

### 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.<sup>181</sup> 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.<sup>182</sup> 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.<sup>183</sup>

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.<sup>184</sup>

#### 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.”<sup>185</sup> The relation

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

<sup>182</sup> 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;

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

<sup>184</sup> 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.

<sup>185</sup> 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,<sup>186</sup> or as a moral or physical attitude.<sup>187</sup> George Orwell contrasted the two in terms of aggressive versus defensive attitudes.<sup>188</sup> In Bulgaria, although both terms are used interchangeably, nationalism tends to be considered the political manifestation of patriotism.<sup>189</sup>

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,<sup>190</sup> for instance in “national-bolshevism,” it is a key element of modern conservative ideology.<sup>191</sup> 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.<sup>192</sup>

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.”<sup>193</sup> 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.<sup>194</sup> 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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>193</sup> Тодоров (2012), р. 2.

<sup>194</sup> 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.<sup>195</sup> Researchers do not agree whether these organisations can be considered “pro-Nazi”<sup>196</sup> or “patriotic.”<sup>197</sup> 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.<sup>198</sup>

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.”<sup>199</sup> 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

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

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

<sup>197</sup> Алтънков (2004).

<sup>198</sup> Тодоров (2012), p. 4.

<sup>199</sup> 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.<sup>200</sup> 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.<sup>201</sup> 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 groups<sup>202</sup> 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

<sup>200</sup> 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.

<sup>201</sup> 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>

<sup>202</sup> 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 conflicts<sup>203</sup> resulted in the coalition's disintegration.<sup>204</sup> 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.<sup>205</sup> 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.<sup>206</sup> 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.<sup>207</sup> Identifying these main issues, Ragaru<sup>208</sup> 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.<sup>209</sup> 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.<sup>210</sup>

<sup>203</sup> 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.

<sup>204</sup> 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).

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

<sup>206</sup> 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.

<sup>207</sup> Тодоров (2012), p. 8.

<sup>208</sup> „20 точки на партия АТАКА“, [http://www.ataka.bg/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=13&Itemid=51](http://www.ataka.bg/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=13&Itemid=51); Ragaru, H. (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.

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

<sup>210</sup> 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](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 broadcasted<sup>211</sup> 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.<sup>212</sup> Although NFSB's political programme published in 2014<sup>213</sup> is more moderate than that of Ataka, leading political scientists believe that the party aims at destroying the system of democracy.<sup>214</sup> 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.<sup>215</sup>

### 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,<sup>216</sup> which can partly be attributed

<sup>211</sup> It is available via the cable operators in Sofia and eastern Bulgaria.

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

<sup>213</sup> NFSB website, „Основни задачи на правителството на националното спасение“, [http://nfsb.bg/programa\\_2014.php](http://nfsb.bg/programa_2014.php)

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

<sup>215</sup> *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](http://news.ibox.bg/news/id_1729623115)

<sup>216</sup> 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.<sup>217</sup> 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.<sup>218</sup>

**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.<sup>219</sup> 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.<sup>220</sup>

**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.

<sup>217</sup> 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>

<sup>218</sup> IMRO website at: [www.vmro.bg](http://www.vmro.bg)

<sup>219</sup> 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/#>

<sup>220</sup> 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,<sup>221</sup> Ataka enjoyed a relatively stable share of electoral support (increasing by 2009 in terms of absolute numbers)<sup>222</sup> 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 mosque<sup>223</sup> 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.<sup>224</sup>

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.<sup>225</sup> Political scientists attribute Ataka's popularity to the protest vote and see their supporters as the "humiliated and insulted."<sup>226</sup> 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.<sup>227</sup> Ivanova<sup>228</sup> 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.

<sup>221</sup> 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](http://www.vestnikataka.bg)), 09.05.2015.

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

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

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

<sup>225</sup> Иванова (2007); Рагару, Н. (2010) „Как така АТАКА? Преоформянето на лицата на българския национализъм“. В: *Преплетените времена на настоящето*. София: ИК КХ, 2010; Cholova, V. (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; Raгару, N. (2011) "Voting for Xenophobic Party "Ataka" in Bulgaria. Reshaping Symbolic Boundaries after Socialism", In: *Euxeinos* 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.

