

THE RISE OF ATAKA IN BULGARIA

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ABSTRACT

THE RISE OF ATAKA IN BULGARIA

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This thesis analyses ATAKA's rise as a prominent actor in Bulgarian politics and to what extent this success is sustainable. The first section seeks the roots of authoritarianism in Bulgaria. The following section focuses on the restructuring and transformation in Bulgaria following the end of the Communist Party rule. The last section examines the reproduction of authoritarianism Bulgaria which is manifested through the rise of ATAKA in the last few years. Main argument of the thesis is that while the party's success has been rather fast and unexpected in the beginning, it was a result of the recreation of authoritarianism that has been present in the Bulgarian history and manifested itself through ATAKA and its xenophobic-racist rhetoric since 2005. While the sustainability of ATAKA's success in the long-term is in question considering its decline in the 2009 parliamentary elections, there is always the possibility of the authoritarianism resurfacing through different mediums, if not through ATAKA.

Keywords: ATAKA, Nationalism, Minorities, Political Parties and Party System in Bulgaria

ÖZ

BULGARİSTAN'DAKİ ATAKA PARTİSİNİN YÜKSELİŞİ

Karamollaoğlu, Nilay

Yüksek Lisans, Uluslararası İlişkiler Bölümü

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Bu tez ATAKA Partisi'nin Bulgar siyasetinde yükselişini ve bu yükselişin sürdürülebilirliğini analiz etmektedir. Tezin birinci bölümü Bulgaristan'daki otoritaryanizmin köklerini belirlemektedir. Tezin sonraki bölümü komünist Parti döneminin sona ermesinin ardından Bulgaristan'ın geçirdiği yeniden yapılanma ve değişim süreçlerini ele almaktadır. Tezin son bölümü ise Bulgaristan'da otoritaryanizmin yeniden üretimi ve buna bağlı olarak son yıllarda ATAKA partisinin yükselişini açıklamaktadır. Tezin ana argümanı, partinin yükselişi beklenmedik ve hızlı olsa da, bu olayın Bulgaristan'daki derin tarihsel geçmişi olan otoritaryanizmin yeniden üretimi sonucu olmasıdır. Son yıllarda bu otoritaryanizmin yansıması ATAKA partisi ve onun ırkçı-yabancı düşmanlığı içeren söylemleriyle olmuştur. 2009 genel seçimleri itibariyle ATAKA'nın oy oranı büyük oranda düşmüş ve uzun dönemdeki geleceği sorgulanıyor olsa da, Bulgaristan'da benzer hareketlerin tarihsel ve konjonktürel nedenlerden dolayı her zaman yeri olacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: ATAKA , Milliyetçilik, Azınlıklar, Bulgaristan'daki Siyasi Partiler ve Parti Sistemi.

To My Family

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BCP	Bulgarian Communist Party
BSP	Bulgarian Socialist Party
EU	European Union
FCNM	Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities
GERB	Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria
ITRO	Thracian Revolutionary Organization
MRF	Movement for Rights and Freedoms
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
PR	Proportional representation
SMD	Single-member district
TNMB	Turkish National Movement in Bulgaria
UDF	Union of Democratic Forces

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The parliamentary elections of June 2005 in Bulgaria introduced major new developments in Bulgarian political life, and were noteworthy for various reasons all pointing out the apparent ‘protest’ of the people. These elections, while having the “lowest voter turnout since the end of communism” with “55.7% of the eligible voters choosing to participate”, most importantly witnessed the emergence of ATAKA as possessing a serious potential power in the Bulgarian parliament.¹ This new populist party possessing an ultra-nationalist agenda came as a surprise to many as this party was formed only shortly before the parliamentary elections. This achievement of the party was followed by the personal success of its leader, Volen Siderov, in the presidential elections of 2006, in which he became the runner-up following the President Georgi Parvanov from Coalition of Bulgaria. According to Yana Buhner Tavanier, an editor at the weekly *Kapital* “Almost everyone – political analysts, journalists, sociologists – declared ATAKA the biggest surprise of these (2005) elections”.²

Though unexpected or surprising for many, this sudden emergence of the ATAKA party and its success has been both because of and indicative of the radical transformation the country has gone through in the last two decades following the end of the Communist Party rule. However, the roots of the rise of ATAKA are not confined to the narrow time-frame covering the period starting from 1990s. The history of Bulgarian state formation and Bulgarian nationalism (including the period

¹ Elza Ibrosheva and Maria Raicheva-Stover, “The Politics of Hate: Media and the Rise to Power of Ultra-Nationalism in Bulgaria,” *Limina* 15 (2009): 5.

² Jeremy Druker, “Failed Attack”, East of Center (19 May 2012).
<<http://eastofcenter.tol.org/2012/05/failed-attack/>> ,accessed on 10 August 2012.

of the Communist Party rule) is also crucial in understanding the sudden rise of ATAKA as the main rhetoric of nationalism that ATAKA so often utilizes lies in Bulgarian history from the beginning.

There are a few different theories and interpretations on how to assess the rise of ATAKA in terms of the weight of different factors, whether historical or conjectural, national or international. The “unpredictable” nature of its rise, as pointed out by many scholars, is a rare combination of these factors; although the role of each variable is interpreted differently by various scholars.

As scholars tend to have differing views on what the prominent factor was in terms of ATAKA’s seemingly shocking emergence and success, the extent of sustainability of ATAKA’s success is also a matter of debate. While ATAKA appeals to the electorates that are dissatisfied with the current situation in the country with its anti-establishment and ultra-nationalist rhetoric; the motivation and the profile of the ATAKA voters is an important indication as to interpret this party’s future. The uniting factor of ATAKA is that it utilizes the feeling of discontent with the radical transformation the country has gone through in the last two decades. The agenda of the Bulgarian state has been especially dominated by the membership to the European Union in the last decade, especially around the time ATAKA appeared on the political scene of Bulgaria. The process of fast and sudden transformation within the Bulgarian state in turn affected the population and the ones feeling left out or alienated have shifted their vote of preference towards ATAKA. The highly heterogeneous electoral profile of the party points out the aspect of aggregation of discontent about the path the country is following, the long-lasting problems that it has tried to tackle such as “corruption, judicial inefficiency, a weak police force and strong organized crime.”³

This thesis will attempt to explore the internal and external factors that contributed to the rise of ATAKA. The first chapter will cover the historical roots of political parties in Bulgaria. The first section of the chapter will briefly go through

³ Maria Spirova, “Bulgaria,” *European Journal of Political Research*, 46-7/8, 2007: 908.

the history of Bulgaria's independence from the Ottoman Empire, which marks the roots of resentment towards the Turkish minority, the feeling of occupation and dependence on foreign powers. The main events of the period; namely the Balkan Wars, San Stefano Treaty, the Berlin Congress and the Neuilly Treaty will be assessed and their ramifications for the future, both in the Communist Party rule and the contemporary Bulgarian political life will be explored. The second section of this chapter will briefly examine the Communist Party rule in Bulgaria, in which parallels will be drawn with the current political scene. In order to fully grasp the roots of the radical nationalist rhetoric ATAKA utilizes, the issue of minorities will be traced back, giving special emphasis to the Communist Party rule. The Communist Party rule will also be discussed in this thesis focusing on the different manifestations of nationalism, the perception of 'enemy' in this period, the Constitutions of 1947 and 1951, the rights granted to minorities and the forced emigration and assimilation policies of the 1980s as well as periods of soft assimilation.

