are particularly heavy:

- If the violation has been committed by a supporter, the club is sanctioned by a fine of 25,000 leva;
- If the perpetrator is an official of the club, the club is sanctioned by a fine of 37,500 leva and obliged to play in another city, and the official is disqualified for a minimum of five matches;
- If several officials and/or players of the same football club have been involved in the violation or there are other aggravating circumstances, the sanction is deduction of points (three points for the first violation and six points for the second violation) or disqualification from the competition (if no points are awarded for the match). A third consecutive violation may lead to exclusion of the club from the league it plays in.
- If supporters of the football club have committed the violation during a match, the sanction for the club is a fine of at least 37,500 leva.
- For serious violations the club can receive additional sanctions, including playing in another city, forfeiture, deduction of points or disqualification from the competition;
- The supporters who have committed the violation are deprived from accessing the stadium for at least two years.

Sanctions are imposed by the Disciplinary Committee of the Bulgarian Football Union and can be appealed before the Appellate Committee. Fines of less than 5,000 leva cannot be appealed (Art. 53, Par. (1) of the *Disciplinary Regulation*).

2. INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

In accordance with the broader scope of the present study, the review of the institutional framework for countering, monitoring and preventing (violent) radicalisation and related trends in Bulgaria covers a wide range of authorities, both in the administrative and in the judicial sector. This section provides an overview of the relevant bodies and the powers given by law for tackling all hypotheses of radicalisation covered by this study, namely right and left wing radicalisation, Islamist radicalisation and sports hooliganism.

Law enforcement

Police has various functions regarding the prevention and investigation of radicalisation, as well as specialised powers regarding sports hooliganism.

Investigation of radicalisation-related criminal offences falls within the mandate of specially appointed police officers (Art. 52, *Criminal Procedure Code*, hereinafter CPC⁶⁸⁹).⁶⁹⁰ Further, police deals with threats to national security and public order within the framework of its operational work (Art. 8 and following, *Law on the Ministry of Interior*, hereinafter LMI⁶⁹¹), which aims at discovering and preventing crimes and other violations of national security and public order, establishing the identity of and tracking related persons and objects. For this, the law prescribes various methods, including undercover operations, controlled deliveries, control over communications, voluntary collaborators, etc.

The Directorate General for Combatting Organised Crime is tasked with dealing with organised criminal activity of domestic and transnational criminal structures related to terrorism, incitement of terror, kidnapping and taking of hostages (LMI Art. 39, Par. (2)). The repression of terrorist activity is within the powers of the Counter-Terrorism Special Unit (LMI Art. 44). The monitoring of internet sites and countering content related to racism, xenophobia and hate speech and related cybercrimes is within the portfolio of a specialised cybercrime unit within the Directorate General for Combatting Organised Crime. One of its main lines of work is related to countering dissemination of terrorist, Islamist, extremist and xenophobic propaganda via the internet.

Police has substantial powers in managing migration flows through the MoI's Directorate General of Border Police (LMI Art. 39, Par. (3)) and Migration Directorate (LMI Art. 43a).

Regarding sports hooliganism, LPPOSE assigns the Ministry of Interior the main structural tasks in countering this phenomenon.

A specialised Sector "Hooliganism, extremism and sports events" was established at the Criminal Police Department of the Directorate General of National Police, Ministry of Interior, which however was dismantled in 2013 and is expected to be reorganised and re-established. The regional police directorates also have specialised groups for countering football hooliganism under the criminal police units. At the Sofia Police Directorate such a specialised unit for football hooliganism was established in 2008 due to the growing trends of linkages between football hooligans and right-wing extremist groups and organisations.

⁶⁸⁹ National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria (2006): *Наказателно-процесуален кодекс* [Criminal Procedure Code] (State Gazette 86/28.10.2005), Sofia: National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria.

⁶⁹⁰ Investigation of crimes considered especially serious, including crimes against the state is also performed by investigative magistrates.

⁶⁹¹ National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria (2014): *Закон за Министерството на вътрешните работи* [Law on the Ministry of Interior] (State Gazette 53/27.06.2014), Sofia: National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria.

The MoI has a National Information Centre for sports events, which assists organisers of sports events, drafts and provides information, analytical and forecast reports to interested parties, and co-operates with foreign and international authorities (LPPOSE Art. 3-4). The Centre co-ordinates international police co-operation in relation to international sports events and delivers information on persons who pose a threat to public order during sports events and on the logistics of fan groups travelling abroad (LPPOSE Art. 5). Until 2013, this Centre was located at aforementioned Sector “Hooliganism, extremism and sports events” within the Directorate General of National Police, but as of the end of 2015 this unit is undergoing restructuring and the tasks of the information centre are performed by individual officers scattered across different departments of the national police (see the section on football hooliganism).

The MoI should also create and maintain a Unified Automated Register, where data on physical and legal persons sanctioned under the Law, persons under prosecution or having been sentenced for intentional crimes committed during sports events, as well as data on anti-social acts committed during sports events abroad is kept (LPPOSE Art. 6). According to MoI experts such a register is not functioning yet, although plans for its establishment were announced back in 2004.