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

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

<sup>228</sup> 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)<sup>229</sup> who live predominantly in the regional cities and in Sofia (a total of 60%).<sup>230</sup> They can also be prone to crisis-reactive nationalism<sup>231</sup> in response to specific incidents such as anti-Roma protests in Katunitsa, Gurmen and in the Sofia's neighbourhood of Orlandovtsi in 2015. Ghodsee<sup>232</sup> 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 believe<sup>233</sup> 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.<sup>234</sup> 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

<sup>229</sup> Parapy (2010) p. 312.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> 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/>

<sup>232</sup> Ghodsee (2008).

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

<sup>234</sup> 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.<sup>235</sup> 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.<sup>236</sup> 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 Pride<sup>237</sup> 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)<sup>238</sup> 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.<sup>239</sup> 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.

<sup>235</sup> Interview with a former right-wing activist, conducted on 22.05.2015.

<sup>236</sup> 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“.

<sup>237</sup> 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.

<sup>238</sup> 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.

<sup>239</sup> 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).<sup>240</sup> 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.<sup>241</sup>

#### Ultra-right organisations: Bulgarian National Union (BNU)

BNU<sup>242</sup> 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.<sup>243</sup> 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,<sup>244</sup> carries out social activities (such as maintenance of nationalist monuments, food donations to socially disadvantaged people) and cultural and educational activities.<sup>245</sup> 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.<sup>246</sup> 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.<sup>247</sup>

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

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

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

<sup>242</sup> <http://bgns.net/>

<sup>243</sup> 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.

<sup>244</sup> It has its own sports organisation: [http://so.bgns.net/component/option,com\\_frontpage/Itemid,1/](http://so.bgns.net/component/option,com_frontpage/Itemid,1/)

<sup>245</sup> Interview with a right-wing activist.

<sup>246</sup> Христов, Н. (2007) „Прокуратурата ще провери Националната гвардия на Расате,“ Дарикнюз, 21.08.2007, [http://dariknews.bg/view\\_article.php?article\\_id=172989](http://dariknews.bg/view_article.php?article_id=172989)

<sup>247</sup> 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.<sup>248</sup> The BNU officially denied to be linked to that registration.<sup>249</sup> 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.<sup>250</sup>

BNU recently launched their project Rodobran<sup>251</sup> (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.<sup>252</sup> 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.<sup>253</sup>

#### 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,<sup>254</sup> and rallies demanding “solving the Roma issue”.<sup>255</sup> 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.<sup>256</sup> It also supports a broader

<sup>248</sup> Първанов, К. (2009) „Новият шифър на Расате”, В: *Тема*, брой 18 (393), 11-17.05.2009.

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

<sup>250</sup> Interview with a right-wing activist.

<sup>251</sup> <http://www.rodobran.com/>

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

<sup>253</sup> Interview with a right-wing activist.

<sup>254</sup> 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.

<sup>255</sup> *Offnews.bg*, „Шествието: Над 100 искат решаване на „циганския въпрос” (снимки)”, 21.10.2012.

<sup>256</sup> „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.<sup>257</sup> 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.<sup>258</sup>

**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".<sup>259</sup> 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.<sup>260</sup>

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.<sup>261</sup> Such an affiliation is confirmed by the research of Ragaru<sup>262</sup> who notes that the networks of security services officers and political converts have supplied Ataka with political leaders.

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

<sup>258</sup> Interview with a right-wing activist.

<sup>259</sup> Interview with a right-wing activist.

<sup>260</sup> Методиева (2015).

<sup>261</sup> Interviews with right-wing activists.

<sup>262</sup> 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.<sup>263</sup> 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.<sup>264</sup> Their ideology is rather social and proclaims that protectionism (subsidising) of national agricultural and industrial production would lead to economic growth.<sup>265</sup> 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

<sup>263</sup> 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.

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

<sup>265</sup> „20 точки на партия Атака”, [http://www.ataka.bg/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=13&Itemid=51](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.<sup>266</sup>

Nationalist parties declare in their official documents that the law should apply equally to all nationalities and ethnic groups.<sup>267</sup> 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.<sup>268</sup>

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.<sup>269</sup> 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,<sup>270</sup> 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.<sup>271</sup> 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.<sup>272</sup> Their rhetoric follows a logic according to which minorities are the oppressors and the majority are the victims.<sup>273</sup> 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

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

<sup>267</sup> Ibid.

<sup>268</sup> Зафиров, А. (2006) „Мразя турци, цигани, евреи“, В: *Новинар*, 28.09.2006.

<sup>269</sup> Interviews with right-wing activists.