The third chapter will focus on the restructuring and transformation Bulgaria has gone through following the end of the Communist Party rule since the beginning of 1990s. The chapter will be divided into two main parts; in which both domestic and the external factors will be assessed. The positions of political parties of the last two decades in Bulgaria as well as the roles they play internally will be discussed followed by the decline of the moderate right-wing in 2005 elections. What kind of role 'nationalism' plays in each party's agenda will be of special focus. Regarding the external factors; the role of the quest for European Union membership and the neo-liberal restructuring will be evaluated in terms of how it affected the Bulgarian state and prepared the base for the rise of ATAKA.

The fourth chapter will focus on the party itself. Firstly, the results of the elections prior to the formation of ATAKA will be assessed as well as the fragmentation of the center-right, which emerged as the main phenomenon that gave way to ATAKA's rise as a prominent actor in Bulgarian politics. The voter profile of ATAKA will be evaluated to grasp which portion of the society shifted their

choice towards ATAKA; giving insight about whether the success of ATAKA is sustainable or not. The agenda of ATAKA and especially the “20 Points” and the “Program Scheme” that formulate the main discourse of the party will also be explored in order to grasp how ATAKA defines itself. ATAKA’s agenda will be explored in order to explore what its radical nationalist rhetoric actually demands. In this part of the thesis, to what extent ATAKA’s claims and discourse make the party appealing to a portion of the society will be assessed.

Along with to what extent the demands of ATAKA are attainable, the party’s significance in terms of reflecting the thoughts or feelings of a portion of the Bulgarian population demanding radical change in the contemporary Bulgarian politics and in terms of contamination of Bulgaria with some trends that have grown in other countries of Europe, which in turn have led to the rise of political parties with radical nationalist tendencies to rise will also be evaluated. Another point of discussion regarding the appearance and sudden success of ATAKA in Bulgarian politics will be its contribution to the infant Bulgarian democracy as ATAKA’s political agenda radically diverts from the agenda of the other political parties on both ends of the political spectrum established in the first 15 years of the new Bulgarian regime. How the transition from the Communist Party rule to democracy affected the Bulgarian society, the problems this transition has faced with will be explored and how ATAKA perceived all these problems will be evaluated.

This chapter will also take up the issue of transformation ATAKA has gone through from being a mainly urban phenomenon to becoming a mainly peripheral phenomenon in a relatively short amount of time. In addition to the change in the electoral profile over time, the change in ATAKA’s rhetoric to appeal to a wider audience will also be brought up.

Another important dimension discussed in the fourth chapter while discussing ATAKA’s success is the persona of its leader, Volen Siderov and the propaganda tools that the party owns that appeals to the public. This section of the chapter will focus on the role of the media and propaganda tools and the persona of ATAKA’s

leader to the party's undisputable success in the June 2005 elections and even the relative decline in the votes in the latest elections of October 2011. Whether Siderov's background as a prominent TV personality and journalist can be directly linked to the success of the party will be discussed.

Linking all the chapters of the thesis together; in other words, factoring the historical background of both the political parties and, nationalism was perceived and what constituted the 'Bulgarian nation' at different times, the policies for dealing with the minorities over time, the transformation the Bulgarian state has gone through in the last two decades and the rise of the right-wing as a general trend around Europe, the reasons behind ATAKA's rise will be assessed. After exposing these reasons, the sustainability of such a success will be discussed.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL ROOTS OF AUTHORITARIANISM IN BULGARIA

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the historical roots of authoritarianism in Bulgaria, starting from Bulgarian independence from the Ottoman Empire until the end of Communist Party rule. The chapter will be divided into two main periods; the first covering the period up until the Communist Party rule and the second focusing on the Cold War era which was marked by Communist Party rule and absolute dependence on the Soviet Union.

The first period begins with the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the Russo-Ottoman war of 1877-1878, after which the Treaty of San Stefano was concluded and was revised in the Berlin Treaty of 1878. The two Balkan Wars will also be examined in order to seek out the traces of some of the rhetoric that ATAKA utilizes more than a century later. The Berlin Congress and the Neuilly Treaty, which have had crucial outcomes concerning the fate of the Bulgarian nation and the Bulgarian Kingdom, will also be assessed in terms of what they have brought to the collective minds of the Bulgarians and how these events were perceived. Then briefly, the situation of the parties of the era and more importantly, the situation of minorities will be explained. Overall, this section will give an insight as to what extent ATAKA utilizes historical grudges, distrust to outside powers and insecurities about the surrender of independency or sovereignty in its rhetoric against the status quo or the existing system.

The second section of the chapter will examine Communist Party rule and the manifestations of nationalism in this era. To draw parallels between ATAKA's portrayal of the enemy today, the traditional enemy figure which is seen as the utmost threat to the independence of the state this period will be discussed. After

discussing the constitutions in terms of what they had granted to minorities, the assimilation policies against minorities at different times will also be presented.

2.1 Bulgarian Independence under the Shadow of the Russian Empire and Dependency

The history of Bulgaria under Ottoman rule covers a period of nearly 500 years, starting from the conquest of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom in 1396 until the end of the Russo-Turkish War (1877-1878). This war was mainly fought in the Balkans and the Caucasus, which directly affected Bulgaria. The end of the war and the defeat of the Ottomans were followed by the conclusion of San Stefano Treaty. This Treaty was the first impetus for Bulgaria in gaining an outlet to the Aegean Sea with the help of Russia. Russia had “decided to strengthen Bulgaria as much as possible, perhaps with a view to future operations against the Turks”.⁴

Among other provisions concerning the other Balkan regions in the San Stefano Treaty, the most crucial was the re-establishment of the autonomous Principality of Bulgaria “covering the land between the Danube River and the Balkan Mountains (except Northern Dobrudja which was given to Romania) as well as the region of Sofia, which became the new state's capital”⁵. In other words, the newly established entity in the Southeastern Europe owed its existence to the Russian forces, coming into existence as a result of two major powers clashing rather than undertaking a National Liberation War of its own. There was also a proposal to create a Greater Bulgaria territorially, although it was never implemented. The Great Powers, specifically Britain and Austria, rejected this as would increase Russian influence in the Balkans. In addition, “Serbia and Greece also perceived ‘Greater Bulgaria’ as a threat which could endanger their independence.”⁶

⁴ Hamilton Fish Armstrong, “Bulgaria and the Aegean,” *Foreign Affairs* 5/1 (October, 1926), 148.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 148.

⁶ Tahir Tahir, “Minority Policies in Bulgaria: Continuity and Change”, Master’s Thesis, Middle East Technical University, 2003, 34.

