

IV. FOOTBALL HOOLIGANISM

1. BACKGROUND

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2. ROOT CAUSES AND MOTIVATIONS

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

Macro level

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

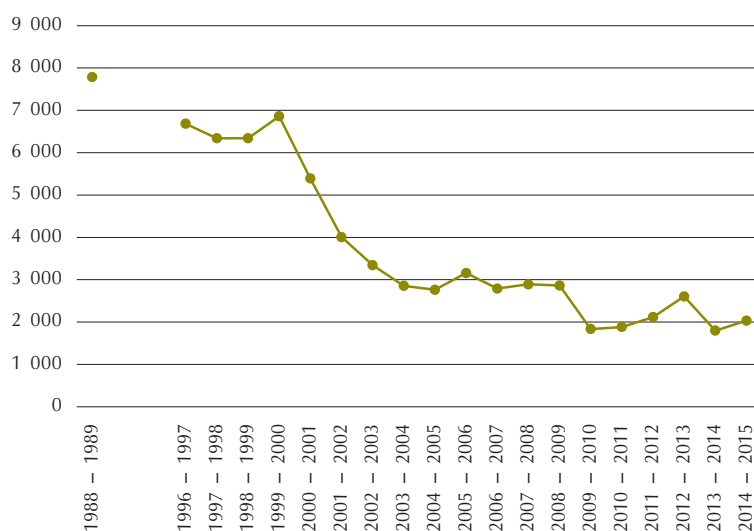
⁵³⁶ Based on data from the Employment Agency.

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

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

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

Figure 2. Average attendance of football matches



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

⁵³⁸ National Statistical Institute.

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

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

⁵⁴¹ Ibid.

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

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

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

Meso level

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

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

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

⁵⁴³ Ibid.

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

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

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

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

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

Micro level

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

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

⁵⁴⁶ Interview with a football fan.

⁵⁴⁷ Interview with a football fan.

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

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

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

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

3. IDEOLOGY AND IDEAS

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

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

Nationalism

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

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

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

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

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

Anti-communism

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

Extreme right views

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

⁵⁵⁰ Interviews with football fans.

⁵⁵¹ Interview with a football fan.

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

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

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

⁵⁵⁵ Interview with a football fan.

⁵⁵⁶ Interview with a football fan.

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

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

Against modern football

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

Anti-system views

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

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

⁵⁵⁸ Interview with a football fan.

⁵⁵⁹ Interview with a football fan.

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

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

⁵⁶² All Cops Are Bastards.

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

4. DEVIANT BEHAVIOUR AND CRIMINAL ACTIVITY OF HOOLIGANS/ULTRAS

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

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

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

⁵⁶³ Interview with a football fan.

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

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid.

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

⁵⁶⁷ Interviews with law enforcement officers and sports journalists.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

An understanding of the fan subculture and the influence of crime networks on the conduct of fans needs also to take into account a related phenomenon – protection racket. It is an imitation of violence and is restricted mostly to intimidation. According to interviewees, mass and extreme violence is avoided as it brings about pressure from the police. Intimidation turns out to be much more efficient.⁵⁷⁵

A feature of fan groups that is exploited by criminals is anonymity – these groups consist of a large number of persons who know how to hide their faces. Given the big crowds involved in clashes, fans are easily “shuffled” by the leaders. Shuffling – which involves the rotation of fans at various places in the crowd in order to minimise their exposure to police surveillance – makes the task of identifying perpetrators of crimes very difficult. Additional techniques applied to those at the fringes of the fan groups are “sacrifice” and “trial.” A fan explains: “They would get one of the kids that hang around and throw him to the police; if he doesn’t “sing” he can be admitted in the faction.”⁵⁷⁶ Sacrificing is an important mechanism of the “peaceful coexistence” with the police. Senior police officers would “shelter” fan leaders from investigation in exchange for receiving the identities of perpetrators. As a result, crime networks operating among fan groups remain intact, while the police acquire control over the fans.

Deals between club owners and fan groups are made legal through the organisation of public order during matches. The faction of Levski Sofia-West, for example,

⁵⁷³ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁴ Interviews a fan from the core of an influential faction and a police officer.

⁵⁷⁵ Interviews with Mol officers.

⁵⁷⁶ Interview with a fan from the hard core of an influential faction.

would establish a private security company which would sign a protection contract with the football club. The company would then legally employ fans, while control over the fan group is achieved by paying off the hard core and using punitive squads against unruly fans.

Gradually, these deals with the club owners turn into systematic protection racket. If not paid, fans stage incidents and the football clubs are fined. The examples provided at the interviews were of the 2013 – 2014 season when Levski Sofia was facing financial difficulties and the owner declined to pay off the fans as before. A series of incidents at away and home matches followed and the club was fined and penalised to play behind closed doors. A similar incident occurred during a match with Croatia when organisers fans “captured the flags” of the Croats and blackmailed the BFU that they would burn them (thus risking a UEFA disciplinary proceeding) if not paid.

This kind of protection racket, however, escalates beyond football and enters other business areas and politics. Examples of the use of “pressure groups” by fan leaders involve business conflicts, when entrepreneurs pay fans to destroy facilities of the competition (usually in the catering business). On one occasion, an entrepreneur paid fans to attack members of the public who were protesting against development plans in a local park. Apart from physical intimidation, the cars of local residents were burned down.⁵⁷⁷

5. ORGANISATIONAL FORMS AND ACTORS

Categories of football supporters

There are different types of football fans depending on the degree of their commitment, the degree of identification with the club and the extent to which they demonstrate violent behaviour. One of the most widely used classifications is based on criteria centred on identification and attachment, and identifies five types of sports supporters: temporal, local, devoted, fanatical and dysfunctional.⁵⁷⁸ Temporary supporters are committed as long as the team is winning, while local fans support the team because it represents their city. As for the devoted fan, the attachment to the team endures beyond time and place. The fanatical and dysfunctional fans demonstrate strong team identification in very public ways. The dysfunctional fans are so attached to their team that it dominates their lives, and they often engage in anti-social behaviour.

Over the past years the Bulgarian police have used a similar 3-level scheme. The fan supporters are classified based on the level of risk. The first category A represents the lowest level of risk and includes the general public at stadiums. Category B represents medium level of risk for security, which in Bulgaria self-

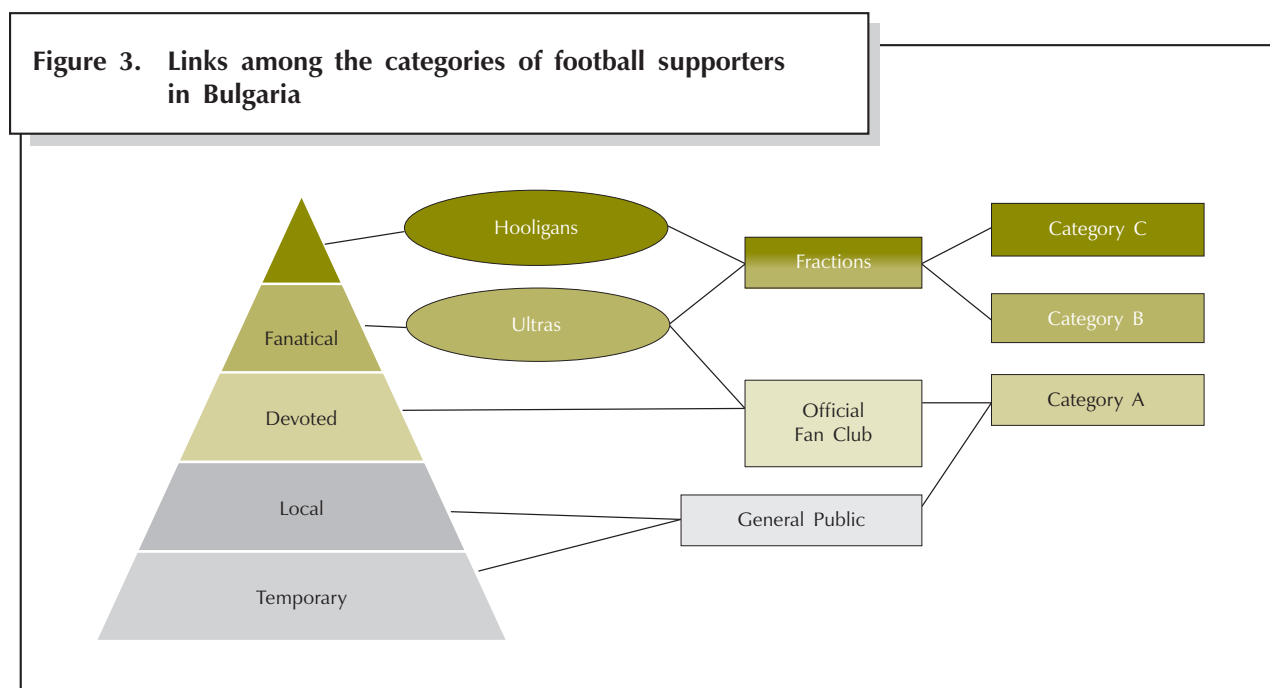
⁵⁷⁷ *Btv Новините*, „Подпалени коли на протестиращи за квартална градинка”, 20.10.2014; *Offnews.bg*, „Запалени коли и протести заради строеж върху детска площадка”, 20.10.2014.

⁵⁷⁸ Hunt K., Bristol T., Bashaw E. (1999) “A Conceptual Approach to Classifying Sports Fans,” *Journal of Services Marketing*, Vol. 13, Issue 6, 1999, pp. 439-452.

identify as “ultras.” The hooligans – or persons with the highest level of risk – are in category C.⁵⁷⁹

The interviews confirmed that supporters who define themselves as ultras correspond to the fanatical type. They attend football games of their favourite team very frequently and demonstrate their support through the use of flares, choreography, vocal support in large groups and the display of banners. The use of violence, however, is not their primary characteristic. Football hooligans, on the other hand, correspond to the dysfunctional type, for whom violence is a way to express their support to the team. Their behaviour is predominantly led by hate towards the rival team and the police. In practice, the distinction between the two types is not very clear, as very often ultras participate in hooligan acts.⁵⁸⁰

The links between the various categories of supporters in Bulgaria is illustrated in Figure 3.