Police is also involved in the establishment and penalisation of anti-social acts, related to sports events. Police authorities issue decrees for establishing anti-social acts under the legislation on administrative violations (LPPOSE Art. 26, Par. (1)) and enter them into a special register they keep (LPPOSE Art. 28). In case of an anti-social act committed abroad, the respective decree is issued by police officers from the National Information Centre. (LPPOSE Art. 31a, Par. (1)). One of the penalties that can be imposed is detention in a territorial unit of the Ministry of Interior (LPPOSE Art. 22, Par. (1), item 1).

Prosecution of radicalisation-related offences

Courts and prosecutor’s offices in Bulgaria are part of the judiciary and are involved in criminal proceedings against radicalisation- and terrorism-related offences, regulated in the CPC, as well as in using special investigative means in accordance with the CPC and the *Law on Special Investigative Means* (LSIM). The use of special investigative means has a particular significance for criminal proceedings, since radicalisation-related crimes are most often part of those for which such means are permitted as part of the criminal process.

Most crimes related to radicalisation because of their seriousness are under the jurisdiction of district courts and their respective Prosecutor’s Offices. Organised crime cases are tackled by the Specialised Criminal Court and the Appellate Specialised Criminal Court, and their respective Prosecutor’s Offices recently created for those specific types of cases.

National security and intelligence bodies

Countering radicalisation and related trends is a significant part of the activity of specialised state services – the State Agency for National Security (SANS), as

regulated in the *Law on the State Agency for National Security* (LSANS),⁶⁹² the National Intelligence Service, the National Protection Service, which is responsible for the protection of the persons and facilities determined by law,⁶⁹³ and the Defence Information Service.

SANS has so far been the main agency gathering intelligence, monitoring and investigating radicalisation-related processes and trends in Bulgaria, in cooperation with the police and the prosecution. It is a specialised body with the Council of Ministers tasked to protect national security from violations related to, *inter alia*, intelligence for the benefit of foreign powers, dangers to the country's sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity of the nation, anti-constitutional activity, international terrorism and extremism, as well as their financing, activities of persons and groups, supporting foreign services, terrorist or extremist organisations. It has a specialised International Terrorism, Extremism and Migration Directorate tasked with monitoring, analysis and investigation of radicalisation-related phenomena. Within this Directorate, there are specialised units dealing with religiously-inspired extremism, right and left-wing extremism, ethnic/nationalist extremism and related phenomena. The analyses and situational risk assessments conducted by the Directorate are not public.

In addition, on its own or with other authorities SANS performs counter-intelligence to monitor, uncover, counter and prevent planned or actual violations of national security (LSANS Art. 4). As with the police, countering crimes and other violations related to national security is part of the Agency's functions (LSANS Art. 18 and following). Methods include vetting persons who pose a threat to national security, marking objects and facilities, monitoring, control over correspondence and telephone calls, undercover operations, operational experiments, control over the radio frequencies, etc. (LSANS Art. 20). The Agency may also use voluntary collaborators (LSANS Art. 23).

SANS has a special unit called the National Counter-terrorism Centre (NCTC), created by a decree of the Council of Ministers in 2014⁶⁹⁴ and re-regulated by a new decree in 2015.⁶⁹⁵ The NCTC is a unified national platform for collection and processing of information in view of identifying persons and organisations, related to terrorism, which provides 24-hour access for all security and public order structures to information needed to prevent and curb terrorist threats. The Centre uses the expertise of SANS officers, as well as seconded experts from the Ministry

⁶⁹² National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria (2007): Закон за Държавна агенция „Национална сигурност“ [Law on the State Agency for National Security] (State Gazette 109/20.12.2007), Sofia: National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria.

⁶⁹³ National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria (2015): Закон за Националната служба за охрана [Law on the National Protection Service] (State Gazette 61/11.08.2015), Sofia: National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria

⁶⁹⁴ Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria (2014): Постановление № 191 на МС от 10.07.2014 г. за създаване на Национален контртерористичен център [Decree No 191 of the Council of Ministers of 10 July 2014 for creating National Counterterrorism Centre] (State Gazette 59/18.07.2014), Sofia: Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria.

⁶⁹⁵ Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria (2015) *Постановление № 198 от 27 юли 2015 г. за създаване на Национален контртерористичен център* [Decree No 198 of the Council of Ministers of 27 July 2015 for creating National Counterterrorism Centre] (State Gazette 58/31.07.2015), Sofia: Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria.

of Interior, the Ministry of Defence and the National Intelligence service (Art. 3, NCTC Decree). The NCTC, *inter alia*, prepares situational reports, periodic bulletins and prognoses on the security environment, determines the level of terrorism threat and sends reports on terrorism threats to the President, the Chair of Parliament and the Prime Minister. In order to identify potential terrorists, the Centre, *inter alia*, was initially supposed to process PNR (Passenger Names Records) and API (Advanced Passenger Information) data. However, the 2015 decree contains no regulation on PNR processing, which is supposed to be regulated by LSANS amendments in process of preparation. In the July 2015 decree the mandate and organisation of NCTC were optimised and further specified, as well as the exchange of information procedures with other institutions. The changes include an extended mandate as regards the scope of the information gathered and processed by the NCTC, namely not only related to terrorism-related trends, but also to preceding processes and phenomena such as violent extremism and radicalisation that might lead to terrorism. Information coordination and exchange between NCTC and other security structures and ministries was further strengthened.