As a result of strong opposition from various sides, the Congress of Berlin was held later in the same year, in which the provisions of the San Stefano Treaty were revised. The first article of the Berlin Treaty of 1878 stated that Bulgaria was “an autonomous and tributary Principality under the sovereign rule of the sultan with a Christian government and national army”, clearly indicating the establishment of the Principality.⁷ Concerning the Ottoman territory, in the Congress it was decided that a bulk of it would be returned to the Ottomans, whereas Bulgaria’s territory would be reduced. This concession in territory proved to be a very important misstep in the eventual achievement of Bulgarian desires. “Although the San Stefano arrangement was so swiftly blotted out it was not forgotten in Bulgaria, and the Aegean coast was one of Bulgaria’s chief objectives when joining the other Balkan states in 1912 in the war against Turkey.”⁸

The de jure independence of Bulgaria finally came into being on 5th October 1908 with the declaration of Prince Ferdinand, although the Bulgarian Principality had acted in practice as independent since 1878. Prior to the declaration of independence, Prince Ferdinand received the “Austrian approval of Bulgaria’s conduct” and Vienna’s secret negotiations with Sofia became clear later on, making other Powers’ warnings irrelevant for the Bulgarian government.⁹

For the Ottoman Empire, 1908 was a chaotic time, mainly because the Young Turk Revolution that aimed to restore the Constitution of 1876 and to establish a constitutional monarchy, took place in July of that year and there were preparations for elections in the newly established parliament. The revolution and the political turmoil in the Ottoman Empire provided a good opportunity to the Bulgarian vassal

⁷ Valery Kolev, “About the Character of the Official Bilateral Ottoman-Bulgarian Relations (1879-1909),” in *Turkish-Bulgarian Relations: Past and Present*, ed. Mustafa Türkeş (İstanbul: Tasam Publications, 2010), 19.

⁸ Armstrong, *op. cit.*, p.148.

⁹ Aşkın Koyuncu, “The Ottoman Reaction to the Bulgarian Independence Declaration (1908-1909)” in *Turkish-Bulgarian Relations: Past and Present*, ed. Mustafa Türkeş (İstanbul: Tasam Publications, 2010), 35-36.

state to claim full independence.¹⁰ Around the time of the declaration of independence of Bulgaria, two main factors contributed to this process as well. The first incident was called Geshov incident which resulted from the refusal of the Sublime Porte to invite Ivan Geshov, Bulgarian representative of the Ottoman government, to a banquet for diplomatic corps in honor of the Sultan's birthday.¹¹ The Ottoman Ministry of Foreign Affairs invited all foreign diplomats but not Geshov since Bulgaria was a vassal state that was subject to the Empire and the Ottoman government did not consider Geshov to be a representative of an independent state.¹² Bulgaria used this incident to create a crisis that formed the basis for call for independence. This was one of the various examples of the use of the theme of 'national pride' which has also been very often utilized by the rhetoric of ATAKA and other nationalist parties. Another example of perceived attack on Bulgarian 'national pride' was a railway strike.¹³ The workers of the Oriental Railway Company passing through Eastern Rumelia decided to go on a strike and Bulgarian nationalists believed that "... the Ottoman government, or at least pro-Ottoman forces, had engineered the strike in order to provide a pretext for meddling in Bulgarian internal affairs."¹⁴

The territorial gains of Bulgaria continued in the First Balkan War. The rationale for declaring a war against the Ottomans was partly due to the military and administrative weakness of the Ottoman Empire at the time, as well as the outbreak of the Italian-Turkish War for the possession of Tripoli (1911). With the aid of Russian secret diplomacy Serbia and Bulgaria concluded a treaty of alliance in 1912. The treaty called for a joint military action and the division of the land that had been conquered. Greece and Montenegro soon joined the alliance and this war that continued until 1913 led the Balkan League (Bulgaria, Montenegro, Greece and

¹⁰ Peter Mentzel, "The Bulgarian Declaration of Independence and the 1908 Oriental Railway Strike: Conspiracy of Coincidence?" *East European Quarterly*, 37/4, January 2004, 403.

¹¹ Koyuncu, *op. cit.*, p.32.

¹² Mentzel, *op. cit.* p.407.

¹³ Koyuncu, *op. cit.* p.33-34.

¹⁴ Mentzel, *op. cit.*, p.403.

Serbia) that united against the Ottomans. As a result of this war, the Ottomans suffered massive territorial losses, losing almost all their European territory except for İstanbul. Bulgaria obtained a considerable coastal line. However, it still remained dissatisfied over the division of the Macedonian territory. The London Conference in 1913 created an independent Albania of fair size, which denied Serbia a sea coast. In order to gain access to Adriatic, Serbia demanded an annexation of a large part of Albania. However, since this appeared to lead to a Greater Serbia it was contested by Austria-Hungarians, Italians and Albanians.

The dissatisfaction with the outcomes of the First Balkan War following the demand of Serbia for a larger share of Macedonia led Bulgaria to declare war against Serbia and Greece. Bulgaria was not willing to accept the way that Macedonia had been divided among the Balkan states. Thus, the Second Balkan War erupted in June 1913. Following the attack on Serbia, Bulgaria was attacked by Romania, Greece and the Ottoman Empire. Bulgaria was defeated, and lost all its territories with the decisions made at the Treaty of Bucharest in August 1913. The European territories of the Ottoman Empire were, once again, redistributed among the Balkan states. In a short amount of time Bulgaria gained a considerable territory that was long desired and most importantly, a coast line, in the First Balkan War. All these gains, however, were lost in the Second Balkan War.

The overall aim of Bulgaria in this period immediately after gaining independence had been to reach to the Aegean Sea and “relegate her commerce to the roundabout Black Sea route of the slow passage up the Danube”¹⁵. In relation to this situation, another important Treaty that played a role in shaping the Bulgarian anger that resonates today in contemporary politics was the Neuilly Treaty, which was concluded between Bulgaria and the Allies following the end of World War I in 1919. In fact, Bulgaria entered World War I with strong territorial ambitions and rejected all requests for peace through initial negotiations. The Neuilly obliged Bulgaria to give the Western Thrace and several border areas to Greece, and Southern Dobruja was to be a part of Romania. Reparations were demanded from Bulgaria, and the Bulgarian army was limited to 20,000 men. The Allied Powers

¹⁵ Armstrong, *op. cit.*, p.148.

promised Bulgaria that although the northern Aegean coast would be handed to Greece, they “would arrange suitable facilities for the transit of Bulgarian Commerce”.¹⁶ Later the “facilities which they were subsequently offered were refused as “psychologically inadmissible” by Bulgaria, who apparently hoped, or thought it worthwhile to pretend that the original undertaking implied something very much like Bulgarian sovereignty over a corridor to the Aegean. Bulgaria's counter-propositions were absolutely rejected by the Allies; and there, for official purposes, the matter rested”¹⁷. After the conclusion of the Treaty, the anger in Bulgarians who considered this issue as a miscalculation and lack of diplomacy did not translate into formal negotiations. However, the issue was constantly discussed in the Bulgarian press and administration for a long period of time.