Source: Authors.

The current chapter is focused on hooligans and ultras as they are the groups prone to radicalisation. Ultras and hooligans are usually part of factions and may not be members of the official fan group of a football club, which is much more numerous. Some ultras are not well disposed towards the official fan group as they consider them financially and organisationally dependent on the football club. Thus a faction that is not part of any official fan group allows them to belong to a band of supporters and at the same time feel independent and free of obligations. One interviewee defined himself as “an independent fighting unit with

⁵⁷⁹ Interview with a police officer.

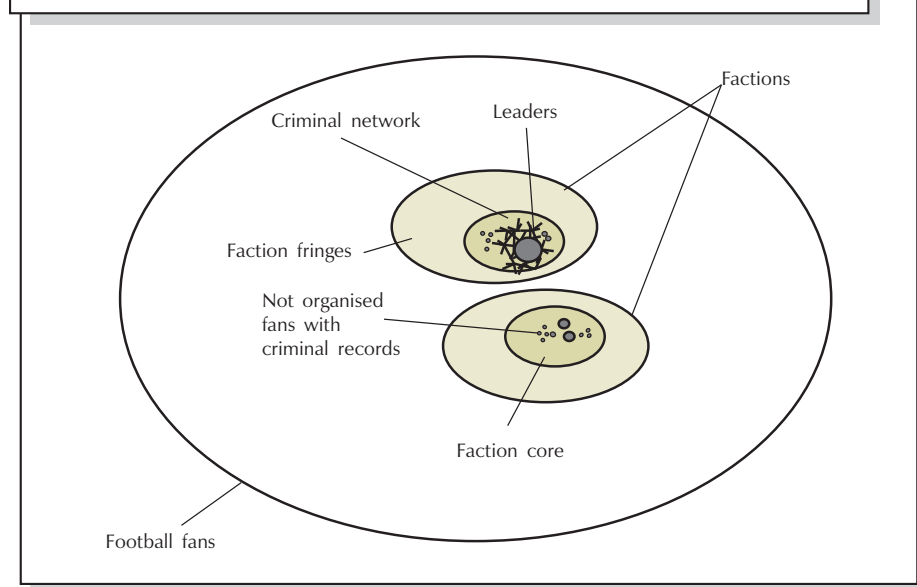
⁵⁸⁰ Interview with a sports journalist.

several people behind his back”⁵⁸¹ and denied being part of any faction, which confirms that some of the most extreme fans are not part of any organisational structure.⁵⁸²

There is also the category of dysfunctional fans who are engaged in criminal activities. They fall into two groups: those who commit occasional or regular crimes but are not involved with organised criminal structures and those who are part of crime networks and use the faction as an environment and tool for their criminal as well as legal income.

Survey data on this topic in Bulgaria are scarce and outdated. The shares, therefore, of the various categories of fans in the overall fan population can only be estimated on the basis of statistics on football match attendance, surveys conducted in 1999 – 2000 and police estimates. Thus, given that in the period 1998 – 2000 the average match attendance was at 6,000-7,000 persons, an estimate of 20% of the B and C categories of “risk” fans would correspond to around 1,200-1,400.⁵⁸³ Police estimates for that period claim that around 300 persons fall into category C. Reduced attendance in the 2012 – 2015 period (to around 2,000-2,500 spectators) changed the ratio between high-risk and low-risk fans. According to the sources, the share of risk fans is now at 30-35%, or around 600-900 persons of category C. It should also be taken into account that in recent years high-stakes (and thus risk-prone) matches have been attended by 3-4 times larger audiences.

Figure 4. Organisational structure of fan factions and supporters



Source: Authors.

⁵⁸¹ Interview with a football fan.

⁵⁸² Ibid.

⁵⁸³ Радева (2009).

Leading fan clubs and factions

The number of ultras factions today is estimated at around 76⁵⁸⁴ located in most major Bulgarian cities (see Table 1). It should be noted that their organisation, leadership and membership base are very dynamic. The trends since the late 1990s indicate that within 2-3 years they undergo mergers, divisions, name changes. The most numerous and most interesting in terms of risks and potential for extreme behaviour are the fan groups of the two leading rival football clubs in Sofia – Levski and CSKA. The other two leading teams and their groups of supporters are based in the second largest city in the country, Plovdiv – Lokomotiv and Botev. Other strong factions are to be found in Stara Zagora (Beroe) and Varna (Cherno More), as well as some other clubs with long tradition in the bigger cities.

Table 4. Football clubs and fan factions in Bulgaria

Football club	Factions
Naftex Bourgas	Green Fighters, Old Dirty Dogs, HGU, The Young Company, Hate Front Burgas, Meden Rudnik Firm`13, Italian Hood
Dunav Rousse	Danube Forever, Riverside Boys, Zdravec Iztok Front
Cherno More Varna	Chaika Hools, Green Brats, Green Demons, The Alcoholics
Lokomotiv Plovdiv	Napoletani 1995, Lauta Hools, Gott Mit Uns, The Usual Suspects, Lauta Youths
CSKA Sofia	Ofanzica (including faction "14", known also as Northside 14p and The Young Ones), The Animals, Red Mladost, Ultra Pernik (Red Religion), Boys Vidin, Varna Firm, Proud, Ultra Front Vratza, Torcida Plovdiv, Office Boys, Lyulin Boys, Armeitsi Dobrich, Pleven Group, The Great Tarnovites, Bourgas Brigade, Executors – Haskovo, Shoumen Group, Rousse Defends CSKA (Forever Red)
Levski Sofia	Sofia West, South Division, Blue Junta, HD Boys, Blue Lads Sliven, Ultra Varna, U.L.R., Vandals Pleven, LSL, Blue Huns Pernik, Blue Warriors Plovdiv, Old Capital Boys, Blue Terror Ruse, Blue Blood Asenovgrad, Club Dobrich, Ultras Blagoevgrad, Torcida Kyustendil, Varna Crew, Bad Blue Boys Blagoevgrad, Blue Zone Gorna Oryahovitsa, The Gabrovo Blues
Etar Veliko Tarnovo	Hells Ultras, Young Boys V.T., E.G.F.
Spartak Varna	Semper Fidelis (Always Loyal), Flower Hood, Brigade Hools, Spartak Youth, Vladislavovo Front, Mladost Boys 95
Lokomotiv Sofia	Iron Brigades, Drinking Boys

⁵⁸⁴ Data from Bulgarian's ultras website, available at <http://bulgarian-ultras.com>, accessed on 05.08.2015.

Table 4. Football clubs and fan factions in Bulgaria (continued)

Football club	Factions
Botev Plovdiv	The Wild Bunch Kitchuka, Izgrev Boys, Trakia Brigade, Bunta North, SCB, CSC, Youth Group, Centrum Crew, Patriots
Spartak Pleven	Always Loyal, SPSS (Spartak Pleven Sofia Supporters), Pleven BoySS, S.P.U.Y. (Spartak Pleven Ultras Youths), Storgo Firm,
Beroe Stara Zagora	Zara Boys, CP12, Rakia Power
Litex Lovech	Ultras Lovech, Sofia Lads, Young Brigade, Youth Crew, Lovcheans, Litex Drink Team, North Town Boys
Minyor Pernik	Teva Boys, Ultras Moshino, Central fan Club, U.A, Pashov Boys
Slavia Sofia	Boys Sofia, La Vecchia Scuola
Montana	Ogosta Boys
Lokomotiv Gorna Oryahovitsa	Jolly Roger Firm
Asenovets Asenovgrad	South Squad, Wasted Life Crew (WLC), Headbreakers
Chernomorets Bourgas	Blue Sharks, Blue Brigade Bourgas, Grudowo Boys
Sportist Svoge	Svoge Boys
Pirin Blagoevgrad	Green Eagles, Pirin SS

Source: *bulgarian-ultras.com*

The first conflicts within the fan groups of the various football clubs which led to the formation of sub-groups took place in the mid-1990s. The newly formed factions sought to affirm their identity through confrontation with the others. Until 2007-2008, the Levski Fan Club (LFC) was dominated by the core, although it was not associated with the hooligan culture as was the case with Sofia West. The leaders of the LFC are personalities well known to the public. When the owners and management started to pay off the Sofia West faction in order to avoid disturbances, young people in LFC started to become more radical imitating the more extreme conduct of Sofia West. The LFC leaders attempted to check this process but failed and had to quit, as a result of which LFC fell apart. Some of its former members joined Sofia West.

The faction Sofia West was established in 1999 by residents of the largest Sofia district Lyulin.⁵⁸⁵ While in 2006 it was one of the smaller fan groups, today it has gained significant influence and is the most numerous, with 200-300 – or more,

⁵⁸⁵ Lyulin is a district of Sofia which is situated in the western part of the city, hence Sofia West. Its current informal leader is Lyubomir "the Youngster" Kostadinov.

depending on the performance of the football club – active core members.⁵⁸⁶ On the basis of the interviews and media reports it could be suggested that one of the reasons for this development is the involvement of its core members in criminal activities, mainly drug distribution. The faction is involved in private security services (stewards at stadiums) and the insurance business through a firm of a leader⁵⁸⁷ of the organisation.⁵⁸⁸ A respondent referred to the fan group as “the firm” referring to its involvement in selling official merchandise of the club and receiving payment from the club.⁵⁸⁹

The second and more influential among Levski supporters faction is the South Division. It was established in 2006 and is constantly attracting new supporters. The South Division seeks to clearly differentiate itself from Sofia West. Its members are younger, believe to be idealists – they turn down money offers – and are bigger nationalists than Sofia West. The latter, interviewees claim, “perform” at events only when paid. They would attend events only formally but would take no part. The police estimate that the South Division is about 500 strong. When Levski performs well, however, their number doubles.⁵⁹⁰ One of the most extreme Levski fan groups is Blue Junta. It was established in 2010 and has attracted a lot of younger people. The faction is very small with less than 50 people, but is famous for being very active in hooligan actions before and after Levski matches. In addition to the Sofia factions, there are Levski fan groups in almost every Bulgarian town. Although these groups have their own names and symbols, they participate in one of the Sofia factions (for example, in 2012 Levski’s factions in Pazardzhik and Kyustendil joined the Division). Levski has large and very active fan clubs in major cities in the country, such as Ultra Varna, Bad Blue Boys Blagoevgrad and Blue Huns Pernik.