SANS exercises control over the stay of foreigners in Bulgaria by giving opinions on providing international protection, on giving stay permits and visas and obtaining and losing Bulgarian citizenship (LSANS Art. 41).

Some specialised directorates, as well as territorial directorates and units of the SANS may request from the court the use of special investigative means (LSIM Art. 13). SANS also applies such means itself (LSIM Art. 16).

The National Intelligence Service was created by a special decree in 1990 and was for a long time regulated in the *Law on Defence and Armed Forces* (LDAF),⁶⁹⁶ until a special law was adopted in October 2015 – the *Law on the State Intelligence Agency* (LSIA).⁶⁹⁷ Previously under the President, the service is now directly subordinate to the Council of Ministers. The Service's functions are related to gathering intelligence and it is not to be tasked with domestic politics (LSIA Art. 3-5). The Agency is responsible for protecting national security and for informational and analytical work for preventing, detecting and countering threats to national security, foreign policy, economy and constitutionally established order (LSIA Art. 7). The Agency uses special intelligence means within and outside the country and various undercover operations (LSIA Art. 10). The new formal structure and functions of the Agency are yet to be established, but the *Strategy for National Security of the Republic of Bulgaria of 2011*⁶⁹⁸ looks at an 'intelligence community', consisting of state bodies, performing information and analytical activity to assess the risks and threats for national security and their sources and planning and executing counteraction (Par. 165).

⁶⁹⁶ National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria (2009): Закон за отбраната и въоръжените сили [Law on Defence and Armed Forces] (State Gazette 35/12.05.2009), Sofia: National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria.

⁶⁹⁷ National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria (2015): Закон за Държавна агенция „Разузнаване“ [Law on the State Intelligence Agency] (State Gazette 79/13.10.2015), Sofia: National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria.

⁶⁹⁸ National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria (2011): Стратегия за национална сигурност на Република България [Strategy for National Security of the Republic of Bulgaria] (State Gazette 19/08.03.2011), Sofia: National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria.

The Defence Information Service, performing military intelligence, is regulated in the LDAF as a structure directly subordinate to the Minister of Defence (LDAF Art. 78). It is tasked with gathering, processing, analysing, keeping and providing information in the interest of national security and the state's defence (LDAF Art. 101). A new *Law on Military Intelligence* was adopted by parliament in October 2015, but was vetoed by the President.

Strategic aspects

Radicalisation-related threats are among the core activities of strategic bodies in the area of national security.

The National Security Consultative Council (NSCC) is regulated in its special, although short, law.⁶⁹⁹ The NSCC is headed by the President of the Republic and includes the Chair of the National Assembly, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Defence, the Minister of Interior, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Finance, the Chair of SANS, the chair of the State Intelligence Agency, the Chief of Defence, the secretary of the Security Council and one representative of each parliamentary group (LNSCC Art. 2).

The Council deliberates on the internal and foreign policy of the country, related to national security, the guaranteeing of peace, public order, the rights and interests of Bulgarian citizens, as well as curbing and preventing dangers for national security (LNSCC Art. 3). It can draft opinions and proposals (LNSCC Art. 4) and sits regularly at least once every three months or extraordinarily, if need be (LNSCC Art. 5).

The Security Council with the Council of Ministers (SCCM), working for a long time only under a special Regulation,⁷⁰⁰ is now part of a law of larger, conceptual scope – the *Law on the Management and Functioning of the National Security Protection System* (LMFNPS).⁷⁰¹ It defines (LMFNPS Art. 2) national security as “dynamic position of society and state, where the territorial integrity, sovereignty and constitutionally established order of the country are protected, the democratic functioning of institutions and citizens’ fundamental rights and freedoms are protected, as a result of which the nation keeps and enhances its well-being and is developing, and the country successfully defends its national interests and realizes its national priorities.” It also outlines the system of protection of national security (LMFNPS Art. 3, par. 1) as consisting of state bodies and structures, performing diplomatic, defence, intelligence, counter-intelligence, operations and

⁶⁹⁹ National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria (1994): Закон за Консултативен съвет за национална сигурност [Law on the National Security Consultative Council, hereinafter LNSCC] (State Gazette 13/11.02.1994), Sofia: National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria.

⁷⁰⁰ Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria (1998): Правилник за функциите, задачите и организацията на работа на Съвета по сигурността при Министерския съвет [Regulation on the Functions, Tasks and Organisation of Work of the Security Council with the Council of Ministers] (State Gazette 116/07.10.1998), Sofia: Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria.