<sup>270</sup> As defined by the Merriam Webster Dictionary.

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

<sup>272</sup> Станюлов, Ст. (2015) „Цигани и роми. Фактите на една отчайваща безизходица“, в. *Атака*, 12.06.2015; Interviews with right-wing activists.

<sup>273</sup> Parapy (2010), p. 290.

leaders' speeches.<sup>274</sup> 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 leaders<sup>275</sup> as an argument in political debates.<sup>276</sup> 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.<sup>277</sup> 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"<sup>278</sup> 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.<sup>279</sup> 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.<sup>280</sup> 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.<sup>281</sup>

**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-

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

<sup>275</sup> Станюков, Ст. (2015) „Катуница, Гърмен, Орландовци вещаят края на българската нация“, в. АТАКА, 19.06.2015.

<sup>276</sup> Ragaru (2011).

<sup>277</sup> 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.

<sup>278</sup> 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.

<sup>279</sup> Ragaru (2011).

<sup>280</sup> Interviews with right-wing activists.

<sup>281</sup> 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"<sup>282</sup> 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",<sup>283</sup> 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.<sup>284</sup>

### Homophobia

Bulgarian far-right groups are strongly **homophobic**. This is to a significant extent a leftover from the homophobic attitudes of the communist regime.<sup>285</sup> 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.<sup>286</sup> Ataka went even further proposing a supplement to the *Criminal Code* incriminating the manifestation of homosexuality.<sup>287</sup> NFSB is active locally, tabling numerous proposals to the city council of Burgas for banning gay pride events.<sup>288</sup>

These groups hold that gay people should not be allowed by the government to "tell everybody how happy and proud of themselves they are".<sup>289</sup> 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.<sup>290</sup> Eurobarometer confirms that only 15% of Bulgarians agree that homosexual marriages should be allowed in the EU.<sup>291</sup>

<sup>282</sup> Сидеров, В. (2002) *Бумерангът на злото*. София: Жарава.

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

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

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

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

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*

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

<sup>289</sup> Interview with a right-wing activist.

<sup>290</sup> 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.

<sup>291</sup> 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.<sup>292</sup> The theoretical background of this idea comes, among other sources, from Volen Siderov's book "Bulgarophobia",<sup>293</sup> 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.<sup>294</sup> 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 website<sup>295</sup> 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”.<sup>296</sup> 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.<sup>297</sup>

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

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

<sup>293</sup> Сидеров, В. (2003) *Българофобия*. София: Бумеранг.БГ.

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

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

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

<sup>297</sup> Interview with a right-wing activist.

affiliation with the former State Security of many representatives of Ataka<sup>298</sup> 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 Tangra<sup>299</sup> links Bulgaria's history to the occult beliefs of the Third Reich putting forward a number of analogies.<sup>300</sup> In her research Goncharova<sup>301</sup> 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.<sup>302</sup>

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

<sup>298</sup> See for example: Parapy (2010), p. 298 et seq.

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

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

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

<sup>302</sup> 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](http://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”<sup>303</sup> – 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. Experts<sup>304</sup> 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 content<sup>305</sup> 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,<sup>306</sup> or protests against the annual Sofia Pride.<sup>307</sup> Ataka

<sup>303</sup> 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](http://www.northstarcompass.org/nsc0604/bulgaria.htm)

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

<sup>305</sup> Examples of such can be found at: [http://evreite.blogspot.com/2012/04/blog-post\\_3208.html](http://evreite.blogspot.com/2012/04/blog-post_3208.html); <http://kolevm38.blog.bg/izkustvo/2012/04/07/kak-evreite-zakopavat-ylgarii.936051>; [http://conspiracyandtruth1.blogspot.com/2013/05/blog-post\\_23.html](http://conspiracyandtruth1.blogspot.com/2013/05/blog-post_23.html)

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

<sup>307</sup> 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.<sup>308</sup>

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.<sup>309</sup> 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.<sup>310</sup> The event is organised under strict rules published on its website.<sup>311</sup> 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.<sup>312</sup> There is a number of library websites containing resources on history, mythology, "alternative history" and memoirs.<sup>313</sup>

**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.<sup>314</sup> There is only fragmentary

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

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

<sup>310</sup> „Властите не разрешават Луковмарш”, *Vesti.bg*, 12.02.2015.