CSKA’s fans are the other large risk-posing group. Its Central Fan Club was established in 1990, but was based on the supporter’s club founded during the first win games of Bulgarian army’s football club in the 1950s. The development of the CSKA fan factions resembles that of Levski’s – initially very fragmented and warring with each other, through various coalitions in 2013 to the current two large factions – Ofanziva (Assault) and the Animals. The Animals is an old faction, which in many ways resembles Sofia West – commercialised and having leaders involved in shady activities. Their influences waxes and wanes depending on how active their leader Rossen Petrov is.⁵⁹¹ Interviewees confirm that the Animals are the most violent CSKA fan faction and their members are responsible for most of the hooligans and ultras actions associated with the team. Ofanziva is the faction of nationalists and idealists among the CSKA fans. It is an example of a faction growing in significance because of the mergers of smaller factions – it was created by the merger of „14“ (known also as Northside 14) and the Young Ones. “14” used to be a leading faction, but after having its banner captured by Levski

⁵⁸⁶ Interview with a police officer.

⁵⁸⁷ Anton “Toni the Insurance” Kalchev.

⁵⁸⁸ Interview with a police officer.

⁵⁸⁹ Interview with a sports journalist.

⁵⁹⁰ Interview with a police officer and a sports journalist.

⁵⁹¹ As mentioned above he is currently serving a sentence for drug dealing.

hooligans, their members joined others existing factions.⁵⁹² The police estimate that the core of Ofanziva consists of around 100-150 persons, with around 500 wearing their jersey at big matches. The changes in the factions in the last three years are an example of the “efficiency” of the faction model. For a dozen years (2000 – 2012) there was only one official fan club managed by Dimitar “the Duce” Angelov. The clashes among the factions started with the crisis in the CSKA finances. When its owner – who also owns the waste management company Titan – started to reduce the funding and sell players in 2011, the faction leaders started to challenge each other. Dimitar Angelov supported the owners as they paid for being on good terms with the fans. Ofanziva was the faction which wanted the Titan owners to withdraw because they were believed to be bringing the club down. Dimitar Angelov was accused by CSKA’s fans for misusing the club’s funding and the income made from selling catering and merchandise around stadiums. When the owners stopped paying, Dimitar Angelov and his people turned against Titan and started to pay Kaloyan “the Goldfinch” Stoyanov – a shady character and member of a former security company thought to be a front for a criminal organisation – for protection services. Stoyanov in turn started to pay off Rossen Petrov. In 2012, Dimitar Angelov resigned as the leader of CSKA’s fan club after being publicly humiliated by Petrov. After the dissolution of the official fan club, CSKA fans fragmented into multiple factions, estimated to be between 10 and 14 during the 2013 political turmoil. These then started to merge since smaller factions were no match for the two large Levski factions. At that time, CSKA factions started to participate in political rallies and to get paid for that (more on this below). The Animals became the dominant faction. As with the Levski fans, CSKA factions from outside Sofia tend to affiliate themselves with either Ofanziva or The Animals. Among the more active and independent CSKA factions around the country are Torcida Plovdiv, Varna Firm, Ultra Front Vratza, Ultra Pernik (Red Religion), Boys Vidin, Red Lions Pazardjik.

Lokomotiv Plovdiv’s main factions are – Got mit uns (1998), Lauta Hools and Napoletani Ultras Plovdiv (1995). Members of Got mit uns and Lauta Hools are responsible for the majority of fights during the club’s games. Got mit uns’ members are mostly older skinheads, while Lauta Hools members are younger hooligans and ultras. Napoletani’s members are more involved in ultras actions, rather than hooligan ones.

Botev Plovdiv’s current leading factions are Centrum Crew and Young Group, consisting primarily of younger hooligans. In the past, the leading factions of the team were Izgrev Boys and the Wild Bunch Kitchuka. The members of the latter factions were mainly older anarchist hooligans, who had lost influence among supporters.

Although having limited human and financial resources, factions of other major Bulgarian football clubs have participated in a number of incidents and mass brawls which resulted in bodily injuries. Beroe Stara Zagora’s supporters are believed to be the fifth supporter group on the Bulgarian ultras scene in terms of influence. Their leading factions are called Green Vandals and CP12, united under the Zara Boys banner. The members of the factions, supporting the two rival

⁵⁹² Тарандова, Е., Б. Къртунов, „Войната на знамената,“ в. *Капитал*, 02.03.2011.

Varna football teams – Spartak and Chernomorec are organized on a hooligan basis, while ultras actions are rarely seen on their stadiums. Naftex enjoys the largest fan base in Bourgas. The main supporters' organisation Green Fighters often participates in hooligan actions in the city and has members that hold key positions in the right-wing National Front for Salvation of Bulgaria.⁵⁹³ One of the currently top football clubs Ludogorets is gradually building up a stable fan base, although its loyalty to the team has yet to be proved.

Ultras and hooligans of the five most popular clubs in Bulgaria have established an Association of Football Supporters. It is headed by Elena Vataška, a former director of the supporters' sector at the Bulgarian Football Union (BFU), who is known for her connections with radical factions of football fans.⁵⁹⁴ Although one of the priorities that the Association was the establishment of a positive fan culture, in practice the organisation has supported several nationalistic actions of football fans.

Outside Sofia, the risk posed by local fan factions is not easily discernible. Although they are not publicly visible, they are an important resource for the local business and political clientelistic circles. There are several reasons for this lack of clarity. First, violence takes place mainly in Sofia or is explained by the involvement of Sofia factions. In fact, non-Sofia factions would travel for matches to the capital and join the action on behalf of some Sofia group. The second reason is the lack of independent local media seeking to investigate this phenomenon. Third, the police are reluctant to share information as it would jeopardise the career prospects of officers and is also possibly related to rent seeking.

Relationship among the main fan groups

A typical characteristic of football clubs and their supporters' club is that they tend to develop great rivalries with other clubs and fan groups. While this is often caused by regional diversities and past events, the reasons why a particular club is considered a rival are not always clear to supporters. Each team and supporters group has identified an opponent to whom they are more tolerant. They also establish connections with international fan clubs and sometimes travel to support them during matches.

As mentioned, the two leading rivals in Bulgaria are Levski and CSKA. It could be argued which is the second biggest rival of Levski, but surely it is either Botev Plovdiv or Minyor Pernik. In recent years, a new strong rivalry has emerged between Levski and Beroe Stara Zagora. Interviewees mentioned that there are personal contacts between hooligans of Levski and Lokomotiv Plovdiv, but it is not clear whether their supporters could be considered allies. The only international twin club of Levski is Lazio (Italy). Unlike Levski, CSKA's supporters are on good terms with Botev Plovdiv. Internationally, CSKA fans support Steaua Bucharest, Partizan Belgrade and since recently Liverpool's fan faction – Urchin. The main rivals and twin teams of the two main rival clubs in Plovdiv are illustrated in Figure 6. The other main rivalries in the country are between Lokomotiv Sofia

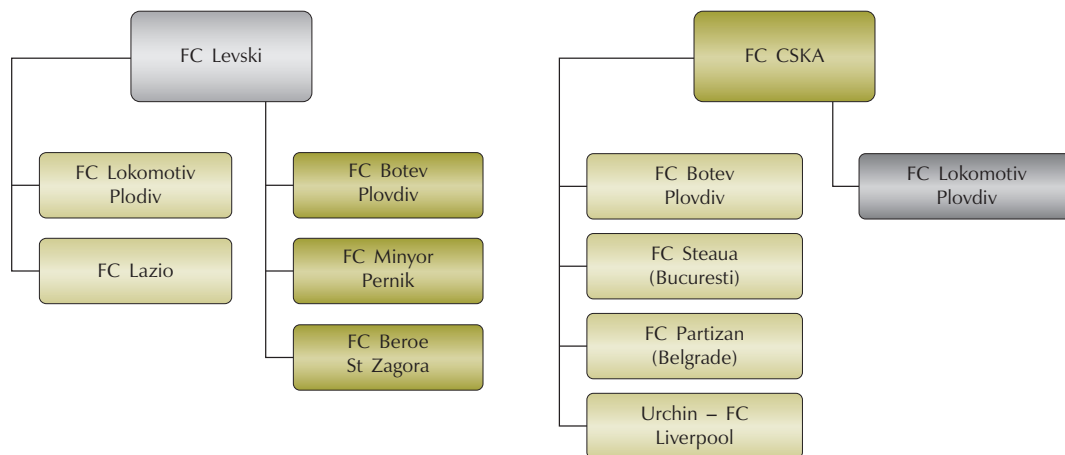
⁵⁹³ A member of the supporter's organization was a candidate for municipality councillor.

⁵⁹⁴ *Webcafe.bg*, "Футболни фенове за политическа употреба," 22.02.2014.

and Slavia Sofia, Spartak Varna and Cherno More Varna, Neftokhimik Burgas and Chernomorets Burgas.

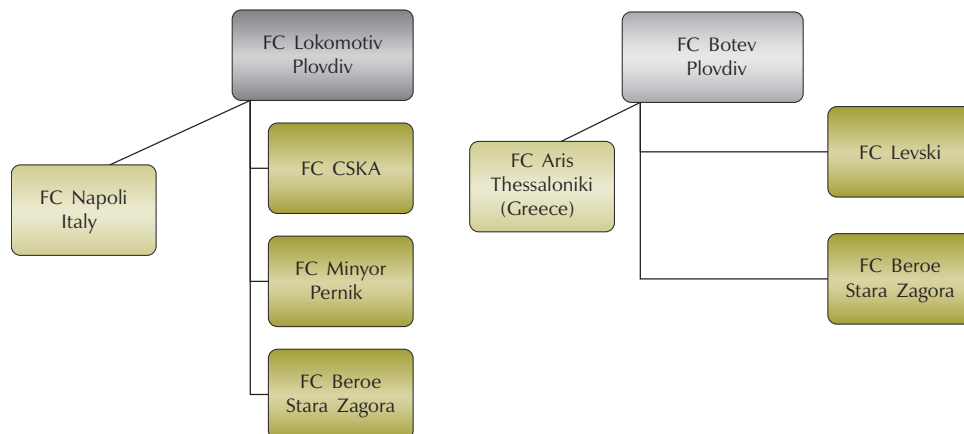
Interviews with police officers confirm that the main rivalries between football clubs' supporters are known to them and that this information is taken into account when assessing the risk of hooligan actions at a particular game.