Following the defeat of the Greek forces against the Turkish army in Asia Minor, Bulgaria once again decided to achieve the promise contained in the Treaty of Neuilly (Art.48) which stated that the : “Principal Allied and Associated Powers undertake to ensure the economic outlets of Bulgaria to the Aegean Sea. The conditions of this guarantee will be fixed at a later date.”¹⁸ Bulgaria’s former Thracian territory was under the occupation of the Allied Powers at the time up until August 10, 1920, when the Thracian Treaty handed the region to Greece. Although this Treaty was not ratified, it basically came into effect when the Allied powers withdrew from the region. This Treaty also stated that Bulgaria should have “free transit over the territories and through the ports, with a permanent lease on the port of Dedeagach, and that an international commission should ensure her enjoyment of these rights.”¹⁹ Bulgaria was invited to the Lausanne Conference to voice its opinion on the matter after the overturn of the Sevres Treaty, but the Bulgarian demands were never met.

¹⁶ Armstrong, *op. cit.*, p.148.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 150.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 150.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 150.

In summary, the period from the Bulgarian upheavals to establish their autonomous entity up until the achievement of *de jure* independence, followed by the wars and the agreements that changed and redrew the map of the Balkan region completely, was marked by Bulgarian dependence on Greater Powers. The emergence of Bulgaria as a separate state became a reality as a bi-product of the rivalry of the Great Powers, especially between Russia and the Ottoman Empire in the Balkan region. The territorial gains and even the losses of Bulgaria were marked by a sense of ‘being granted’ rather than an armed struggle held against their rulers or opponents. Even decades after the independence the shared Ottoman past between Turkey and Bulgaria continued to shape the public opinion in Bulgaria, which was also often utilized in ATAKA’s rhetoric. The First Balkan War and many other important turning points in Bulgarian history against the Ottomans continued to be used in the rhetoric of the anti-Turkish campaigns by connecting the past and the present. ATAKA has been no exception in utilizing the symbolic events from Bulgarian history to emphasize the heroic nature of the Bulgarians.

2.2.1 An Overview of Bulgarian Nationalism

In Bulgaria, the policy makers both during the pre-Communist Party period and the Communist Party rule adopted “repression a systematic state policy” against the Muslim-Turkish minority. Thus, the overall aim of the Bulgarian policy makers has always been to create “a linguistically, culturally and racially homogeneous nation-state.”²⁰ Overall, the era from 1878 to 1989 marked the period of influence of Balkan nationalism in Bulgaria. This type of nationalism was based on ethnicity or cultural-historical-national identity. In the quest to establish a homogeneous culture, each state had to focus on one ethnic community and the existence of many different ethnic groups was seen as a source of instability. Therefore, this nationalism that was also evident in the Bulgarian state relied on “exercising pressure on minorities” and was “prone to employing aggressive and authoritarian fascist methods”. This Balkan

²⁰ Ali Dayıoğlu, “Policies of the Bulgarian Administration Towards the Turkish Minority between 1984 and 1989,” in *Turkish-Bulgarian Relations: Past and Present*, ed. Mustafa Türkeş (İstanbul: Tasam Publications, 2010), 89.

nationalism is regarded as closest to “ethno-cultural fanaticism” since it justifies forced emigration, population exchanges and the use of force in order to create the desired homogeneous ethnic composition.²¹

Since the establishment of Bulgarian Principality by the Berlin Agreement in 1878, Bulgarian policy-makers aimed to create a homogeneous nation-state with a common language, culture and ethnicity. The general policy that they resorted to in order to achieve this aim was either assimilation or forced emigration of those belonging to different minority groups. This was the attempt to solve the main ‘problem’ of language, cultural, religious and ethnic heterogeneity of the state. The main reason was that “...in the 19th century, Balkan nationalism in general, and Bulgarian nationalism in particular, were founded on linguistic and religious identities.”²² Therefore, the presence of people speaking different languages, having different religious beliefs or belonging to an ethnicity other than the dominant one possessed a problem for the Bulgarian state. Another reason for such a perception and policy was the historical resentment against the Ottoman past and dependency of the Bulgarian state. The policy makers claimed that the Ottoman rule of Bulgaria of almost 500 years was responsible for the negative developments and the backwardness of Bulgaria in comparison to Western Europe. The Muslim-Turkish population in Bulgaria was seen as remains of this resented past that was full of failures. “De-Ottomanization” efforts begun with the formation of Bulgarian Principality and continued until 1989, which aimed to strip the remains of the Ottoman and the ‘oriental’ from the state and society. Changing the visible elements at the outset such as architecture, dress code, language and the names of the Turkish residential areas also reflected the desire to create a culturally and linguistically homogeneous nation state and erasing the presence of the Turkish-Muslim minority as well.²³

²¹ *Ibid.*, 89.

²² *Ibid.*, 89.

²³ *Ibid.*, 91.

Not just in Bulgaria, but all over Eastern Europe, nationalism has always possessed a dominant power in politics, manifesting itself through different means and practices. Especially accompanied by the weakening of the Communist Party rule, its mobilization and integrating power in the 1980s, Bulgarian nationalism was used to fill in the ideological vacuum.²⁴

2.1.2 The Situation of Minorities after Bulgarian Independence

The first Ottoman-Bulgarian Protocol of 19 April 1909 showing the de jure recognition of Bulgaria's independence by the Porte also confirmed "the religious freedom of Muslim population in Bulgaria and stipulated that 'the name of His Imperial Majesty, the Sultan, as the Khalif will continue to be read out in the praying places of the Muslims'".²⁵

A Friendship Treaty was signed between the two countries in Ankara on October 18, 1925, containing various clauses that emphasized the friendship between the two states. The treaty took the Neuilly and Lausanne Treaties as basis for formulating a solution to the long lasting problem of "Bulgarian minorities" in Turkey and the "Muslim minorities" in Bulgaria. The significant part concerning the definition of minorities was that Bulgarian minority was precisely defined as "non-Muslim subjects whose mother-tongue is Bulgarian", whereas there was no such precise definition of Turkish minority in Bulgaria, "which was simply referred as Muslims in Bulgaria".²⁶

The treaties signed which emphasized mutual friendship and cooperation between the two states had never hidden the fact that relations between Turkey and Bulgaria were in fact strained. The Turkish state was aware of the limits of Bulgaria's power and accepted that Bulgaria did not possess a territorial threat to

²⁴ Nikolai Genov, "Radical Nationalism in Contemporary Bulgaria," *Review of European Studies*, 2/2 (December 2010), 36.

²⁵ Koyuncu, *op. cit.*, p. 48-49.

²⁶ Ebru Boyar, "Turkish-Bulgarian Relations in the Early Turkish Republic: The View from Ankara," in *Turkish-Bulgarian Relations: Past and Present*, ed. Mustafa Türkeş (İstanbul: Tasam Publications, 2010), 58.