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

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

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

<sup>314</sup> 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.<sup>315</sup>

#### *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,<sup>316</sup> 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.<sup>317</sup> The raids come as a response either to a specific incident<sup>318</sup> 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.<sup>319</sup>

<sup>315</sup> *bTV*, „Свастики се появиха отново”, 07.07.2010.

<sup>316</sup> 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.

<sup>317</sup> 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.

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

<sup>319</sup> 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,<sup>320</sup> 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.<sup>321</sup> 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,<sup>322</sup> 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.<sup>323</sup>

### 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.

<sup>320</sup> *Mediapool.bg*, „Атака“ организира нов протест пред „Баня Башь“, 13.06.2012.

<sup>321</sup> *bTV*, „Бой и пожар след митинг на „Атака“ пред джамията Баня Башь“, 20.05.2011.

<sup>322</sup> Kiossev and Kabakchieva (2008).

<sup>323</sup> 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*.<sup>324</sup> 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.<sup>325</sup> 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.<sup>326</sup>

In that respect, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) criticised Bulgaria<sup>327</sup> for “the ease of official recognition of extremist parties as well as the possibility for them to receive State subsidies.”<sup>328</sup> The Commission recommended Bulgaria to introduce legislation changes in order to stop public financing of organisations or political parties which promote racism.<sup>329</sup>

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.<sup>330</sup> A number of international organisations, such as ECRI, criticised Bulgaria for either failing to prosecute racist

<sup>324</sup> 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/>

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

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

<sup>327</sup> 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>

<sup>328</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>330</sup> 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.<sup>331</sup> There is a ruling of the European Court of Human Rights to the same effect.<sup>332</sup>

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.<sup>333</sup> 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 hooliganism 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.<sup>334</sup> 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.<sup>335</sup> 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.**

<sup>331</sup> ECRI report on Bulgaria (fifth monitoring cycle), 16.09.2013, p. 19.

<sup>332</sup> 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#{)

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

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

<sup>335</sup> 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 olds<sup>336</sup> – they fall within the scope of the abovementioned institutions with already developed radical views and thus are subject of predominantly repressive measures.<sup>337</sup>**

The interviewed ultra-right activists<sup>338</sup> 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.<sup>339</sup> 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.<sup>340</sup> Although anarchist and communist movements who resorted to violence were part of the political life in Bulgaria at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>341</sup> 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.<sup>342</sup>

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%).<sup>343</sup> Furthermore,

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

<sup>337</sup> Ibid.

<sup>338</sup> Interviews with far-right activists.

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

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

<sup>341</sup> Благов, К. 'Атентатът в църквата „Света Неделя“'. Available at: [www.krumblagov.com/fifty/1.php](http://www.krumblagov.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>

<sup>342</sup> Europol, *EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Reports 2011 – 2014*, available at: [www.europol.europa.eu/latest\\_publications/37](http://www.europol.europa.eu/latest_publications/37)

<sup>343</sup> 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.<sup>344</sup> In addition, 8% of young people (18-30) in Bulgaria define themselves as being on the radical left.<sup>345</sup> Yet, importantly, despite the relative popularity of radical left ideas, there has been little electoral support for radical left parties in Bulgaria.<sup>346</sup> On the one hand, Bulgarians are reluctant to publicly associate themselves with the political left, which remains stigmatised after the communist period.<sup>347</sup> 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.<sup>348</sup> 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.<sup>349</sup> 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.<sup>350</sup> 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,<sup>351</sup> and to some extent in studies of populism in Bulgaria.<sup>352</sup>

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

<sup>344</sup> *Ibid.*

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

<sup>346</sup> Visser, M. et al., (2013), p. 15.

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

<sup>348</sup> Europol. EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report. 2011. Available at: [www.europol.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/te-sat2011.pdf](http://www.europol.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/te-sat2011.pdf)

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

<sup>350</sup> The Red House. Debate on 25.04.2015. Available at: [www.redhouse-sofia.org/Event.aspx?id=12871](http://www.redhouse-sofia.org/Event.aspx?id=12871)

<sup>351</sup> 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](http://www.cepsr.com/dwnld/maresx20040404.pdf)

<sup>352</sup> 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](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.<sup>353</sup> 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.<sup>354</sup>

## 2.2. Ideas and ideology

Given that "radical" is a contested concept,<sup>355</sup> 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."<sup>356</sup> 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."<sup>357</sup> 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 left<sup>358</sup> 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's<sup>359</sup> typology of 20<sup>th</sup> 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,<sup>360</sup> 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

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

<sup>354</sup> 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](http://www.md.government.bg/bg/doc/drugi/20150327_Doklad_MO_2014.pdf)

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

<sup>356</sup> 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.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid.