⁷⁰¹ National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria (2015): Закон за управление и функциониране на системата за защита на националната сигурност [Law on the Management and Functioning of the National Security Protection System] (State Gazette 61/11.08.2015, in force as of 1.11.2015), Sofia: National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria.

surveillance, law enforcement and protection activities and which are represented in the Security Council with the Council of Ministers. It defines the main tasks of national security protection as (LMFNPS Art. 3, par. 2):

- analysis of specifics and dependencies in the security environment and early warning for risks; not allowing, reduction and prevention of risks; countering of threats and violations;
- management and overcoming crises;
- establishment, marking and protection of critical infrastructure.

The Law also proclaims the main principles of managing and functioning of the national security protection system (LMFNPS Art. 4), among which are:

- abiding by the *Constitution*, laws and relevant international treaties;
- political neutrality;
- respect for and guaranteeing of fundamental rights and freedoms;
- objectivity and impartiality;
- co-operation with citizens and their organisations;
- openness and transparency of policies;
- centralised management and control of intelligence.

The Law outlines the functions of the National Assembly, President and Council of Ministers in the area (Art. 5 and following) and re-regulates the Security Council with the Council of Ministers (Art. 8 and following) as a consultative and co-ordinating body, chaired by the Prime Minister and including the ministers of the interior, defence, foreign affairs, finance, the Chief of Defence, the Secretary General of the MoI, the chairs of SANS and the National Intelligence Agency, the Director of the Military Information Service, the Head of the National Protection Service, the Secretary of the Security Council and two representatives of the President. The Security Council analyses the state of the national security system, gives assessments and proposes decisions and action on the system's ability to counter threats, the compatibility and integration of state bodies among themselves and with their EU and NATO counterparts, the protection of information security. It also co-ordinates the implementation of national security policies. The previously known concept of 'intelligence community' is now regulated (LMFNPS Art. 15) as a group with the Security Council, consisting of the secretary of the Security Council, the MoI Secretary General and the heads of SANS, the National Intelligence Agency and the Military Information Service. The Law also has a special section on the system of crisis management (Art. 17 and following). It also regulates the parliamentary, administrative, judicial and civic oversight over the national security system (Art. 21 and following).

CONCLUSIONS

The current analysis of the main forms that radicalisation takes in Bulgaria in the context of internationally growing radicalisation challenges has allowed the assessment of the main threats, the main actors and their repertoires of action, the main groups at risk as well as the present policy responses. Against this background, gaps are identified and recommendations are made for improving the overall policy, legal and institutional approach with regard to the phenomena of radicalisation in Bulgaria.

Islamist radicalisation

To date, Bulgaria has remained relatively unaffected by international radical Islamist activities. This can be explained by the absence from the Bulgarian context of important factors, considered contributory to Islamist radicalisation in Western Europe, such as colonial history and significant post-conflict immigration.⁷⁰² In addition, Bulgaria hosts a considerable historical Muslim minority and long established mechanisms of inter-religious and inter-community relations, which serve to divert and sustain potential negative influences that might be related to internationally observed phenomena of Islamist radicalisation.

In terms of external threats Bulgaria's engagement in the international anti-terrorist coalition and the involvement of Bulgarian military regiments in different crisis zones exposes the country to potential external terrorist acts. This has been demonstrated by the first terrorist attack perpetrated on Bulgarian territory in July 2012. According to the assessment of intelligence and law enforcement agencies, the security risks for the country have become higher after this attack.⁷⁰³ In the context of the escalating militant Islamist threat with the conflict in Syria and the establishment of IS and in the context of Bulgaria's geographical proximity to countries exporting Islamist radicalism, the country is becoming more prone to risks associated with transiting transnational fighters and the potential for operation of related logistical infrastructures. This is demonstrated in the Europol TE-STAT report for 2014 where Bulgaria is mentioned among the European states (together with Austria, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Croatia, Slovenia, Serbia, Macedonia) that serve as land routes for transnational fighters to Syria and Iraq, with frequent arrests having taken place at the Bulgarian-Turkish border.⁷⁰⁴

According to the latest analysis by the Bulgarian intelligence services reflected in the Draft *Strategy to Counteract Radicalization and Terrorism* (2015 – 2020), the internal

⁷⁰² Psoiu (2014), p. 773.

⁷⁰³ Стратегия за противодействие на радикализацията и тероризма (2015 – 2020), Проект, с. 4-5, Министерски съвет, Портал за обществени консултации, available at: <http://www.strategy.bg/PublicConsultations/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&Id=1771>, accessed on: 12.08.2015.