Figure 5. Rivalries and friendships of Levski and CSKA



Source: Authors.

Figure 6. Rivalries and friendships of Lokomotiv and Botev



Source: Authors.

The structure of factions

There are a number of common elements between the organisational structure of football factions and street gangs: the internal hierarchy, the leader, rules of conduct within the group, regular meetings of members and territoriality.

Each fan group has three structural elements with clear hierarchy – leaders, core of the fan group and supporting members. Hierarchies, however, can vary. Sofia West and the Animals have one leader who controls the membership with the use of “captains.” Only well trusted people are allowed in the core of the faction. These are people submitting to a relatively rigid hierarchy of “lieutenants” each commanding a number of “foot soldiers.” The punitive squads are an important discipline enforcement tool – they guard the leaders and exercise control both of the criminal business and within the faction. Ofanziva and South Division are headed by 20-30 “natural” leaders each having his own informal network, thus forming a core of 100-150 persons.⁵⁹⁵

Each level of the hierarchy of the factions has a specific demography:

- The faction fringe usually includes the youngest ones, teenagers from poorer neighbourhoods. They would come from troubled families and would not do very well at school. They follow the leaders of the gang, this is their family. They are prone to deviant behaviour.
- The next level is the core, consisting of young men up to their late 20s who have climbed the hierarchy ladder. They usually have police records for thefts, battery, drugs, etc.
- The inner core, the third level, are individuals aged 30 and over with crime records. This is the middle management of the group – they deal with both the fringes and the top leaders.⁵⁹⁶

Greater reputation is enjoyed by fans who regularly attend matches of the club at home, often travel to away matches, engage in procuring fan equipment and are very active in the support choreography at stadiums. Special reputation is enjoyed by those who demonstrate readiness to fight with other fans and the police.⁵⁹⁷ Several interviewees mentioned that the hierarchy within the group is also dependent on the age of supporters. Older ultras are respected, followed and imitated by younger ones as this is perceived as a way to climb in the hierarchy of the faction.

According to interviewees, the core members of the leading factions in the country number around 50-100. Actions by the ultras are usually organized by a somewhat larger supporters’ group – 100-200 people.⁵⁹⁸ In Sofia, the police has identified around 4,000-5,000 ultras falling under category B (medium level of risk) and around 300-400 hooligans falling under category C (high level of risk).

⁵⁹⁵ Interviews with police officers and fans from the core of factions.

⁵⁹⁶ ВЪЛКОВ, И. (2013), „Футболно хулиганство и политически натиск.“ *Newmedia21.eu*, 09.09.2013.

⁵⁹⁷ Interview with a sports journalist.

⁵⁹⁸ *Btv*, Interview with a CSKA fan, 01.03.2011, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eTj8q_hTS-c (accessed 25.08.2015).

Within the factions, category A fans can also be seen as enemies and battered if they don't comply with the faction order. There have been many incidents involving individual fans who attend matches only occasionally but have violated some internal rule, e.g. used some banned pyrotechnic.

Factions also have internal division of labour. The most general distinction is between „singers“ and „soldiers.“ There is also the special group of pyrotechnic experts. Other fans are specialised in fights which are arranged according to certain rules of engagement (e.g. groups of equal numbers – 10, 30, 50 – fighting each other). Some of them are also hired as security guards as part of the security services provided after 2006 – 2007 by the factions leaders under deals with club owners.

Although each faction has a leader, none of the interviewees mentioned any formal procedure for his election by the faction. A respondent explained that his group has a ringleader, who organizes the joint singing and chanting, takes the lead in the organization of choreographies and excursions. His leadership was established as a gradual process, during which he proved as one of the most serious, loyal and charismatic within the group.⁵⁹⁹ The leaders of the most influential factions, however, are often linked to criminal networks and their control over the group is one based predominantly on fear.⁶⁰⁰ Unlike factions, official fan clubs have put in place a formal procedure for the election of leadership – a chairman, a board of directors and a control board. However, the case of Dimitar Angelov illustrated in the previous section, shows that these procedures are not always applied.

Although the majority of factions have not adopted any codes of conduct, a respondent mentioned that there are specific rules of behaviour within the groups. These rules might require certain behaviour at stadiums or ban participation in political activities for money or the hitting of women and children. A common rule for most factions is the prohibition to disclose information on planned activities to the police. The compliance with these rules is controlled within the group and a respondent mentioned that some of the internal fights within factions at stadiums are initiated exactly because of disobedience.⁶⁰¹

The majority of factions have been established on a territorial basis. This territoriality principle is then transferred to the stadium. Levski's core supporters, for example, are located in Sector B of the national stadium, while CSKA's supporters in Sector G. Each faction's meetings are usually held in an office in the neighbourhood from which the group originates. Many Ultras meet during the week in their own fan rooms or local pubs to plan choreographed displays or prepare banners.

Membership

The majority of factions have not endorsed a formal procedure for becoming a member. Several respondents mentioned that a fan should prove themselves as worthy of becoming a member. There is a trial period, during which one should

⁵⁹⁹ Interview with a football fan.

⁶⁰⁰ Sofia West and the Animals could be mentioned as an example.

⁶⁰¹ Interview with a football fan.

prove that the others can count on him/her in critical situations (fights with police and/or opponents) and in the organization of support activities.⁶⁰² Once a new member has won the trust of the group, he should strive not to let down the others. None of the respondents mentioned a case of terminating a membership on these grounds.

Some factions are more open to new members than others. This is usually in direct correlation to the extent to which the faction is involved in hooligan acts. The larger the fan base of a club, the more difficult it is for an individual to become part of the core group of supporters and vice versa. This is because more popular supporters' organizations attract more candidate members and could afford to be more selective. It is much easier to be accepted in the faction, if a trusted member takes you to the designated sector at the stadium or other supporters' events.⁶⁰³ A respondent suggested that it is extremely difficult to become a core member of the most influential and leading Levski's factions – Sofia West and South Division.⁶⁰⁴ In order to become a member of Sofia West, one should gain the trust and be recommended by at least three prominent members.⁶⁰⁵ It could be suggested that one of the reasons for the particularly strict selection procedure lies in the fact that the faction is involved in criminal activities,⁶⁰⁶ which requires higher level of secrecy in the organisation.

According to all interviewees no special recruiting tactics are needed to attract new members as usually there are more than enough candidates. Only interviewed supporters of Lokomotiv Sofia mentioned that being right-wing is an important precondition for becoming member of their factions.⁶⁰⁷

Role of social media

Ultras actively use social media outlets to advertise the idea of being a member of a particular faction.⁶⁰⁸ They often produce visual materials – pictures of the faction at stadiums and YouTube videos, which represent the life of an ultra. Although most of the respondents deny that this is a tactic for recruitment, the presence of factions on the internet is certainly an inspirational factor for young people. In addition, old methods of distributing information about factions (leaflets, graffiti) are still widely used. All respondents claimed that one cannot become a member of a faction only by being active on social media. The perpetual testing of one's loyalty in real-life situations is a necessary prerequisite for being a member.

Private messages on social media platforms are often used as a means of communication between younger members of a faction. This has been confirmed by interviewed football fans and police officers. A respondent mentioned that

⁶⁰² Ibid.

⁶⁰³ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁴ Interviews with Levski supporters, 19.05.2015.

⁶⁰⁵ ВЪЛКОВ (2013).

⁶⁰⁶ Interviews with police officers, media reports.

⁶⁰⁷ Interview with a football fan.

⁶⁰⁸ ДИМИТРОВ (2013).

younger ultras often engage in hate talk with rival supporters only on the internet. This has been viewed by older fans as a symptom of cowardice.

There are two major ways in which social media are used by Bulgarian football fans – for recruitment of future members and for the coordination of clandestine actions. The recruitment application of social media has gone through several stages. Until 2011 – 2012, there was no clear distinction between recruitment and coordination. Events, including staged fights between rival factions were arranged in online forums. Outsiders or deliberate troublemakers could be identified by the use of key words and jargon. The accounts of unwanted outsiders would be blocked. Later, these forums became accessible only through a password, which was provided only after a vetting process. Various precaution measures were introduced, such as changing participants and regular checks by phone.

Facebook became an increasingly popular recruitment platform around 2010 – 2011. In September 2011, during a week-long protest against a controversial Roma leader fans created a Facebook page which became both an organisational and ideological platform. It was used to coordinate the protests all over the country with faction affiliation avoided as an issue. Before the police discontinued the forum, it had over 50,000 participants, while street demonstrations were growing. A comparison of police surveillance of events and the number of commitments to participation in Facebook indicates a high ratio of actual turnout – the police estimated that around 30% of those committing through the forum actually did take place. This is particularly high when contrasted with the turnout at environmental events – only 10% of those committing through Facebook actually attend.⁶⁰⁹ No social media alternative was found following the closure of the Facebook page since Twitter had not yet been popular in Bulgaria at the time.

The growing availability of smartphones and increasingly successful efforts by police to crack forum passwords led to gradual abandonment of members-only forum platforms. New technologies allow greater privacy through mobile applications such as Viber, Skype, WhatsApp, and sometimes even more specialised software. Fans are aware that the police have problems accessing encrypted communications.⁶¹⁰

During the political protests in early 2013, the factions did not follow any explicit ideological line but generally supported the protests, although there is little reliable information given the closed nature of their discussion forums. The same applies to their participation in other political events in the summer and autumn of 2013.

Similarly, in the summer of 2015, there was no solicitation of public support through open Facebook groups. According to the police, in members-only groups there had been little effort to organise fans, possibly because of the lack of significant funding.⁶¹¹

⁶⁰⁹ Interview with an expert on Bulgarian social media.