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

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

<sup>360</sup> 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.<sup>361</sup> At the same time, the communist left adopts a strong pro-Russian stance and employs a Cold War rhetoric,<sup>362</sup> as well as sometimes racism and anti-Semitism.<sup>363</sup> 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.<sup>364</sup> 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.<sup>365</sup> As Krasteva<sup>366</sup> 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.<sup>367</sup> 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 noted<sup>368</sup> 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.<sup>369</sup> Nevertheless, representatives of the other radical left-wing groups do not regard Ataka's platform as left-wing.<sup>370</sup>

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

<sup>361</sup> 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.

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

<sup>363</sup> 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](http://www.redhouse-sofia.org/Event.aspx?id=12871)

<sup>364</sup> Genov (2010), pp. 36-37.

<sup>365</sup> 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.

<sup>366</sup> Krasteva (2013).

<sup>367</sup> Ghodsee (2008); Krasteva (2013).

<sup>368</sup> 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](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2274166)

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

<sup>370</sup> 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.<sup>371</sup> Anarchists see relationships between people as egalitarian, free and non-hierarchical and the state as a form of power limiting human freedom and equality.<sup>372</sup> Moreover, they fight against imperialism, nationalism, chauvinism and racism.<sup>373</sup> The anarchist rhetoric is revolutionary but similarly to anarchists in other post-communist European states, Bulgarian anarchists “[have] not embraced terrorism.”<sup>374</sup> 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 20<sup>th</sup> century left-wing extremism.<sup>375</sup> 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.<sup>376</sup> 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.<sup>377</sup>

Finally, the **greens** are split between a left-wing<sup>378</sup> and a neo-liberal centre-right wing<sup>379</sup> 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.<sup>380</sup> Although fragmented at the moment,<sup>381</sup> 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.<sup>382</sup> Although nowadays the Bulgarian green movement is influenced

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

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

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>374</sup> Mareš (2007), p. 302.

<sup>375</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 307-309.

<sup>376</sup> „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.

<sup>377</sup> „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/>

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

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

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

<sup>381</sup> Interview with a left-wing and environmental activist conducted on 21.05.2015.

<sup>382</sup> 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.<sup>383</sup> Finally, it should be noted that many environmental activists do not define themselves as left-wing but rather as anti-globalists and anti-capitalists.<sup>384</sup>

### 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).<sup>385</sup> 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.<sup>386</sup> According to interviewees<sup>387</sup> and other parties on the left BSP's policies are not left-wing,<sup>388</sup> for the party continues to be politically and socially conservative,<sup>389</sup> and captured by private economic interests.<sup>390</sup> 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.<sup>391</sup> The other left-wing parties are either in coalition with the BSP,<sup>392</sup> as well as certain Russophile organisations such as the Bulgarian Anti-fascist Union,<sup>393</sup> or have broken away from the party like the centre-left Alternative for Bulgarian Revival party,<sup>394</sup> which is currently in government with 4.15% of the vote.<sup>395</sup>

<sup>383</sup> Interview with a left-wing and environmental activist.

<sup>384</sup> *Ibid.*; Кръстанова (2012).

<sup>385</sup> March (2011), p. 1858.

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

<sup>387</sup> Interviews with left-wing and environmental activist and former left-wing activist.

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

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

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

<sup>391</sup> 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.

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

<sup>393</sup> 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/](http://www.bas-bg.org/)

<sup>394</sup> See [www.abv-alternativa.bg/mission.html](http://www.abv-alternativa.bg/mission.html)

<sup>395</sup> 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.<sup>396</sup> 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.<sup>397</sup> As aforementioned, a number of communist left voters have also recognised the Ataka party as representative of their views.<sup>398</sup> 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 agenda<sup>399</sup> but has become largely compromised as a representative of the green movement.<sup>400</sup> On the other hand, the Greens (*Зелените*) – founded in 2008 by institutionalising recent civic movements – is considered more genuinely representative<sup>401</sup> and favours economic neo-liberalism.<sup>402</sup> 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.<sup>403</sup>

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,<sup>404</sup> 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.<sup>405</sup>

#### *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,

<sup>396</sup> Зайкова (2015).