⁷⁰⁴ Europol (2015), European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report. European Policy Office, p. 22.

security risks related to Islamist radicalisation are associated with the accessibility of radical Islamist propaganda on the internet, the stark poverty and social marginalisation of some communities in the country, the risks of provocation and spread of anti-Islamic and xenophobic waves and the ethno-religious confrontations that may stem from them.⁷⁰⁵ Home grown risks of Islamist radicalisation are presently discussed in the context of two trends. One involves processes of proselytism of Salafi interpretations of Islam and heightened religiosity based on Salafism among some Bulgarian-speaking Muslims. The other is associated with expressions of symbolic approval for international Islamist organisations, based on Salafi interpretations of Islam among some Muslim Roma. The representatives of the first group are to be rather associated with the purist branch of Salafism putting focus on non-violent, non-political methods of propagation and education. The representatives of the second group seem to associate themselves with more radical aspects of the Salafi interpretations of Islam which is demonstrated in acts of sympathy with IS and logistical support to transnational fighters. It needs to be pointed that according to experts these acts are not accompanied by a profound internalisation of the Salafi doctrine. Further research should be conducted to trace the root causes and the interplay of social and individual level mechanisms that contribute to this process.

Certain groups may be considered at risk of home-grown Islamist radicalisation in Bulgaria and they include some Muslim converts in the Roma community.⁷⁰⁶ With the imprisonment of some of the leaders and main actors from this community there is a risk that they may influence inmates in the prison.

It needs to be stressed that the prevailing assessment of experts in Islam and Muslim minorities is that neither Salafi interpretations of Islam nor any militant versions of these interpretations can find root among the Muslim communities in Bulgaria.⁷⁰⁷ This is the outcome of a long Islamic tradition in the country based in Hannafi Sunnism, developed in the course of centuries and in co-existence with Orthodox Christianity.⁷⁰⁸ The resilience of Bulgaria's Muslim communities to militant ideas associated with the Salafi interpretation of Islam is strongly demonstrated by the fact that no fighters from the country have been recruited by IS. This is especially impressive given that most EU member states as well as the Balkan countries have had a worrying number of their citizens join IS as transnational fighters.

⁷⁰⁵ Стратегия за противодействие на радикализацията и тероризма (2015 – 2020), Проект, с. 4-5.

⁷⁰⁶ Expert interview with a representative of law enforcement/ intelligence institutions, 8.04.2015.

⁷⁰⁷ Zhelyazkova (2014), p. 603; Роев, В. „Арабистът проф. Цветан Теофанов: Не видях нищо страшно в Гърмен“, 20.03.2009, available at: <http://www.politika.bg/article?id=12129>; according to Yordan Peev, one of the renowned scholars of Islam in Bulgaria, Salafi interpretations of Islam spread by Saudi Arabia have much serious influence in Western Europe while in Bulgaria they are not accepted by the overwhelming majority of the Muslim population (Expert interview, 23.06.2015).

⁷⁰⁸ This traditional interpretation of Islam (Hannafi Sunnism) is generally accepted to be the most moderate interpretation of the Islamic religion (Цветан Теофанов в негово интервю за в. Политика, 20.3.2009, available at <http://www.politika.bg/article?id=12129>, accessed on 12 June 2015).

Right and left wing radicalisation

Bulgaria's right-wing scene is rather diverse comprising political parties and non-parliamentary actors, including organisations and informal groups. Both parliamentary and non-parliamentary political parties and the informal right wing groups espouse strong nationalist sentiments that are built on anti-minority, anti-foreigners and anti-immigrant rhetoric. A strong emphasis is put on the Bulgarian nation, which is often discussed in exclusionist strictly ethnic terms. Right-wing actors share ideas of extreme cultural conservatism, racism, anti-Semitism as well as homophobia. They identify with the idea of order imposed by a "strong hand" and espouse a form of populism based on the opposition between the (corrupt) elite and the people. Vocal anti-Europeanism and anti-immigrant and pro-security rhetoric are also strong components of the ideology of right-wing actors. It is important to note that some right wing actors and more particularly the political party Ataka, appropriate aspects of left-wing rhetoric, including proposals to re-nationalise state-owned companies sold to foreign investors or to re-examine privatisation.⁷⁰⁹ Ataka's hybrid agenda is the outcome of complex financial and political loyalties, including Slavophile identification with Russia's interests in Bulgaria and in Europe. The right-left ideological mix propagated by Ataka appears possible through supporters from the far-right and the far-left who share common nostalgia for the strong authoritarian governance and egalitarianism of the former totalitarian regime and perpetuate anti-Western nationalism. However, Ataka's ideological hybridity and opportunism contribute to the isolation of the party from the rest of the right-wing players in the country.

Right-wing groups not in parliament are smaller. While they do not take part in the national and local elections they are very active among certain youth circles and football fans. The less ideological skinhead gangs, often merging with football fan factions, are the youngest and most aggressive part of the radical right. Additional ideological actors can be found in mysticism associations with active publishing activity. They fill the radical right ideological gap by producing alternative history sources, translating foreign occult, Nazi and conspiracy theory literature, or developing their own religious sects worshipping pagan Bulgarian deities. A third type of non-parliamentary actors includes quasi-military groups with relatively consistent ideology. These three types of extra-parliamentary groups often share common membership and both influence and fight one another. Importantly, right-wing radical groups, although fragmented and impermanent, enjoy significant latent support by inactive people. This silent support can be activated by events which have the potential to grow into riot-type violent acts. Presently, right-wing activists' leaders do not have the capacity to rally large number of supporters, as they count predominantly on populist rhetoric and are preoccupied by personal conflicts, which result in further fragmentation of the right-wing political space.