⁶¹⁰ Interviews with police officers.

⁶¹¹ *Ibid.*

6. REPERTOIRE OF ACTIONS

Acts not associated with violence

The non-violent conduct of ultras and football hooligans are related to their various football support activities at stadiums. The acts can be classified as follows:

Graffiti, stickers and wall inscriptions all over the cities; development of video content. Graffiti usually illustrate the favourite club's emblem and/or name, or the name and emblem of the faction. They are usually placed on trains, abandoned construction sites, etc. Inscriptions are written everywhere, including on public buildings. The stickers are often seen on road signs, buses, metro trains. The aim of the ultras is to fill the city with images related to their favourite football club. As mentioned in a previous section this is used to attract new supporters. The visualisations, however, can also have offensive, racist or homophobic content.

Wearing certain brands, fan scarves and other clothing. The casual dress code has always been a distinctive characteristic of ultras and hooligans. While it has evolved as a way to conceal from the police one's affiliation with a particular faction, nowadays the dress code is well known to the authorities and the general public. In Bulgaria, ultras do not stick to the usual brands (Fred Perry, Lacoste, Ben Sherman, etc.) strictly, but choose clothes with large hoods and long zips to conceal their faces from the police and shield from the smoke at stadiums.⁶¹²

Fan choreography: chanting, waving banners and singing at stadiums. Ultras invest significant efforts and time in the preparation and display of fan choreography, including the composition of songs, writing lyrics and preparation of banners. The lyrics and banners are usually focused on favourite club's triumphs or are offensive to rival teams. Sometimes, the banners concern topics of interest to ultras. For example, with the banners ultras express their attitude towards the club's owners or their attitude towards the *Law on the Protection of Public Order during Sport Events*. The chanting or shouting at competitors or other spectators of messages whose content displays or incites hatred based on racial, national, regional or religious affiliation should be seen as a violent act.

Protests and marches. Ultras and hooligans participate in parades, commemorating historical persons such as the Lukov March.⁶¹³ In 2015, the march was attended by supporters of both Levski and CSKA and was guarded by fans of Beroe Stara Zagora. Each year, football hooligans take part in the protests against the annual Sofia Pride. At such demonstrations, rivalries are set aside and participants from different factions are united by a common nationalistic or patriotic cause. Supporters of rivaling factions march together and follow strict instructions from their leaders on how to behave.

Travel. Ultras often organise trips to other Bulgarian or foreign cities in order to attend a game of the favourite team.

⁶¹² Interview with a football fan.

⁶¹³ See footnote 254.

Donation campaigns. Although this is not widely known, ultras factions often organise or engage in donation campaign, such as collecting money for paying the debts of their club.

Acts associated with violence

Violent acts can be grouped into several categories:

Use of pyrotechnics and other objects on sports grounds or among spectators, which may jeopardise people's lives. The most common violation at stadiums is the use of pyrotechnics. Ultras see pyrotechnics as a way to create atmosphere at the stadiums and often include it in their choreographies. Very often, however, the pyrotechnics turn into a weapon and they throw them at the pitch. In 2000, a handmade bomb killed a 30-year old man who had nothing to do with faction rivalries. On 26 February 2011, CSKA's hooligans bombarded the police with pieces of iron and concrete, studs, torches and bombs. Thirty-two police officers were injured and as a result all CSKA supporters were expelled from the stadium at halftime.

Pitch invasion with the aim to impede or stop the sports event. A landmark act of football hooliganism was the successful invasion by CSKA's supporters of the pitch in the town of Mezdra during a game with a local team on 21 March 2010. The match was inadequately guarded – in fact, there was practically no security at all – and CSKA's ultras seized the opportunity to express their discontent.⁶¹⁴

Destroying or damaging public infrastructure (installations in the sports facility, vehicles, commercial facilities, etc.). This is one of the most common violent hooligan acts and almost each major derby in the country is accompanied by breaking of stadium seats and damaging vehicles. It is worth mentioning that football hooligans sometimes use vandalism as an expression of their position towards certain policies. In 2013, CSKA's hooligans caused serious damage to the BFU building. They broke windows and stormed the building causing further damage. The reason was dissatisfaction with the Union's management decisions.⁶¹⁵

Not paying bills in cafes and restaurants. This is a very common practice before and after matches. Ultras and hooligans usually sit at cafes and restaurants around stadiums in large groups, often abusing alcohol and drugs, intimidating the staff and fleeing without paying.

Group fights between rival factions. Group fights between rival fan groups usually happen not only before, during and after football matches, but also when specifically arranged by the rivalling factions. Several interviewees confirmed that there is a practice of organising fights in various formats.⁶¹⁶ An interviewed minor mentioned a case of an organised fight between young supporters of Levski and CSKA next to a school building. According to a law enforcement expert, 'gentlemanship' and old values are declining among football hooligans. The older skinheads used to organise

⁶¹⁴ *24chasa.bg*, „Съдят 10 фенове на ЦСКА за скандала в Мездра (видео)“, 26.03.2010.

⁶¹⁵ *Dnevnik.bg*, „Съдът постанови домашен арест за фенове, потрошили централата на БФС“, 02.07. 2013.

⁶¹⁶ Interviews with football fans.

fights between matching groups and would shake hands after the fight. Now this is often not the case, and 10 fans would engage in fights against only 2 from the rival club; there are attacks on the property and cars of rivalling supporters, young hooligans use knives, make selfies and pose on social media.⁶¹⁷ According to police officers, some factions pay martial arts fighters and athletes to take part in organised fights. Some of the factions have also formed their own “fight clubs” – they hire sports facilities and their members receive combat training.

One of the major group fight took place in 2006 before a derby between Levski and CSKA. Over 100 fans were involved in a fight close to the National Palace of Culture after CSKA's hooligans attacked an office of Levski fans.⁶¹⁸ A post-match act of hooliganism that gained public attention was Levski supporters' cruelty against Chernomorets fans after the game between the two clubs on 13 August 2011 in the city of Varna. Chernomorets fans celebrated the win of their club at a bar in the city, when a dozen masked Levski hooligans invaded the bar and attacked the home supporters. They used prohibited weapons such as knives, hammers and wrenches. Five people – one of whom a young lady – were seriously injured.⁶¹⁹

In 2012, there were ethnic tensions related to group fights between hooligans of Levski Sofia and Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina). On the night before the game, the Bosnian ultras began violating public order and provoked the police. Levski hooligans came to the place and the fight was inevitable. There were injured people, including a journalist and a policeman. The next day Levski ultras displayed extremely insulting banners during the match.

Thefts, including banners of rival factions. On 26 February 2011, Levski's hooligans stole the flag of CSKA's leading faction “14.” Since this was considered by ultras as a significant humiliation, CSKA supporters responded by arranging a fight where a CSKA hooligan was stabbed with a knife. This event became a turning point for the Bulgarian hooligan community since it led to the de facto disbanding of the extreme far-right CSKA faction “14.”⁶²⁰ An interviewee also mentioned that his fellow fans would often be robbed by rival football fans.

Individual physical assaults on other fans, passers-by or members of minority groups. Individual physical assaults are often motivated by hatred based on racial, national, regional or religious grounds. The predominantly hate nature of these violent acts turns them into one of the most serious hooligan actions. Individual physical assaults committed at stadiums could easily grow into group fights.

An example illustrating the intolerance of ultras/hooligans towards certain ethnic minorities is the case of 29-year old Muslim of Turkish origin Georgi Dimitrov who was battered into a state of coma in 2013.⁶²¹

⁶¹⁷ Interview with an expert from the MoI.

⁶¹⁸ Йотов, С. „На мач – с паве“, в. *Капитал*, 21.09.2006.

⁶¹⁹ *Dnevnik.bg*, „Установени са двама от ултрасите след мача „Черно море“ – „Левски“ във Варна“, 25.08.2011.

⁶²⁰ Тарандова, Е., Б. Къртунов. „Войната на знамената“, в. *Капитал*, 02.03.2011.

⁶²¹ *Dnevnik.bg*, „Липсата на стратегия за борба с футболното хулиганство доведе до погрома в Пловдив“, 25.05.2003.

Participation in violent protests. Very often there are escalations to violence during protests, in which football supporters take part. In 2008, hundreds of hooligans protested against the first Sofia Pride and tried to attack the participants. More than 60 people were arrested and lots of knives, bombs, and Molotov cocktails were found and confiscated.⁶²²

In 2014, football hooligans attempted to assault a mosque during a protest in the Bulgarian city of Plovdiv.⁶²³ The demonstration which gathered around 2,000-3,000 people, mainly nationalists and supporters of football clubs, started in front of the Judicial Palace and protested against the return of the ancient and inactive Kursum Mosque to the Chief Muftiate upon which the court in Plovdiv was about to decide that day. The rally escalated as the mob of protesters started throwing stones, bottles and flaming rockets at the historical Dzhumaya Mosque, smashed its windows, tried to storm it and clashed with the police.

Hooligans then attempted an attack on the Turkish Consulate in Plovdiv and the office of the ethnic Turkish party Movement for Rights and Freedoms but were disbursed by riot police. The police arrested 120 people, 4 received light sentences.

7. POLITICAL AFFILIATIONS AND THE USE OF HOOLIGANS

Affiliation with political organisations and ideologies

The interviews conducted with football fans and Mol representatives indicate that fan clubs are not directly linked to any parties. A respondent mentioned that individual members of factions probably support right-wing and nationalist political parties (in particular Ataka and NFSB), but there are no core circles in the factions formed on the basis of affiliation to a certain political party. A few years ago, Ataka used to be very popular among ultras and hooligans but they have realised that this is not a true nationalist party.⁶²⁴ Another interviewee explained that the existing nationalist parties are populists and fail to take any practical steps. Nevertheless, he mentioned that ultras share a lot of Ataka's ideas.⁶²⁵

At the regional level, there are cases where local factions support a particular politician.⁶²⁶ A supporter of Naftex Bourgas mentioned that one of the leading figures of the fan club is a municipal councillor from NFSB which, in his opinion, undoubtedly affected the political affiliations of the whole club.⁶²⁷ An expert

⁶²² Чалева, Л., „Десетки в ареста след гей парада в София”, *B: dnes.dir.bg*, 28.06.2008.