Turkey. However, Turkey was always suspicious of Bulgaria's intentions because of the country's policy towards the Muslim minority in Bulgaria and the support for irredentist organizations and anti-Kemalist forces such as the Thracian Revolutionary Organization (ITRO). The problems that Muslim minority faced around this period were "the main impediment for the betterment of relations between two countries."²⁷ There was a development in the efforts to convert Muslims and Turkey perceived these efforts as a form of assimilation. The solution to this problem was sought through allowing the gradual migration of this population to Turkey, although there were no official statements from Turkish officials.²⁸

Another important aspect of the Turkish minority in this period was that they had been divided politically starting from the late 19th century. A part of the Turkish-Muslim population supported Abdülhamid II and another supported the Committee of Union and Progress. This division continued in independent Bulgaria as well as during the Republican era in Turkey and the Bulgarian government "was very careful to encourage this division in order to prevent this minority becoming a direct challenge to the Bulgarian state."²⁹

In assessing the perception and treatment of the Muslim-Turkish minority in Bulgaria in this era in every aspect, the most important factor was the difference between the power of these two states and the mutual suspicions of the states leading them to intervene in each other's internal affairs. One of the most significant asymmetries was that Bulgaria had a large Muslim-Turkish community compared to the significantly smaller number of Bulgarians in Turkey.

Important steps were taken in terms of the rights of minorities later in the rule of the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union (1919-1923) and the Motherland Front

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 62.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 62.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 64.

(1944-1947) with the first constitution of People's Republic of Bulgaria being accepted on December 4, 1947.³⁰

With the end of the Second World War, the Soviet army entered Bulgaria and the fascist regime was replaced with the 'Motherland Front' government on 9th September 1944. It was composed of "anti-fascist groups such as the social democrats, agrarians, liberals and non-aligned intelligentsia."³¹ The formation of this government was supported by the Turkish-Muslim community and signified a change in their treatment. The minorities' demands were, to some extent, met through the "abolition of various laws restricting the rights of the minority groups, the re-opening of Turkish schools that had previously been closed, building of new schools and permitting the publication of Turkish newspapers."³² This proved to be a time when the minorities enjoyed relatively more rights prior to the consolidation of power of the rulers, being one of the many examples in Bulgarian history.

Together with the positive developments in terms of minority rights during the time of the 'Motherland Front' government, there were also some negative aspects. All the Turkish private schools were nationalized, giving the control of the minority schools to the Bulgarian state itself with a new provision in the Education law.³³

2.2 The Communist Party Rule and its Minority Policy

2.2.1 The First Cold War Period

Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) consolidated its power in 1947 and the new era signified a worsening of minority rights in Bulgaria. The BCP especially perceived the Turkish-Muslim minority as the biggest threat to the unitary socialist

³⁰ Ali Dayıoğlu, *Toplama Kampından Meclis'e: Bulgaristan'da Türk ve Müslüman Azınlığı*. (İstanbul: İletişim, 2005), 280.

³¹ Ali Dayıoğlu, 2010, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

³² *Ibid.*, 92.

³³ *Ibid.*, 91.

structure for various reasons. The large population of this group with a different language, culture and religion was regarded as a huge obstacle to be overcome. What is more, other small minority groups like Pomaks, Roma and Tatars considered themselves to be Turkish.³⁴

Soon after World War II ended, the Bulgarian-Turkish relations had become strained because these neighbors had found themselves in different camps in the super powers' rivalry. The minority issue was no exception, and through this period it often became a part of the greater rivalry between the Eastern and Western camp. In the period between 1946 and 1951, a large scale migration of more than 15,000 Turks from Bulgaria took place.³⁵ The background to this forced emigration was the collectivization of the farmlands and nationalization of production in 1947. The Turkish-Muslim minority, composed mostly of farmers, was affected negatively by this action of BCP. In addition to becoming landless and jobless, BCP interfered with the religious traditions of the minority and "the prohibition of wearing of baggy trousers (şalvar), headscarves and fez, the opening of educational and labor facilities to women were received by the conservatives and the elderly as a threat to their identity and religious beliefs."³⁶ In fact, the Turkish minority in Bulgaria had started to look for way to emigrate at the time when the Bulgarian policy makers were planning the forced migration. With this forced migration, the minority population would be decreased, making it easier to assimilate the remaining people in Bulgaria. To achieve this aim, the BCP asked Turkey to accept the Turkish minority of about 250,000 that were mostly living in northeast Bulgaria, as immigrants. This demand of Bulgaria caused tension between the two states and led Turkey to close its borders. Over two years ending on 30th November 1951, however, 154,393 people emigrated to Turkey.³⁷

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 92.

³⁵ Ebru Boyar, *op. cit.*, p.64.

³⁶ Ali Dayıoğlu 2010, *op. cit.*, p.92.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 93.

The Constitution of 1947 was the most crucial document in which to observe the rights granted to minorities in this period. At this time, the Bulgarian Communist Party was still in the process of consolidating its power, needing the support of the minorities as well as the ethnic Bulgarians. This Constitution (also called the Dimitrov Constitution) granted various rights to minorities such as the right to educate the children in their own language. Along with the nationalistic policy under the umbrella of communism, emigration was widely encouraged. As a result, a huge number of the Jewish community emigrated at the beginning of the 1950s and over 150,000 Turks emigrated to Turkey. The Constitution of 1947 was revised in 1951, trimming some of the rights that had been granted to the minorities.

The general policy of the BCP towards all minorities in this era was assimilation. For example, between 1948 and 1952, Pomaks were forced to change their names and religious beliefs. Those that resisted this forced assimilation were exiled and only in 1954, these people were allowed to return to their homes. Although there was a brief period of policy softening after the forced emigration of the Turkish minority in 1950-1951, this period did not last long. A portion of the Muslim Roma was also subject to assimilation by changing their names in 1953-1954.³⁸

2.2.2 Detente Period

After the death of Stalin in 1953, a period of detente began in Bulgarian-Turkish relations. Due to the past restraints in the bilateral relations, the new Balkan policy proclaimed by Todor Zhivkov, the new leader of Bulgaria, indirectly affected Turkish-Bulgarian relations in a positive way. The relationship between the two countries was directly related to the detente in Europe and the Eastern Bloc's policy of "peaceful coexistence". On 26th May 1965 Todor Zhivkov explained Bulgaria's new Balkan policy to the Soviet political leadership stating that the considerable improvement in the relationship between Turkey and Greece "was a result not only of the improved international situations', but also of the new assessment of some of

³⁸ *Ibid*, 94.

our concepts and moves from the past towards these states.”³⁹ Most concrete outcome of this new policy in terms of the Turkish minority was the right of the Turks in Bulgaria to emigrate to Turkey if they did it voluntarily and not by administrative means and if Turkey was ready to accept this population. Although the issue was later dropped, this new approach formed a crucial step towards the perception of the ‘Turkish minority problem’ in Bulgaria.