The repertoire of actions of right wing actors is diverse ranging from publishing texts and dissemination of nationalist literature, propaganda through their own TV channels, to mass protests and marches as well as educational activities or concerts. It is important to note that right-wing actors are engaged in acts of

⁷⁰⁹ Ghodsee (2008), pp. 26-39; Todorov, A. (2012) *The Extreme Right-Wing in Bulgaria*, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung; Genov (2010), p. 41.

violence varying from hate speech, desecration of Muslim or Jewish temples or cemeteries, to reprisal raids (or violent attacks) against Roma, immigrants, persons of different colour or against those perceived as gay.

Despite the high levels of support for radical left ideas in Bulgarian society, radical left parties in the country enjoy very weak voter support. The main non-parliamentary actors involved in radical left-wing groups in the country are the communist left, the anarchist left, the new left and the greens. Unlike the latter two groups, the communist and the anarchist left have a revolutionary ideology and rhetoric that does not envision social change through the process of representative liberal democracy, but just like the new left and the greens they believe that real social change can only be achieved when society is ready. Thus, there are no significant differences in the four groups' repertoire of actions, which are almost exclusively non-violent and focused on the popularisation and discussion of left-wing ideas, and struggles for social justice particularly concerning the rights of migrants, minorities, and workers. It can safely be claimed that there is no immediate threat of left-wing violence, although according to non-official sources, radical left-wing ideas are growing in popularity.

A particular group at risk of far right radicalisation involves youngsters in the age group 14 – 18. The influence of radical ideologies over juveniles in Bulgaria has been insufficiently explored. It is important to design and conduct studies to explore root causes and triggers that push young persons to engagement and activity within the right-wing scene.

Football hooliganism

Football hooliganism in Bulgaria is connected to factors such as the levels of football game spectators' attendance and the participation of entrepreneurs from the grey and criminal sector in the ownership of football clubs. In addition, two trends related to political instability and inter-ethnic tensions seem to provoke risks of radicalisation of football fans.

The decrease in the number of spectators of football games since the 2000s has affected a decrease in the number of hooligan incidents. This is the case as smaller audiences reduce the risks of radicalisation of the football fans. This trend, however, is offset by a countertrend whereas reduced audiences have led to a growing influence of the well-organised core of fan groups, which pose a higher risk of violent conduct.

Following series of bankrupted and restored football clubs previously owned by entrepreneurs from the grey and criminal sector, the ownership of the big football teams is now considerably more transparent and legalised. This development leads to a decrease of criminal influences over the football factions.

Following a period of political instability in 2013 – 2014, a number of new risks of radicalisation of football fans became visible. The most serious of these is related to the use of football fans as participants in political demonstrations. There have been a number of instances of remunerated participation in protests, counter-protests, provocations and bodyguard services to politicians. On certain

occasions, fans recruited by political parties for participating in otherwise genuine protests engage in violence, even against the police. Further analysis needs to be carried out to understand: 1) what are the factors and conditions leading to such phenomena; 2) whether the radicalisation of the ultras and the football fans takes place only in situations of political and economic instability; 3) what is the extent to which the participation of football fans in political protests is the outcome of authentic political affiliations or is only motivated by financial stimuli; 4) what is the volume of finance needed to mobilise several thousand ultras.

A serious long term risk of radicalisation of football fans is posed by the ethnic tensions between Roma and Bulgarian communities at the local level or in some of the big cities. A critical factor in this regard might also be the frequent institutional changes in the Ministry of the Interior following changes in government and leading to loss of expertise and resources.

Intelligence and law enforcement experts should be aware that the trend of using football fans in political protests or in ethnic conflicts at the local level bears the risk of radicalisation of not only football fans but of the conflicts in which they are called to participate. Therefore, it is very important to monitor such processes and accumulate expert knowledge of the operational mechanisms involved, as well as to design well informed policies to counteract them.

Institutional response

Although the Bulgarian government has formulated a national strategic policy approach to the complex issues of radicalisation that might lead to violence, relevant authorities are in the very early stages of developing working methods for identifying, preventing and countering processes and manifestations of radicalisation. Radicalisation is not sufficiently understood at the level of government institutions, including the pull and push factors involved, pathways and vulnerabilities of individuals or groups of people; consequently there is not enough knowledge on how to prevent and address such issues.

While law enforcement and intelligence bodies have been active in applying monitoring, repressive and deterrence actions towards radicalisation, there is a lack of any systematic and organised institutional effort towards early recognition and prevention of such trends. Furthermore, the involvement of other key public actors such as the educational and social systems in these efforts is limited. Law enforcement and security agencies play an important role in countering violent radicalisation, but their intervention should be the last resort of government response.