⁶²³ *Mediapool.bg*, „Футболни хулигани вилняха в Пловдив”, 14.02.2014.

⁶²⁴ Interview with a football fan.

⁶²⁵ The interviewee mentioned as an example that he approves Ataka's idea to nationalise all companies that are currently operated under concessions by foreign investors.

⁶²⁶ Interview with a football fan. He mentioned that this has happened in Plovdiv, Stara Zagora, Veliko Tarnovo but failed to provide any names.

⁶²⁷ Interview with a football fan.

also suggested that all factions are politically dependent. Parties have specially designated persons in charge of communication with the factions and instruct them what to do in certain political situations.⁶²⁸

Political ideologies and street protests “for hire”

The crisis in public support for political parties and the declining efficiency of political engineering in creating new parties prompted the search for ways to use fan groups. Still, football fans participate in political rallies not only because they have been paid to do so.

The involvement of fan groups in political affairs can be traced to the early days after the collapse of the communist regime in late 1989. Football was a motivating factor for joining protest marches and sit-ins – there was a Levski fans command post in the tent camp that was set up by protesters in front of the President's Office in 1990.⁶²⁹ Levski fans were motivated to join street protests by their experience with violence by communist militia (police) against active football supporters. There was little ideology involved in this kind of motivation – the opposition's banners were blue and so were Levski's. Urban football myths were mixing with actual historic events in a kind of ad hoc creed. Claims surfaced that the football club had been subject to persecution by the communist regime and that club leaders had been killed or imprisoned after 1944.

All interviewees confirm that members of fan clubs are politically active whenever there are mass protests or other events where they can express their views. There were, however, differing opinions as to whether these participations were driven by genuine personal beliefs or because fans are paid off and controlled by certain political/business circles. According to an expert, there is a sort of “marketplace” where fans are hired for participating in public protests, but it is not organised through the faction's core and is rather diverse in terms of participation. While the expert suggested that in 1997 Levski's supporters were used in the protests against the then government, an interviewed hooligan mentioned that this was the only “genuine” protest in which he took part. He defined the protest as genuine because he participated in it on his own convictions and because of the violence that erupted.⁶³⁰

Thus, it could be claimed that in 1997 there was a mixture of reasons for the participation of Levski fan groups in the occupation of a major Sofia intersection, the assault on the National Assembly building and the subsequent street violence. On the one hand, they were against the “communist Videnov government” and wanted to bring down “the government which caused the banking collapse, economic crisis and mass poverty among the people earning an average of \$30 a month.” An additional non-pecuniary reason for the fans to join in was the opportunity to fight the police. At the same time, they had purely monetary incentives. According to a long-term Levski fan, key opposition politicians started to pay fans for joining street protests:

⁶²⁸ Interview with an expert from the Mol.

⁶²⁹ *Trud.bg*, „Футболните агитки – юмрукът на масите“, 29.04.2013.

⁶³⁰ Interview with a football fan.

„[Evgeni] Bakardzhiev⁶³¹ would pay anyone, would also pay compensation in case of injuries, would pay for every fight. Even those who did not care for UDF⁶³² participated. Payments created order and discipline. If it weren't for the money, some would come, others wouldn't. Bakardzhiev's people paid in Germans Marks – it was a lot of money and was also reliable money since the lev was devaluing by the day.“⁶³³

According to the interviewees, 1997 had been a turning point in the remunerated participation of organised fans in protests. The people around Bakardzhiev – a key figure in the UDF and the UDF government – understood the potential of organized fan groups and kept open the channels of communication with the fan leaders. This could arguably be the reason why no football fans participated in protests during the UDF government (1997 – 2001).

The issue of the political use of fan groups resurfaced at the time of the next economic crisis. During the protests against the so called “tripartite coalition” government on 14 January 2009 category C fans challenged the police guarding the parliament building. The core of the challengers consisted of members of Sofia West and the Lokomotiv Plovdiv fan group; the police also apprehended two fans from Bourgas. Around 30 young men wearing black hoods or scarves hiding their faces penetrated the crowd and formed a closed circle. They were armed with stones, chains, snowballs. The ensuing scuffles with the police compromised the peaceful nature of the protest. According to interviewees, this was the beginning of the use of fan factions to sabotage protests.⁶³⁴ “The troublemakers are always ‘financially incentivised.’ All it takes is to bring in a dozen agitators who would provoke the protesters to turn against them. This attracts media attention and is sufficient to create havoc.“⁶³⁵

Police records from 2009 show that there were representatives of various factions during the protests that year. The presence of unemployed supporters from around the country who could not usually be able to pay their way to come to the capital suggested that the fans had not been there because of their ideological beliefs. The fact that there were no representatives of the faction's core during the protest suggested that the organisation of the support was not paid through the factions.⁶³⁶

A boom of the remunerated use of football fans took place in 2013. The participation of ultras and hooligans in the 2013 protests against the caretaker government was a subject of public discussion as it was believed that certain political parties paid ultras and hooligans to participate in the protest and provoke the police.⁶³⁷ The parties alleged of doing that were the Bulgarian Socialist Party,

⁶³¹ A future Deputy Prime Minister in the UDF government.

⁶³² Union of Democratic Forces, the then opposition party.

⁶³³ Interview with a long-term supporter of Levski.

⁶³⁴ Interview with an expert from the MoI.

⁶³⁵ ВЪЛКОВ (2013).

⁶³⁶ Interview with an expert from the MoI.

⁶³⁷ Митов, Б., „Планът ‘Сидеров’ с ‘криминалните банди,’ който ‘ignorevolen’ провали”, В: *Media-pool.bg*, 21.06.2013.

the nationalistic Ataka and GERB. It was widely discussed that these parties paid individual ultras and hooligans, mostly CSKA supporters.⁶³⁸ Although most of the interviewees from the factions refused to discuss this question in greater detail, some claimed that during the 2013 protests Ataka paid money to CSKA's ultras and hooligans and GERB paid to Levski's ultras and hooligans in order to participate in the protests.⁶³⁹

A number of differences in the relationships between various fan factions and political parties can be summarised on the basis of interviews with law enforcement officers. Levski factions did not participate in the February 2013 protests which brought down the Borissov government (2009 – 2013) and triggered early elections. According to interviewees, not only is the Levski fan group considered close to Borissov's party GERB but at that time a fan leader was paying off fans not to participate in protests. Indeed, there had been no South Division or Sofia West members at the protests.

The situation with CSKA was quite different. There, factions were multiplying rapidly, reaching 12-13 despite attempts by the police to stem the process, with only 2-3 getting involved in street fights. In 2013, CSKA fans turned into a supply pool for small nationalist groups and political engineering. They were driven to participate in the February street clashes by both ideological and commercial reasons. Ofanziva had traditional ties with IMRO through the "14" faction, which had not yet merged with Ofanziva. The Animals support Ataka and its leader Volen Siderov through its sub-faction in Samokov.⁶⁴⁰

The interviewees indicated that during the protests of early 2013 a special effort was made to bypass the information sources which the police had among the Sofia factions. In addition to "14" and 2-3 other CSKA factions, there were also fans from outside Sofia – from Plovdiv, Pazardjik, and Rousse through Bisser "the Blot" Milanov.⁶⁴¹ In Sofia, in demand were young men who had not been registered by the police as high risk fans. Thus, individuals frequenting fitness facilities and those training in martial arts were recruited. In addition to nationalist parties such as Ataka and IMRO, there were also smaller radical right-wing parties led by controversial businessmen, such as Slavi Binev's GORD and Svoboden Narod (Free People).

⁶³⁸ Interview with an expert from the MoI.

⁶³⁹ Interview with a CSKA supporter, 09.06.2015.

⁶⁴⁰ It should be noted that the anti-government protests started from Varna – the third largest city in Bulgaria with two popular football clubs – Chernomorec and Spartak (which was relegated from the premier league). Usually, the local police would not qualify local fan factions as falling into the risk categories. Thus, some observers believe that what happened was organised by intermediaries who knew how MoI worked. Notably, the fans had already participated in protests against high electricity prices in previous years. Varna is also the city where football fans joined protests on uncharacteristic issues, such as against shale gas fracking. This suggests that the organisers of the protest around Ataka have interests coinciding with those of Russian government funds financing campaigns against fracking. The fans who participated in the January 2012 protests are believed to have also been part of the protests in January 2013. It is not clear whether they had been paid for by Ataka (or some other nationalist group) or it was a spontaneous reaction to the high cost of electricity and heating.

⁶⁴¹ Milanov has a police record for drug dealing in Rousse (Center for the Study of Democracy, 2003).

There were various examples of fan factions used by political parties and politicians during the political turmoil of 2014 – 2015. Following the May 2013 elections, a left of centre government of the BSP and the MRF, supported by Ataka, came to power. On 14 June 2014, the biggest protests since the beginning of transition erupted in Sofia and other major cities prompted by the nomination of Delyan Peevski – a controversial businessman, media mogul and MRF MP – for Chairman of SANS. Counter-protests were staged from the very beginning in which football fans were used.

Initially, attempts were made to use seasoned troublemakers such the political formation SILA and Bisser Milanov.⁶⁴² These failed because were anticipated by the protesters and intervention by the Mol.⁶⁴³ A new form of fan engagement which appeared at that time was guarding politicians. Ataka leader Volen Siderov and other MPs started to be use football fans as guards after the Ataka headquarters were surrounded by protesters.⁶⁴⁴ These services were preformed by a Samokov sub-faction of the Animals (CSKA) together with other Animals members.⁶⁴⁵

Later, when the government strategists assumed that there had been sufficient BSP supporters in the capital who – although elderly – could maintain the momentum of the counter-protests, it was decided to establish a new populist party as a tool for propping up the BSP-MRF coalition. The political party Bulgaria without Censorship (BwC),⁶⁴⁶ was created from the ground up through funding provided by the Bulgarian Corporate Commercial Bank (CCB)⁶⁴⁷ and with the support of Peevski; it was led by the former TV presenter Nikolai Barekov. The intention was to substitute Ataka with a new centre-right party which would help BSP and MRF stay in power after the next elections.