In the BCP Central Committee meeting in 1956, the aim of ‘creating a socialist state based on a single nation’ was accepted. Regarding the minorities, it was decided that they would be forced to adopt Bulgarian names. This decision was first applied to the Macedonians who mostly lived in the south east and they started to be described as Bulgarians on their identity cards. “The Macedonian population, which numbered 187,789 in the 1956 census, was shown to be a mere 8,700 in the official Bulgarian statistics in 1965.”⁴⁰

Roma were another minority group that suffered from the decisions made by the BCP. After the issuing of a decree in 1958 that indicated that most Roma described themselves as Turks and sent their children to Turkish schools, Roma newspapers started to be published only in Bulgarian whereas beforehand they could also be published in Roman. Moreover Roma theatres were shut down. In addition, the nomadic Roma were permanently settled and the names of some the Muslim Roma population were converted to Bulgarian.⁴¹ In April 1962, the BCP concluded that the Muslim Roma, Pomaks and the Tatars considered themselves Turks. The fact that most belonged to the Islamic faith, possessing Turkish and Arabic names urged the BCP to eradicate the alleged Turkish influence on these people. A campaign was initiated for these people to adopt Bulgarian names. Furthermore, “the Politburo gave directions to the People’s Councils, responsible for local administration, not to issue permits to the Pomaks and Roma to visit places where Turks were heavily

³⁹ Iskra Baeva, “Bulgarian-Turkish Relations in the Context of Bulgaria’s Balkan Policy in the 1960s-70s,” in *Turkish-Bulgarian Relations: Past and Present*, ed. Mustafa Türkeş (İstanbul: Tasam Publications, 2010), 73.

⁴⁰ Ali Dayıoğlu 2010, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 94.

concentrated”⁴². Pomak children were directed towards receiving education in Bulgarian rather than Turkish and Turkish teachers were not appointed to minority schools.

There was resistance from the minorities towards the changes that BCP had been urging. For instance, fights erupted between the Pomaks and the state officials, around the time the decision to change the name of the Pomaks was taken in 1962. After facing resistance from the Pomaks, this policy was eventually abandoned and Pomaks were given back their original names. In 1965, however, the policy of name changing was adopted for Muslim Roma and as a result the names of over 100,000 Roma, who identified themselves as Turks, were changed to Bulgarian. Overall, the major policy regarding the smaller minority groups in this period was to isolate the most numerous and influential Turkish-Muslim minority, from the smaller groups that identified with them. The aim of separating the minority groups was the prohibiting the Turkish children to attend the same boarding schools as other Muslims and Turkish religious staff was prevented from being sent to areas or villages where there was a predominantly Muslim population.⁴³

Being the largest minority and being a constant reminder of the Ottoman rule in the country, the Turkish minority was still considered the biggest threat to the unification of the Bulgarian state and people in this period. In this regard, there were steps taken against the language and the religion of this community. First, the Turkish and Bulgarian schools were amalgamated in the start of the 1958/1959 school year. Initially this meant the closure of Turkish schools, the later Turkish lessons in all educational institutions were gradually removed, and completely eradicated in 1974. The second obstacle the BCP administration had to tackle was the problem of religion which bound the minority community together, “steps were taken to ban the Koran courses, to remove religious lessons from school textbooks, to arrest teachers of religious lessons for acting against the regime and to spread anti-

⁴² *Ibid.*, 94.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 95.

religious propaganda among students.”⁴⁴ Traditional clothes, celebration of religious days, fasting during Ramadan, religious marriages and circumcision were all prohibited.

Zhivkov’s first visit to Turkey 20-26 March 1968 was undertaking the aim of concluding an agreement on emigration. On 22 March 1968, the “Close Relative Emigration Agreement” was signed. This set an annual emigration quota of 10,000 to 15,000 comprising the relatives of those “Turks in Bulgaria who had immigrated until 1952.”⁴⁵ A total of 130,000 emigrated up until the termination of the agreement on 30 November 1978.⁴⁶ The Close Relative Emigration Agreement was considered to be an important and positive milestone in improvement of the bilateral relations between the two states, however, an ultimate solution to the problem of Turkish minority in Bulgaria was far from being reached.

In this period, it was impossible to separate the East-West confrontation and Bulgaria and Turkey positioning themselves on the opposite camps from Bulgarian-Turkish bilateral relations and Bulgaria’s attitude towards the Turkish-Muslim minority. After the signing of 1968 Agreement on emigration, on 25 February 1969, the Bulgarian Communist Party leadership adopted decisions for the “improvement of the Party activity among the Turkish population”. The main aim of these socio-economic measures was in fact, political. As a part of “the propaganda for the advantages of life under socialism (in Bulgaria) as compared to capitalism (in Turkey)” these measures allegedly aimed to decrease the number of people who wanted to emigrate to Turkey.⁴⁷ However, in the reality, the long lasting aim of homogenization of the population was under way

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁴⁵ Evgenia Kalinova, “Bulgarian-Turkish Diplomatic Relations (1980-1985),” in *Turkish-Bulgarian Relations: Past and Present*, ed. Mustafa Türkeş (İstanbul: Tasam Publications, 2010), 80.

⁴⁶ Ali Dayıoğlu, “Policies of the Bulgarian Administration Towards the Turkish Minority between 1984 and 1989,” in *Turkish-Bulgarian Relations: Past and Present*, ed. Mustafa Türkeş (İstanbul: Tasam Publications, 2010), 97.

⁴⁷ Iskra Baeva, *op. cit.*, p.75.

In 1970s, the authorities changed the names of the Bulgarian-speaking Muslims. By 1964 the BCP had already abandoned the decision it took on 1962 concerning the name changing of Pomaks. However, in 1970, the BCP took another decision in order to change the names of the people from the Pomak minority and the way they dressed. Once again, carrying out this decision came with the ill-treatment of this minority, including murder and exile. Those who resisted the campaign faced oppressive measures or pressures from the Bulgarian administration such as; arrest, forced labor, not being prohibited from receiving their salaries or using their bank accounts, carrying out their businesses or being able to find new employment.

One of the most important documents that show the Bulgaria's stance about the issue of minorities was the new Constitution of 1971. This was different from the Constitution of 1947 in terms of the approach to the minority issue. Other than the "provision that the Bulgarian citizens of non-Bulgarian ethnic origin had the right to learn their mother tongue" no other provision was made regarding the rights of minorities."⁴⁸ The word 'minority' was not even used in the Article 45 of the constitution. Instead, the ethnic minorities were referred to as "citizens of non-Bulgarian origin". This demonstrated that "the goal of creating a socialist regime with one nation, one language and a homogeneous culture had become evident as a state policy."⁴⁹

2.2.3 The Second Cold War Period

The tension between the East and the West camp started to escalate once again following the period of detente. The "Second Cold War" period witnessed the end of the positive developments in terms of the relations between the two camps, which also became evident in the bilateral relations of Bulgaria and Turkey and Bulgaria's approach to the Turkish minority. The "de-Ottomanization" was applied most intensely in this period. The period that started in 1984 with the changing of Turkish names to Bulgarian until the end of the Zhivkov regime in 1989 is also the

⁴⁸ Ali Dayıoğlu 2010, *op. cit.*, p.96.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* , 96.

“Harsh Assimilation Period”. The pressures on the minorities in this period failed to attract much reaction from Turkey or other countries, encouraging Bulgaria to force all minorities into assimilation. This period witnessed the gradual hardening of the assimilation policies, which became forced migration.