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

<sup>398</sup> **Interview with a former left-wing activist.**

<sup>399</sup> The Green Party, [www.Greenparty.bg](http://www.Greenparty.bg)

<sup>400</sup> Кръстанова (2012), p. 35.

<sup>401</sup> *Ibid.*

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

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

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

<sup>405</sup> 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/](http://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“ иницира 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.<sup>406</sup> 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.<sup>407</sup> There are, however, nowadays stronger youth organisations,<sup>408</sup> which include single-issue youth groups for students' rights,<sup>409</sup> 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,<sup>410</sup> and Che Guevara<sup>411</sup> 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,<sup>412</sup> and later joined the BSP coalition Left Bulgaria.<sup>413</sup> According to official information, both organisations have membership of around 10 people.<sup>414</sup> 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.<sup>415</sup> Moreover, activist interviewees agree that their numbers continue to rise,<sup>416</sup> although this information is not confirmed by official sources.

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

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

<sup>407</sup> See: [www.bas-bg.org/](http://www.bas-bg.org/)

<sup>408</sup> Interview with a representative of an informal libertarian group conducted on 22.05.2015.

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

<sup>410</sup> Interview with a representative of an informal libertarian group.

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

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

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

<sup>414</sup> Interview with Representative of Law Enforcement/Intelligence institutions.

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

<sup>416</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>417</sup> *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>

<sup>418</sup> Златков (2012).

<sup>419</sup> „Атенатът в църквата „Света Неделя”. В: *Официален сайт на Крум Благов*, [www.krumblagov.com/fifty/1.php](http://www.krumblagov.com/fifty/1.php); Ангелов, Ал. и В. Николов. (2006) „Анархизъмът 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.<sup>420</sup> The autonomous libertarian group Anarchoresistance has fallen apart.<sup>421</sup> According to official sources, the reduction of members in anarchist organisations is due to activists emigrating to Greece.<sup>422</sup> Finally, the anarchists are supported largely in the bigger cities and have a strong lobby among Greek university students.<sup>423</sup>

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.<sup>424</sup> 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.<sup>425</sup> 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.”<sup>426</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>427</sup> 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.<sup>428</sup> In fact, Ecoglasnost became the first political party during the former regime providing an alternative to the Bulgarian Communist Party.<sup>429</sup> 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.<sup>430</sup> The green agenda is also represented by a number of nongovernmental organisations,<sup>431</sup>

<sup>420</sup> Interview with an activist of the Association of Bulgarian Anarchists.

<sup>421</sup> See: <http://aresistance.net/>

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

<sup>423</sup> Ibid.

<sup>424</sup> See: <http://novilevi.org/>

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

<sup>426</sup> Petkova (2015).

<sup>427</sup> „История”, Български туристически съюз, [www.btsbg.org/informaciq-za-bts/64-istoriq.html](http://www.btsbg.org/informaciq-za-bts/64-istoriq.html)

<sup>428</sup> 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.

<sup>429</sup> 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>

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

<sup>431</sup> 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.<sup>432</sup>

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.<sup>433</sup> Recruitment is done through the internet and social media, and increasingly at events and actions.<sup>434</sup> Respondents also mentioned exposure to radical left-wing ideas at university, at home, at protests and through music.<sup>435</sup>

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.<sup>436</sup> The Federation of Anarchists in Bulgaria are in contact with anarchist organisations in Greece, Romania and Serbia.<sup>437</sup> According to official information, stolen Bulgarian guns were sold to Greek anarchist organisations.<sup>438</sup> Finally, representatives of the new left are in contact with other progressive left-wing organisations from other European countries,<sup>439</sup> and regularly invite foreign speakers to Bulgaria.<sup>440</sup>

#### 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.<sup>441</sup> 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.<sup>442</sup>

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

<sup>433</sup> Interview with a representative of an informal libertarian group.

<sup>434</sup> Ibid.

<sup>435</sup> Ibid.; Interview with a former left-wing activist.

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

<sup>437</sup> Ibid.

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

<sup>439</sup> See: <http://novilevi.org/links>

<sup>440</sup> Ibid.