Making BwC popular and building its local structures was an interesting example of political engineering which was the first of its kind in the post-1989 period. The technology included a mixed format of rally-and-concert where prominent singers, actors and politicians appeared, and covered by TV7.⁶⁴⁸ Initially, the main organiser of football fans was IMRO. Later, when the majority owner of CCB Tsvetan Vassilev bought Botev Plovdiv, political rallies were attended by

⁶⁴² *Fakti.bg*, „Пети ден в защита на Орешарски,” 01.07.2013.

⁶⁴³ It is not clear why the policy makers at the Mol decided to restrain these provocations since it was obvious that they would subvert the protests. It was speculated that the protests would soon die down or would lead to violence, which would further weaken the government.

⁶⁴⁴ Ataka was resented by both protesters and opposition because despite its professed nationalism it backed the government together with the MRF – a party of ethnic Turks and supported by the Roma.

⁶⁴⁵ Interviews with police officers in Sofia and fans from the core of Ofanziva.

⁶⁴⁶ BwC received 10.66% of the vote – the fourth biggest number of votes – at the European Parliament elections in May 2014. At the national parliamentary elections that followed BwC won 15 seats and was renamed Bulgarian Democratic Centre (https://bg.wikipedia.org/wiki/България_без_цензура/).

⁶⁴⁷ The fourth largest bank in Bulgaria, which was driven to bankruptcy in 2014 because of its exposure to risky investment and involvement in political conflicts, thus triggering the most severe financial instability in the country since the 1996 financial crisis.

⁶⁴⁸ The TV channel where Barekov had been executive director and which is believed to be owned by Tsvetan Vassilev.

members of all Botev factions. At some rallies in Sofia, Botev fans would number 3,000, while in other cities where BwC held rallies they would be around 1,000. According to various sources,⁶⁴⁹ there was **cooperation among the fan factions of a number of football clubs**, for example between Botev Plovdiv fans and CSKA's the Animals arranged through the leader of the latter Rossen Petrov.

Some restrictions on the public conduct of fans were introduced following the establishment of BwC. It was claimed that "Tsvetan Vassilev did not allow" organisers to direct fans to anti-Borissov and anti-GERB actions⁶⁵⁰ (at the time GERB had been in opposition).

Throughout the BSP-MRF government, the other major party GERB made almost no use of football fans. GERB would bus in young men from around the country to participate in Sofia rallies but avoided football fans. There are a number of reasons for this. It is believed that the MoI had been controlled by BSP and MRF and could therefore easily identify participants in the rallies. Fan participation could also lead to incidents which would cause public outrage.⁶⁵¹

Following the CCB crisis, fans were gone from political protests. The two leading Sofia clubs – Levski and CSKA – entered very difficult times, with CSKA declared insolvent and relegated to the amateur league, and Levski ending in seventh place in the premier league at the end of the 2014 – 2015 season. As a result, audience numbers at their matches fell sharply and their fan factions lost membership. As a result of the 2014 – 2015 crisis, four leading clubs with large fan groups – Levski, CSKA, Botev Plovdiv and Lokomotiv Plovdiv – changed owners.

One of the least known elements in this process is the **intermediary**. All interviewees agree that political parties have designated persons dealing with football fans and ensuring their participation in political events. These are usually former police officers who are experienced in working with fans⁶⁵² or "former football players who are drinking buddies with the crime bosses in the fan groups."⁶⁵³ How the financial flows are directed by the parties and how exactly the organisation of street protests takes place are known only in very general terms. Low level participants claim that participation fees are "miserly;"⁶⁵⁴ other sources speak of "20 to 50 levs (€10-20), sometimes pizza and beer."⁶⁵⁵ These intermediaries are trusted by members of the factions as it is known that they "pay up"; which is why they also control attendance. On occasions, hired participants are expected to meet certain criteria. For example, those hired to protect the headquarters and MPs from Ataka are required to weigh over 80 kg.⁶⁵⁶ Fans not meeting their side of the bargain as well as those breaking discipline are punished by the punitive squads. There have been occasions

⁶⁴⁹ Interviews with police officers in Sofia and Plovdiv and fans from the core of Ofanziva.

⁶⁵⁰ Interviews with police officers.

⁶⁵¹ Interviews with police officers.

⁶⁵² Interview with a police officer.

⁶⁵³ Interview with fans from the core of South Division.

⁶⁵⁴ Interviews with football fans.

⁶⁵⁵ Interviews with police officers.

⁶⁵⁶ Interviews with fans from the core of South Division.

when recruiters switched to another faction when the first one failed to ensure sufficient turnout.⁶⁵⁷

Ethnicity-based protests with political support

Three incidents are exemplary in this regard – Katunitca of 2011, and Garmen and Orlandovtsi of 2015.

As noted, the nationalist cause often unites rival factions and leads to joint actions such as (violent) protests and demonstrations. The most well-known example of such an action were the events in the village of Katunitca in 2011. Hooligans supporting all the major clubs assembled in the village of Katunitca in order to seek revenge over the death of a young boy who was killed in a hit-and-run car accident following previous conflicts with the local Roma community, and more specifically with an influential and controversial Roma family. The incident provoked public disorder and a series of acts of vandalism, arsons and clashes between football hooligans and ultra-right supporters, on the one side, and local Roma, on the other. Football hooligans rushed into the village chanting “death to the Gipsy scum,” caused riots and set two properties owned by the local informal Roma leader on fire.⁶⁵⁸

The Garmen events took place in the spring of 2015, followed by protests in the Sofia district of Orlandovtsi. Garmen is a small municipality with a population of 16,000, situated close to the border with Greece and the town of Gotse Delchev. Following an attack by several dozen young Roma men against some ethnic Bulgarians, local residents – supported by residents of Gotse Delchev and neighbouring villages – started a protest demanding that the government deal with “Roma criminality” and that Roma dwellings with no construction permits be demolished. Media attention was drawn to the fact that members of a CSKA fan faction from Garmen together with Levski fans and some persons with criminal records joined the protests. Until that moment, there had been no cases of fans participating in clashes in small towns and villages, as they would typically engage in such actions in large cities. Next, fan factions from Sofia and Plovdiv started to arrive in Garmen. This was due to the fact that a local businessman had old contacts with a CSKA sub-faction.⁶⁵⁹ IMRO supporters also joined the action.⁶⁶⁰ Eventually, the police managed to prevent an escalation of fan participation in the disturbances.

Shortly after the Garmen incident, a similar protest was launched following a clash between Roma and ethnic Bulgarians in the Sofia district of Orlandovtsi. Football fan factions were mobilised again, and the protest was joined by politicians from nationalist parties. The police sent in considerable forces and the MoI exercised behind the scenes pressure on faction leaders.

In the wake of the events, there were two serious incidents of Roma persons being battered by football fans causing fears that this could trigger a wave of violence.

⁶⁵⁷ Interview with a police officer.

⁶⁵⁸ *24chasa.bg*, „Измъкнаха цар Киро от Катунца, футболни фенове нападат“, 24.09.2011.

⁶⁵⁹ Interviews with police officers.

⁶⁶⁰ Interview with a police officer.

The fact that the perpetrators were quickly identified indicates that Sofia police have sufficient capacity to react and they know the identities of high-risk fans.

In summary, the use of football fan groups at the September 2011 (Katunitsa) and May-September 2015 (Garmen and Orlandovtsi) incidents indicates that confrontation with the Roma is becoming an issue with serious concern regarding the radicalisation of football fans. This includes the emergence of permanent zones of conflict between the Roma and ethnic Bulgarians, such as the outer districts of large cities where incidents could become a usual form of demonstration by the Roma. In this context, nationalist groups seek the support of football fans resulting in coalitions which had been unknown 3-4 years ago. Factions which are otherwise hostile to each other join forces to use violence against large groups of people. Nationalist politicians use such incidents to get media exposure and attract public attention to their cause.⁶⁶¹

The use of football fans in political protests or in conflicts among ethnic groups threatens not only to radicalise fans but to escalate the conflicts in which they are recruited to participate. These risks make the expert analyses of this process all the more important, especially as such analyses are indispensable for making preventive measures better informed.

8. INSTITUTIONAL/LAW ENFORCEMENT RESPONSE

The main institution responsible for tackling football hooliganism is the Ministry of Interior. The first attempt to introduce systematic monitoring over football hooliganism was made in 2000 through establishing a working group at the MoI General Directorate of National Police, which later – given the growing seriousness of the phenomenon – was extended to include employees from other MoI departments. Such groups were also established at the territorial units of the MoI. The working group at central level was tasked with conducting analyses and forecasts on the development of football hooliganism, including through the use of data from sociological population surveys.⁶⁶² Police statistics at that time showed that most football hooligans were from the two biggest fan clubs of Levski and CSKA and located in Sofia. In 2002, the police was monitoring around 546 active football hooligans and some 300 individuals prone to such behaviour (especially after alcohol use).⁶⁶³ The number of minors (12-14 years of age) involved in anti-social behaviour related to football hooliganism was 126.⁶⁶⁴ Hooligan acts in other sports were (and still are) isolated and associated with much lower risks for public safety.

At that time, the police and the BFU started conducting risk evaluation of football matches in accordance with established international practices in order

⁶⁶¹ At the time of both the 2011 and 2015 incidents there were local elections held at which nationalist parties performed well.

⁶⁶² Радева (2009).

⁶⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁴ Ibid.

to deploy the necessary measures for maintaining public order before, during and after matches. The factors taken into account when determining the risk level include: the importance of the match for the championship, level of activity of the supporters, received information on expected attendance, organised trips by supporters from other localities, etc.

In 2004, the *Law on the Protection of Public Order during Sport Events* (LPPOSE) was adopted. It introduced a number of provisions aimed at ensuring better security and safety at football matches, as well as stricter sanctions for acts of football hooliganism (see further the section on the legal framework below). Law enforcement experts expressed concern that a centralised automated register on football hooliganism that was prescribed in the LPPOSE has not been established to date. The register was supposed to contain all data pertaining to sanctions imposed under the law, investigated persons and offences related to football hooliganism.