Although the assimilation of the Turkish minority had always been a major goal in the Bulgarian state until this period, a softer assimilation policy had been adopted by the Bulgarian state. The idea of resorting to harsher means to assimilate the Muslim-Turkish minority first emerged towards the end of the 1960s. The strategy adopted at the time was that the Turkish minority with strong national feeling would be forced to emigrate and those remaining would be assimilated. Prior to this period, in the 1970s, for example, new history books were published to “prove there was no such minority as the Turkish minority and the Turks were ‘pure Bulgarians’ who were Turkified during the Ottoman rule”⁵⁰. In this period, both Pomaks and Turks started to be considered as Bulgarian Muslims, although in the period before the 1980s the presence of a Muslim-Turkish minority was recognized both in the history books and by the policy makers.

The Emigration Convention of 1968 had already been terminated in 1978 with the consent of both states. The Turkish public officials asked for a new convention to be signed on the emigration of the members of separated families. Bulgaria, however, responded that “such cases could be arranged according to the Bulgarian laws and no convention was necessary”⁵¹. Later, upon the request of the Turkish Head of State, Kenan Evren, during a visit in February 1982, Zhivkov “agreed to allow the emigration of a certain number of Turks in Bulgaria, who had not emigrated when the Convention of 1968 had been in force”⁵². In the same meeting all the past conventions and agreements on mass emigration were declared as invalid and to unite separated families and that the individual laws of each state would be used. Once again, on the surface the Cold War mentality of “not losing

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁵¹ Evgenia Kalinova, *op. cit.*, p.80.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 80.

people to the opposite camp” was in place, especially for Bulgaria, and in fact Turkey did not want the mass emigration based on concerns of absorption capacity. The Bulgarian administration issued a decree that prohibited emigration, with some exceptions, until May 1989.⁵³

In the second half of 1982, the Bulgarian state began to change the names of the children of mixed marriages to Bulgarian. This policy attracted Turkish criticism but Zhivkov defended this act as being normal. Zhivkov also claimed that the Turkish state was provoking emigration to Turkey.⁵⁴ In short, around this time in particular and the Cold War era in general, the East-West confrontation and tension had a direct effect on Turkish-Bulgarian relations and the situation of the minorities in Bulgaria. Combined with the historical period of Ottoman control over Bulgarian territory, all the demands of the Turkish side had the risk of being perceived as an intervention in Bulgarian internal affairs. Whenever the tensions escalated within the Cold War framework about security, the issue of minorities became a secondary concern for both states and failed to get much attention.

Along with the Turkish minority, other groups were also subject to state intervention. The names of all the Roma people, who spoke Turkish, were changed between 1981 and 1983. Some of the Turkish minority in this period, who were claimed to be Roma as well, was subject to the same name changing. Following the Roma, the same policy of name changing was applied to the Tatar, Alevi and Albanian minority groups.⁵⁵

Another type of assimilation that was carried out in this period, targeting mainly the Turkish minority was administrative assimilation. This was carried through uniting the places where a large portion of the population was Turkish with towns or villages with a predominantly Bulgarian population. Thus, the percentage of the Turkish population was decreased in each administrative unit, supposedly paving the way for better cultural assimilation.

⁵³ Ali Dayıoğlu 2010, *op.cit.*, p.97.

⁵⁴ Evgenia Kalinova, *op.cit.*, p.80.

⁵⁵ Ali Dayıoğlu 2010, *op.cit.*, p.96.

A decision adopted on 8 May 1984 by the Bulgarian Communist Party “called the Turks in Bulgaria an ethnic group and tried to formulate new means for their integration in the Bulgarian state and society.”⁵⁶ Zhivkov declared that “Turks in Bulgaria should not be pushed to accept being ‘absolutely Bulgarians’ and that they were not following such a policy. This statement hardly satisfied Turkish officials and the tensions between the two countries prevailed. More importantly, in the Cold War context, such accusations of human rights violations directed against the Eastern bloc were a crucial part of Ronald Reagan’s policy of destabilization of the Eastern bloc. This issue had put significant pressure on the ruling Bulgarian Communist Party, causing the policy makers of Bulgaria to fear internal opposition and the slower integration of the Turks into Bulgarian society.”⁵⁷

2.2.3.1 The Revival Process

Bulgarian history has been filled with intervention of the outside powers. Following the end of almost 500 years of dependence on the Ottoman Empire and two decades of relative independence between the two World Wars, Bulgaria quickly fell under the absolute influence of the Soviet Union, positioning itself in the Eastern camp. The way of reducing the risk of outside intervention to a minimum, according to the policy makers of Bulgaria, was to completely eliminate the existence of the Turks as a minority group in Bulgaria. Another major aim was to weaken the effect of religion, namely Islam and its traditions on this population. Thus; from the end of 1984 through 1985, Bulgaria took the harshest step so far in dealing with the minorities by the forced name change of the Turks in Bulgaria followed by policies that intervened in the daily lives of the minority and prevented them from practicing their customs and traditions. These assimilation policies continued until the end of the Zhivkov regime in 1989.

In a very short time from December 1984 until March 1985 the Turkish names of hundreds of thousands of people were forcibly changed with Bulgarian

⁵⁶ Evgenia Kalinova, *op. cit.*, p.82.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* , 82.

ones, a policy aiming the ethnic homogenization of the nation. The Communist Party advocated that these people were in fact of Bulgarian origin and called it the 'revival' or 'rebirth process'. Although Zhivkov was still in power and there was no apparent change in the policy makers, this process was certainly a turning point in the move to the harshest assimilation policy that Bulgaria had adopted so far.

Regarding this policy, which continued up until the removal of Zhivkov from power in November 1989, the official claim was the "re-vitalization of the presumably lost Bulgarian ethnic identity of the Turkish speaking people living in the country."⁵⁸ After the campaign, news spread to the Turkish and eventually world press, resulting in an immense reaction both from the Turkish government and the United States which officially declared their own concern about the Revival Process. Bulgaria regarded these concerns and complaints over the Revival Process as an intervention in its domestic affairs. Especially at such a stage in the Cold War when detente was long gone, the Bulgarian leaders believed that "Turkey wanted to discredit Bulgaria internationally and to transform the natural discontent of the Turks in Bulgaria with the 'revival process' into open resistance against the regime of the Communist Party."⁵⁹

In order to defend their policy, the Bulgarian administrators claimed that the Turkish minority in Bulgaria did not exist and denied the ongoing campaign of forceful change of Turkish names. The BCP also argued that there was no Turkish minority living in Bulgaria and those who were considered to be Turkish were actually Bulgarians who had converted to being Turkish and Muslim during the repressive era of the Ottoman Empire. Thus, the defense of the Bulgarian policy makers was that the people had changed their names voluntarily rather than by use of force from the state. This policy of 'giving back their old names' to the people was done extensively. The official documents of those who had died or emigrated and even the names written on the tombs were changed. Similar to the policy of BCP in the 1970s when the names of people from Pomak minority were forcibly changed;

⁵⁸ Nikolai Genov, *op. cit.*, p.36.