<sup>441</sup> See: [www.septemvri23.com](http://www.septemvri23.com)

<sup>442</sup> 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.”<sup>443</sup> 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.<sup>444</sup>

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.<sup>445</sup> 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.<sup>446</sup> The left-wing repertoire of actions includes demonstrations and protests,<sup>447</sup> graffiti, propaganda over the internet, holding debates,<sup>448</sup> publishing political literature and analyses,<sup>449</sup> issuing statements.<sup>450</sup> 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.<sup>451</sup> Moreover, aforementioned events and actions help establish direct connections with potential supporters.<sup>452</sup> An observer has also noted the increasing use of direct action by environmental groups such as protests, blockades and happenings.<sup>453</sup>

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

<sup>443</sup> 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.

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

<sup>445</sup> 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.

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

<sup>447</sup> For instance protecting the Soviet monuments in the capital city, Sofia. See: [www.facebook.com/ChervenataKlika?fref=photo](http://www.facebook.com/ChervenataKlika?fref=photo)

<sup>448</sup> 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: *Kanumal*, 01.03.2013; „Какво е Солидарна България?” 28.03.2012, <http://solidbul.eu/?p=15>

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

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

<sup>451</sup> Interview with a representative of an informal libertarian group.

<sup>452</sup> See: [www.septemvri23.com/](http://www.septemvri23.com/)

<sup>453</sup> Кръстанова (2012), p. 24.

<sup>454</sup> Георгиева, Цв. (2011) „Комунистически и антифашистки движения се обявиха срещу „Луков марш”. В: *livenews*, 12.02.2011; Начева, М. (2010) „Акция срещу расизма ще чисти София от нацистки графити”, в. *Дневник*, 01.07.2010; *Webcafé.bg*, „Флашмоб против расизма затвори „Попа”, 11.06.2010.

<sup>455</sup> 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.<sup>456</sup> 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.<sup>457</sup>

### 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.<sup>458</sup> 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.<sup>459</sup>

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.<sup>460</sup> Moreover, cases of violence against left-wing activists by right-wing ones are not investigated and prosecuted.<sup>461</sup> 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.<sup>462</sup> 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.<sup>463</sup>

## 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

<sup>456</sup> Кръстанова (2012), pp. 18-24.

<sup>457</sup> Interview with a representative of an informal libertarian group.

<sup>458</sup> Ibid.

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

<sup>460</sup> Interview with a representative of an informal libertarian group.

<sup>461</sup> 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.

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

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

the contributing factors in political radicalisation.<sup>464</sup> 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.<sup>465</sup>

### 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.<sup>466</sup> 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.<sup>467</sup> 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.”<sup>468</sup> 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.<sup>469</sup>

A second factor identified by the study is disenchantment with the current political system based on representative democracy and party politics.<sup>470</sup> The lack of existing political channels to effect change can be a contributing factor in political radicalisation in Bulgaria.<sup>471</sup> 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.”<sup>472</sup> In up to 25-50% of the studied

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

<sup>465</sup> 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.

<sup>466</sup> Schmid (2013), p. 4.

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

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

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

<sup>470</sup> 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>

<sup>471</sup> Interview with a left-wing and environmental activist.

<sup>472</sup> 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.<sup>473</sup> 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.<sup>474</sup> 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.<sup>475</sup> Hence, voters have no alternative for parliamentary political engagement in line with their beliefs<sup>476</sup> and are mistrustful of the idea that social change can be achieved through the existing democratic process.<sup>477</sup> 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).<sup>478</sup> 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.<sup>479</sup> 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.<sup>480</sup>

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.<sup>481</sup> 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.<sup>482</sup> In addition, the communist left and the far right in Bulgaria, especially Ataka, are united by their propensity towards

---

<sup>473</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>474</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

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

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

<sup>477</sup> Krasteva (2013).

<sup>478</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>479</sup> Занкина (2014).

<sup>480</sup> *Ibid.*

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

<sup>482</sup> 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.<sup>483</sup> Finally, authoritarianism is found to enhance the positive image of the communist regime in particular and anti-democratic ideologies in general.<sup>484</sup>

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.<sup>485</sup> Whereas the moderate left and right-wing are democrats and gradualists, left-wing and right-wing extremism share a rejection of democracy.<sup>486</sup> As history has shown, non-democratic and non-gradualist strategies are more likely to justify the use of violence for achieving political ends.<sup>487</sup>

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.<sup>488</sup> Previous studies also show that there can be an indirect link between political radicalisation and the international system.<sup>489</sup> Indeed, 22% of Bulgarians said they would vote in favour of joining the Eurasian Union, while 40% supported EU membership.<sup>490</sup> 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.<sup>491</sup> 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.<sup>492</sup> 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

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

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

<sup>485</sup> Bobbio (1996), p. 94.