In 2014, the sector “Hooliganism, extremism and sports events” within the General Directorate of National Police was dissolved and is undergoing reorganisation at the time of writing, pending re-establishment in 2016. The sector performed the functions of a National Information Centre in charge for conducting analyses, prognoses, risk evaluations of matches, and also for cooperation with foreign police agencies in relation to international matches. During this restructuring period its functions have been divided between the economic police, which deals with fixed matches,⁶⁶⁵ and the security police, which however has no operational function (gathering of information and investigations). This disrupted the continuity of monitoring and systematisation of information relating to football hooliganism at the national police, as the data collected over the years was archived without being updated or accessible during this period.⁶⁶⁶

The Sofia Police Directorate appears to have one of the most specialised units for tackling football hooliganism, established in 2008 in response to growing increasingly stronger links between football fans and far-right movements. The unit has in recent years improved its effectiveness in terms of number of police charges for football hooliganism upheld by the court.⁶⁶⁷ It has a separate well maintained database with operational information, but it is not clear to what extent it is available to other police units, and to what extent data from the territorial police units (including Sofia) are systematically entered into the centralised criminal statistics database. A similar unit exists in the second largest city Plovdiv, which also reported growing effectiveness in processing sanctions (due to good cooperation with the courts) and preventing violent incidents.

Ever since the early 2000s, when more systematic efforts were undertaken by police in tackling football hooliganism, the main problem in monitoring and statistically

⁶⁶⁵ In organized sports, match fixing occurs as a match is played to a completely or partially predetermined result, violating the rules of the game and often the law.

⁶⁶⁶ Interview with a police officer.

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid. While a few years ago only 10% of the police acts ended in convictions for hooliganism, today this percentage is 90%. This is so because the unit developed a regular practice of sending a police officer to each court hearing together with the defendant, in order to be well informed of the court's motives and improve their work.

measuring the scope of the phenomena has been the lack of *Criminal Code* provisions which differentiate football hooliganism from other violations of public order. Acts of football hooliganism are recorded by police and courts under the heading of “general” or “serious” hooliganism, which does not allow the authorities to take stock of the actual size of the problem. Despite legal developments and the specialisation of law enforcement in tackling football hooliganism, **there are still no systematic police statistics and analysis of the phenomenon.**

The responsible authorities apply several **preventive measures** in their efforts to prevent football hooliganism acts at stadiums:

- **Risk assessment of matches** informs the planned and organisation of security not only in and around the stadium and during the match, but also before and after and around the city, in order to prevent damages to public property and endangering citizens’ safety by football fans. This often requires disbursing police officers around the city who conduct preliminary checks and monitor the behaviour of fans.
- **Strict security checks at stadiums** and preventing access to the facility of blacklisted or drunk football fans, and entry with banned objects (alcohol, drugs, pyrotechnics, weapons, etc.). Different security levels are applied to different matches, with the main derbies in the country being assigned the highest security level. This is probably why during the last couple of years the most violent hooligan acts happened during unpopular matches that usually take place in smaller towns.⁶⁶⁸ According to law enforcement officers, the maintenance and investments in the stadiums and sports facilities is another area that needs urgent improvement in order for the facilities to comply with international safety standards (for example having CCTV).
- **Stewards at stadiums** are actually selected from within the hooligan circles without the necessary screening and vetting as international best practice requires, and do not have the necessary security and safety training, which according to respondents undermines their role at stadiums.⁶⁶⁹ There are media-reported cases in which the stewards themselves initiate the violent behaviour at stadiums.⁶⁷⁰
- An effective approach to preventing violent incidents is for police officers specialised in tackling football hooliganism from Sofia and Plovdiv to travel together with the fans to matches of bigger football clubs hosted in smaller cities. The local police that guards such matches is not familiar with the high-risk individuals from the big factions and do not have experience in preventing violent incidents.⁶⁷¹
- **Preliminary questioning** of suspected perpetrators and their temporary detention. Several respondents mentioned that the police often conduct questioning prior to football matches in case it has any inside information.⁶⁷²

⁶⁶⁸ For example, in July 2015 a serious fight took place among CSKA supporters at a match in a small town in Bulgaria (see <http://www.sportal.bg/news.php?news=556431>)

⁶⁶⁹ Interview with a sports journalist and a football fan.

⁶⁷⁰ For example, <http://www.sportal.bg/video.php?video=46552>; <http://www.blitz.bg/sport/article/138062>

⁶⁷¹ Interview with a police officer.

⁶⁷² Interviews with football fans.

- **Preventive talks with the leaders of prominent factions.** The police often engage fan club leaders in preventive talks. Although fan leaders cannot always be trusted to deliver on their promises, the dialogue with the factions is perceived by law enforcement as being crucial.⁶⁷³

Engagement of faction leaders in prevention measures by the police often raises the question of the line between prevention of violence and sheltering wrongdoers from investigation in exchange for information. Informants are not registered in line with standard procedures and are handled rather informally.⁶⁷⁴

Due to the political sensitivity of football hooliganism, it would appear that police avoid working on prevention or disruption of high-risk relationships between political parties and fan factions. Even if there is sufficient information that politicians from ultra-right/nationalist parties are actively looking to cause trouble during street protests with the participation of football hooligans, police tend to work “asymmetrically”. This means that they caution the football fans, but leave the political intermediaries out. A similar line of passive behaviour can be observed on the part of the specialised intelligence agency SANS, which is supposed to tackle political radicalisation and extremism.

Repressive measures applied by authorities include 24-hour detention, fines, prohibition to attend matches and imprisonment. A senior police manager mentioned that fines are not an effective measure, as football hooligans often do not have the financial capacity to pay them and the government does not have a proper fine collection system. According to him, bans on attending football games is a much more effective measure compared to fines, since it takes the hooligan out of the scene.⁶⁷⁵ The ban can be imposed for a period from 1 to 3 years, but to be effective, compliance needs to be monitored. Indeed, a few respondents mentioned that the ban is not always enforced.⁶⁷⁶ According to the Sofia Police Directorate, in 2015 there were 25 bans imposed on fans to attend matches, while their number had been much higher in previous years. LPPOSE allows offenders in football hooliganism to be indicted and brought to court by the police without the involvement of a prosecutor. At the same time, both criminal and administrative offences are to be adjudicated in court and the police has no powers to impose administrative sanctions, as it is the case in many other EU member states; this makes administrative sanctioning more cumbersome.

Football clubs and the BFU play a supporting role in the implementation of measures for countering football hooliganism. Football clubs are required to appoint a security coordinator who should cooperate with fan clubs, the police and security managers of sport venues. A respondent explained that since recently some fan clubs have also appointed a person in charge of cooperation with the football club and the police – a Supporters Liaison Officer.⁶⁷⁷ Such a

⁶⁷³ Interview with a police officer.

⁶⁷⁴ Interview with a former police officer specialised in tackling football hooliganism.

⁶⁷⁵ Interview with a police officer.

⁶⁷⁶ Interview with a football fan.

⁶⁷⁷ Interview with a sports journalist.

measure was also envisioned in the *Law on the Protection of Public Order during Sport Events*.⁶⁷⁸ The effectiveness of this institutional novelty is yet to be assessed, although doubts were expressed about the extent to which a person from the hooligan circles could collaborate with the police effectively.⁶⁷⁹ The chronic lack of material capacities of sports clubs often results in failing to take all statutory measures to prevent violence at the matches that they organise.

In its *Strategy for the Development of Football 2012 – 2016*⁶⁸⁰ the BFU sees football hooliganism as a threat to the development of sports in the country. In an effort to implement the Strategy the Union supported the introduction of a steward system at matches and the establishment of the National Association of Football Supporters. The Bulgarian Football Union is also in charge of the application of sanctions to clubs for acts of hooliganism caused by fans, mainly in the form of monetary fines or banning players of the respective football clubs from participating in matches. According to official statistics of the Union, in the period 2010 – June 2015, the institution has penalised Bulgarian football clubs from the two main professional leagues **897** times (Table 5).

Table 5. Sanctions imposed by the Bulgarian Football Union⁶⁸¹

Season	'A' League	'B' League	Total
2014 – 2015	167	34	201
2013 – 2014	153	17	170
2012 – 2013	186	39	225
2011 – 2012	104	46	150
2010 – 2011	133	18	151
Total	743	154	897

Source: BFU.

There is no information on any preventive programmes aimed at educating young football supporters or preventing recruitment of youngsters into hooligan circles.⁶⁸²

⁶⁷⁸ LPPOSE, Article 17a.

⁶⁷⁹ Interview with a sports journalist.

⁶⁸⁰ Bulgarian Football Union (2012) *Strategy on the Development of Football 2012 – 2016*. Available at: <http://gong.bg/football-sviat/euro-2016/comment/bfs-predstavi-strategiia-za-razvitie-na-futbola-do-2016-g-205347>

⁶⁸¹ Official statistics provided to CSD by the Bulgarian Football Union regarding the penalties imposed on football clubs as a result of hooliganism actions of their supporters for the period of 2011 – 2015.

⁶⁸² Examples of such programmes in other countries are lectures by police officers and football players of rival teams at schools, the organisation of charity football matches between rival fan factions, etc.

A number of good practices for improving the effectiveness of measures against football hooliganism are already applied in many EU member states and could easily be adopted in Bulgaria.⁶⁸³ Concerns were raised by law enforcement experts that although specific legislation on tackling football hooliganism now exists in Bulgaria and a number of measures are applied, they are not accompanied by a consistent government policy and strategic approach towards this problem. Football hooliganism needs to be seen and prioritised by policy makers in a broader perspective that also takes stock of the risks stemming from its links to right wing extremism and its misuse for political purposes.

High staff turnover and restructuring at the MoI have had a disruptive effect on the continuity and sustainability of monitoring activity, collection of operational information, handling of informants and accumulation of skills and expertise for tackling football hooliganism. Furthermore, the police are currently the main line of defence against this phenomenon, while other institutions, such as the educational system, are not involved in efforts to prevent recruitment and radicalisation of football hooligans.

⁶⁸³ Interview with a sports journalist. Examples of such measures are an electronic system for access to the stadium, named tickets, professional stewards, etc.