A multitude of government institutions in the national law enforcement and security sector and the judiciary are tasked with preventing and countering radicalisation. Other authorities are also involved in countering radicalisation, including courts, registering religious denominations and political parties, as well as private actors, having tasks with regard to sports hooliganism. A more pro-active approach by all institutions concerned is required, which starts with the proper recognition and prioritisation of radicalisation-related issues in their strategic planning and day-to-day activities.

Insofar as the national security and law enforcement agencies are concerned, the challenges in countering radicalisation stem largely from the overall challenges to the Bulgarian security sector and law enforcement. Frequent restructuring within SANS and the Mol pose risks for the effective work of the police and security personnel, especially in complex cases like radicalisation-related acts. The effect of recently adopted laws regulating security services remains to be seen. At the same time, high turnover of staff within the security agencies endangers the accumulation of sustainable expertise, knowledge and know-how in understanding and countering radicalisation.

As for the judiciary – prosecutor's offices and criminal courts – they are faced with the growing complexity of left and right wing, as well as Islamist radicalisation, and with the necessity to further build their expertise to prosecute and administer justice in such cases.

Countering specific radicalisation challenges and trends

The issue of potential **Islamist radicalisation** in Bulgaria needs to be approached first from a prevention perspective with serious attention to be paid to the design of soft measures for developing of dialogue with groups and individuals at risk, combined with attendant integration alternatives. Such an approach should involve a range of civil institutions at the central and local levels with law enforcement actors to come into play as the last resort of institutional response. The design of soft policies needs to be based on studies of the factors and social dynamics that put certain local groups and individuals at risk of radicalisation. Respectively, policies for preventing and countering potential risks need to be directed at the specific social, economic and cultural realities at local level. It is telling that the close monitoring, the arrests, the three consecutive court trials and the two convictions of Ahmed Musa of Pazardjik since 2003, have not effectively restrained his activity. On the contrary, his influence is growing, the community that considers him a leader is expanding and the acts that they commit go beyond manifestations of religious purism and piety. Against this background, it could safely be claimed that the case of Ahmed Musa demonstrates that **measures that are solely repressive are not sufficient to prevent or counteract processes that have complex social roots.**

Potential home-grown Islamist radicalisation cannot be addressed and counteracted without the involvement of Muslims themselves. Therefore, any policy approach that relies solely on repressive prevention or reactive repression without the engagement of the Muslim leadership will be ineffective and if applied without caution it may serve to jeopardise the inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations in the country. Prevention policies need to be designed in such a way as to reinforce the mechanisms within the Muslims communities which prove to make them resilient to external influences associated with non-traditional interpretations of Islam. The role of the Chief Muftiate in such a process needs to be acknowledged and policies developed to facilitate the dialogue between Muslim religious leadership, policy makers as well as relevant institutions. Given the main reasons for the penetration of Salafi interpretations of Islam among some segments of the Muslim community in the country identified in this report, it is advisable to consider supporting the autonomy of the Chief Muftiate from powerful external

Islamic centres. Such an approach may involve – but not be limited to – the development of strategies by the Directorate of Religious Denominations at the Council of Ministers for communication and regular dialogue with the Muslim religious leadership; developing strategies for ensuring better financial self-reliance of the Islamic denomination; support for securing the financial independence and improvement of the quality of education in Islamic educational institutions throughout the country. Last but not least, the role of the Chief Muftiate could be more proactive in the context of the global radicalisation challenges, for example by way of taking official positions on key issues related to the Islamic profession and by tightening the control over the Islamic denomination and education throughout the country.

The Roma quarters where some symbolic demonstrations of approval with Islamists jihadism have taken place, will benefit from strong social and educational programmes to help local communities disentangle from such influences.

Effective law enforcement measures and prosecution of acts associated with potentially violent Islamist radicalisation need to be based on legal measures updated to the dynamics of developments in Europe and in Bulgaria. One good step in this direction is the amendment of the *Criminal Code* of 25 June 2015 with provisions incriminating acts of transiting and assistance thereof through the territory of Bulgaria for terrorist aims.⁷¹⁰

With regard to **right-wing radicalisation** the legal and institutional structures in the country appear well-prepared to monitor and prosecute related acts. However, there is no evidence of any preventive measures currently being employed by the relevant authorities. Law enforcement institutions seem well acquainted with the processes underway in the most radical groups and appear to have sufficient capacity to react to acts of violence. However, some forms in which right-wing radicalisation is manifested, such as crimes with racist and xenophobic motives and other hate crimes remain insufficiently prioritised by the government and its agencies. For example, hate crimes are not prosecuted as such but as acts of hooliganism. Without recognition of the actual scope, nature and potential harm of such trends by a wide range of institutional actors, the issues of radicalisation and violent extremism cannot be tackled at their roots. If remaining unaddressed, they could further advance division and polarisation and trigger reactionary and extremist attitudes in other parts of society. Both government institutions and families neglect the role of preventive measures among schoolchildren who are most vulnerable to radicalisation. Indeed, the need for political and multi-cultural education and the overall role of education in preventing radicalisation both in the family and at school has not yet been addressed in public debate.