<sup>486</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>487</sup> *Ibid.*

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

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

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

<sup>491</sup> Schmid (2013), p. 4.

<sup>492</sup> 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.<sup>493</sup> Studies have found that younger generations increasingly use search engines and websites for answers, bypassing independent or third party information.<sup>494</sup>

Moreover, the lack of history education may contribute to misunderstanding historical processes and manipulation.<sup>495</sup> 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,<sup>496</sup> and the majority do not have any knowledge about totalitarian regimes in general.<sup>497</sup> 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.<sup>498</sup> 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.<sup>499</sup> 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.<sup>500</sup>

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.<sup>501</sup> 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,<sup>502</sup> 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

<sup>493</sup> Interview with a representative of a libertarian informal group.

<sup>494</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>495</sup> „Защо не знаят истината за комунизма”. Deutsche Welle Bulgaria, 20.09.2013.

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

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

<sup>498</sup> Interview with a representative of an informal libertarian group.

<sup>499</sup> RAND Europe (2011), p. 11.

<sup>500</sup> For example in: Парару, Н. (2010) „Как така АТАКА? Преоформянето на лицата на българския национализъм”. В: *Преплетените времена на настоящето*. София: ИК КХ, 2010.

<sup>501</sup> 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.

<sup>502</sup> Interview with a former left-wing activist.

carry the dogmatic and conservative left-wing ideas of the Bulgarian Communist Party.<sup>503</sup> 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.<sup>504</sup> 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.<sup>505</sup> 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.<sup>506</sup> Due to the failure of the current system to ensure justice, including social justice, people are seeking solutions and alternatives.<sup>507</sup> In line with previous research,<sup>508</sup> 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.<sup>509</sup> Similarly, in her study of the influence of the skinhead subculture over the formation of personalities among Bulgarian teenagers, Pesheva<sup>510</sup> 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.<sup>511</sup>

## 4. GROUPS AT RISK OF RADICALISATION

Studies on radicalisation have concluded that profiling potential violent radicals is futile.<sup>512</sup> 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.

<sup>503</sup> Ibid.

<sup>504</sup> Interview with a former radical right group activist and with SDI.

<sup>505</sup> Schmid (2013), p. 4.

<sup>506</sup> Interview with left-wing and environmental activist.

<sup>507</sup> Interview with representative of an informal libertarian group.

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

<sup>509</sup> Interview with a former left-wing activist.

<sup>510</sup> Пешева, П. (2010) „Скинхедс: чувството да си специален и свободен.“ В: [www.seminar-bg.eu](http://www.seminar-bg.eu), 17.05.2010.

<sup>511</sup> Ibid.

<sup>512</sup> 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.<sup>513</sup> 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. Kabakchieva<sup>514</sup> 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”<sup>515</sup> 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.

<sup>513</sup> Мирчева, К. (2007) „Психологическа характеристика на непълнолетните правонарушители“, в: *Психология журнал*, бр. 34.

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

<sup>515</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

Ivanova<sup>516</sup> 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, Ragaru<sup>517</sup> defines Ataka voters as people who radically denounce the political, social and moral order of post-communism.

Genov<sup>518</sup> 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”.<sup>519</sup>

In her research on the Ataka electorate,<sup>520</sup> 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. Ragaru<sup>521</sup> 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”.<sup>522</sup>

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

<sup>516</sup> Иванова (2007).

<sup>517</sup> Ragaru (2011).

<sup>518</sup> Генев (2010).

<sup>519</sup> Ibid, p. 46.

<sup>520</sup> Иванова (2007).

<sup>521</sup> Ragaru (2011).

<sup>522</sup> Ibid., p. 4.



identified by Schmid,<sup>523</sup> 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,”<sup>524</sup> and political beliefs correlate with political action<sup>525</sup> they do not in most cases lead to violence.<sup>526</sup> In fact, ideology is not always relevant in violent radicalisation,<sup>527</sup> and importantly, ideology may be secondary, used to justify the use of violence.<sup>528</sup>

In addition, in line with previous research,<sup>529</sup> 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.<sup>530</sup>

---

<sup>523</sup> 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.

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

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

<sup>526</sup> 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.

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

<sup>528</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>529</sup> Visser, M. et al. (2013), p. 13.

<sup>530</sup> Interview with a left-wing and environmental activist; Interview with a former left-wing activist.