With regard to **football hooliganism**, Bulgarian authorities have undertaken a number of measures aimed to monitor and curtail the changing face of this phenomenon. In 2000, a working group at the MoI General Directorate of National Police was established to exercise systematic monitoring over football hooliganism. Given the growing seriousness of the phenomenon the group was extended to

⁷¹⁰ Закон за изменение и допълнение на НК, Чл. 108А, 3 (6,7). Приет на първо четене от НС на 25.06.2015 г.

include employees from other MoI departments. Respectively, the Bulgarian police and the BFU started conducting risk evaluation of football matches in accordance with established international practices in order to deploy the necessary measures for maintaining public order before, during and after matches. A respective legal framework was also established with the introduction in 2004 of the *Law on the Protection of Public Order during Sport Events* (LPPOSE) which includes provisions aimed at ensuring better security and safety at football matches, as well as stricter sanctions for acts of football hooliganism.

However, there are a number of problems associated with the law enforcement response to football hooliganism. The centralised automated register on football hooliganism that is prescribed in the LPPOSE has not yet been established. As the register is an instrument to aid both monitoring and prosecution of acts of football hooliganism efforts need to be invested in its establishment.

There is a lack of *Criminal Code* provisions which differentiate football hooliganism from other violations of public order, which hinders the systematic monitoring and statistical measuring of the phenomenon. Acts of football hooliganism are presently recorded by police and courts under the heading of “general” or “serious” hooliganism, which does not allow the authorities to take stock of the actual scope of the problem. Despite legal developments and the specialisation of law enforcement in tackling football hooliganism, **there are still no systematic public police statistics and analysis of the phenomenon.**

The monitoring and systematisation of information relating to football hooliganism as well as the enforcement of well informed and timely preventive and repressive measures is weakened by frequent institutional restructuring at the MoI and high turnover of staff. Such factors disrupt the accumulation of skills and expertise for tackling football hooliganism.

It should be pointed out that the police have so far avoided working on prevention or disruption of high-risk relationships between political parties and fan factions. The approach is “asymmetrical” and includes measures to caution the football fans, but not the political intermediaries. Given the high risk presented by the use of football fans in political protests or in local ethnic tensions, measures need to be enforced to effectively discourage and curtail the financially motivated and disruptive cooperation between political parties and fan factions. The phenomenon should be curtailed not only by agencies responsible with football hooliganism but also by those dealing with political radicalisation and extremism (such as SANS).

Over the past few years, and especially since the terrorist attacks on European soil have intensified, the Bulgarian government has undertaken several steps towards the gradual development of a much needed holistic policy approach that combines early identification and prevention of radicalisation with strengthened controls and repressive measures against violent extremist and terrorist activity. At the same time, developing institutional preparedness to monitor, counter and prevent violent radicalisation and related risks in a systematic manner is facing multiple challenges. Inter-agency cooperation, information exchange and joint interventions are key prerequisites for the success for the planned measures, as well as the development of analytical capacity, expert knowledge and know-how

within the government administration and other key stakeholders, especially as frontline practitioners are concerned. In this context, efforts should be invested in the development of well-established channels for multi-agency collaboration and community engagement at the local level. The experience in designing and enforcing preventive and repressive approaches to radicalisation accumulated in other EU member states should be consulted. Their application – and, if need be modification – in Bulgaria should proceed from a careful analysis of the features and needs of the Bulgarian context.

APPENDIX. ELECTORAL RESULTS OF NATIONALIST PARTIES 2005 – 2014

Year	Type of elections	Party	Results
2005	Parliamentary elections	Ataka	8.14%
2006	Elections for President	Ataka: Volen Siderov, Pavel Shopov	24.10%*
2007	Elections to the European Parliament	Ataka	14.20%
2009	Elections to the European Parliament	Ataka	11.96%
2009	Elections to the European Parliament	Union of the Patriotic Forces "Defence"***	0.46%
2009	Elections to the European Parliament	"Napred IMRO"****	2.25%
2009	Parliamentary elections	Union of the Patriotic Forces "Defence"	0.15%
2009	Parliamentary elections	Ataka	9.36%
2009	Parliamentary elections	For the Homeland – DCI-NL	0.27%
2011	Elections for President	IMRO: Krasimir Karakachanov and Daniela Simidchieva	0.99%
2011	Elections for President	Ataka: Volen Siderov, Pavel Shopov	3.64%
2013	Parliamentary elections	Ataka	7.30%
2013	Parliamentary elections	NFSB	3.70%
2013	Parliamentary elections	IMRO – BND	1.88%
2014	Elections to the European Parliament	Ataka	2.96%
2014	Elections to the European Parliament	NFSB	3.05%
2014	Elections to the European Parliament	Coalition "Nationalist Parties of Bulgaria"	0.11%
2014	Parliamentary elections	Bulgarian National Union – ND	0.17%
2014	Parliamentary elections	Ataka	4.52%
2014	Parliamentary elections	Patriotic Front: NFSB and IMRO	7.28%

Source: Central Elections Commission.

* At runoff.

** An Ataka spin-off.

*** A coalition between IMRO, Party Lider and Agrarian People's Union.

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