⁵⁹ Evgenia Kalinova, *op. cit.*, p.82.

those who resisted “lost their jobs, denied their salaries, were prohibited from drawing money from their bank accounts and benefitting from health services.”⁶⁰

During the Revival Process, the Turkish minority was also prohibited from speaking Turkish in public. Those who did not obey this rule were fined, and in some rare cases, imprisoned. Along the same lines, the Turkish newspapers and periodicals were banned, the Turkish theaters were halted and Turkish broadcasts from Bulgarian National Radio were stopped. Turkish books in the libraries were removed. The form of harsh assimilation was also seen in administrative units. The names of locations or places were changed. There were bans on clothes such as the usage of baggy trousers (*şalvar*) and headscarves, as well as cultural traditions such as the celebration of marriages, performing folk dances, singing or listening to Turkish songs and Turkish radio broadcasts. Even telephone calls or communication with relatives in Turkey were prevented. In addition, the Turkish school children were sent away to study in schools in which most students were Bulgarians.

The aim of eliminating the Turks in Bulgaria altogether, as mentioned above, also had a religious angle. To weaken the effect of Islam on the Turkish minority, many mosques were closed down and converted into other facilities such as museums, libraries or warehouses. Some mosques were left unattended and were wrecked. The call for prayer and the Koran courses held in the mosque were banned. In addition, only the elderly people were allowed to go to the mosques. In addition there was a ban on circumcision, keeping the religious books inside the homes and going to Mecca for pilgrimage. Celebrations following Ramadan and the Festival of Sacrifice, the two main festivities of the Muslim religion, were also prohibited. A campaign was run against fasting during the month of Ramadan, which is compulsory in Islam. It was even forbidden for burials to be conducted in accordance with the Islamic rules. Muslim cemeteries were closed down and the only option was to be buried in common cemeteries. Disobedience to these new bans and rules had severe consequences, including years of imprisonment.

An important aspect of the pressure applied against the minorities in this era was the occasional resort to violence both from the state officials and the common

⁶⁰ Ali Dayıoğlu 2010, *op.cit.*, p.96.

people. The policy attracted the support of a large portion of the Bulgarian population due to Bulgaria's past dominated by the Ottoman rule that lasted for centuries.⁶¹ When people resisted the compulsory changes dictated by the Bulgarian state officials, they were, at times, physically punished. Some members of the Turkish minority were sent to prison, concentration camps; they were injured and, at times, killed because of their resistance to the forced changes in their everyday life. Another source of violence often emanated from the non-Muslim non-Turk population in Bulgaria. Sometimes everyday objects that reflected the Turkish presence such as the tombs or mosques were under attack. Only the existence of Armenian and Jewish minorities were recognized by the Bulgarian state at the time.

The real motivation behind these harsh policies directed against the Turkish minority was deeply connected to the "need for nationalist legitimacy" of the ruling Communist party and its leadership. The Communist party, in the latest stages of its rule, was in such a need due to the weakness of communism as an ideology for identification and mobilization of the masses.⁶²

CONCLUSION

The historical roots of Bulgarian nationalism and authoritarianism goes back to the Ottoman rule of Bulgaria that covers a period of about 500 years, which had been filled with resentment against the 'outsiders' that dominated their country. The gradual independence of the Bulgarian state was achieved through the rivalry of two great powers (the Ottoman Empire and Russia) and through the outcomes of the wars that they held against each other. However, of the treaties signed following the end of the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-1878 the San Stefano Treaty, was never actually implemented. Bulgaria's original gains from this treaty were trimmed to a large extent by in the Congress of Berlin. This revision of the original treaty had the impact on Bulgarian national pride, and become a yardstick for the later aims of the

⁶¹ Nikolai Genov, *op. cit.*, p.36.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 36.

Bulgarian administration especially in terms of the desired territorial expansion to the Aegean. Nationalism in Bulgaria at all times had its basis on the foundation of the Bulgarian state; the gains of San Stefano Treaty and the territorial losses following the Berlin Congress, fed by a sense of insecurity and complete dependency on a greater outside power.

A very crucial factor that fed the almost-structural insecurity was the presence of different minority groups in the country. Bulgaria, once a province of the Ottoman Empire, contained various minorities at its foundation as an independent country. These groups were different either culturally, ethnically or, more importantly, religiously but all of them were perceived as a threat to the existence of the Bulgarian state, either through changing the demographic profile of the country with high birth rates and eroding the dominant culture and ethnicity or through attracting foreign interference on the grounds that they had not been treated fairly. The impact of this historical insecurity still marks the Bulgarian politics today and it is part of the nationalist movements of the country. This is why the discrimination against minorities has been an issue in the Bulgarian history since it has attracted much criticism from other countries because of its discriminatory nature.

Looking at the overall situation of minorities in Bulgaria from independence until the end of the Communist Party rule, the dominant perception of Bulgarian state always persisted, in that it was the minorities that presented a threat to the well-being of the state and the society. However, the discourse adopted to tackle this problem was different in certain time periods, based on many variables such the intensity of the rivalry between the two different camps during the Cold War, the bilateral relations between the Bulgarian and the Turkish state and the consolidation of the ruling party's power. Despite the changing intensity of suppression and discrimination, the common aspect of the changes that were brought to minority communities was that they were forced. The assimilation trials throughout the Cold War period aimed to create a 'unified socialist state' through certain measures. When the assimilation policies were deemed unsuccessful, the policy of forced emigration was also used, especially regarding the Turkish minority.

The issue of minorities and their treatment prior to the end of the Cold War, together with the milestones of Bulgaria's road to independence, are a very significant part of the assessment the contemporary politics of Bulgaria and how each actor is located in the political spectrum. ATAKA, along with other political actors, utilizes the past and Bulgarian history to build its rhetoric of radical nationalism. As Bulgarian historiography glorifies the San Stefano Treaty and is disappointed by the decisions taken in the Berlin Congress; Bulgarian national pride has been based on the territorial claims of the San Stefano Treaty and the outcomes of the First Balkan War. These symbols are still widely utilized in the nationalist discourse in Bulgarian politics including ATAKA.

CHAPTER 3

TRANSFORMATION IN BULGARIA IN THE POST-COLD WAR ERA

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will examine the transformation that Bulgaria has gone through following the end of the Communist Party rule. The end of the Communist Party rule in Bulgaria in the beginning of 1990s signified an era of radical change not just for the Bulgarian state itself, but for the whole region, continent and even the world. The most important outcome of this transformation to Bulgaria has been the shift of dependency from the Soviet Union and the Eastern Camp to the United States and the Western institutions like NATO and the EU. Along with this, there have been other major outcomes that triggered other changes, which ultimately lead to the Bulgaria we know of today, a member of NATO and the EU, complying with the norms and principles of contemporary Europe.

The chapter will be divided into two main sections. The first section will focus on the internal dynamics of the transformation in Bulgaria. The formation of new political parties located at different sides of the political spectrum will be included. Each party's approach to nationalist rhetoric and integration with the Western institutions will constitute a crucial part of this chapter as the nationalistic rhetoric of ATAKA is one that excludes the minorities. This section will also include the political system established for free elections and the outcomes of the elections after the end of the Communist Party rule. After the examination of the outcomes of the elections on the local, national and the EU level, the second section of the chapter will examine the external factors contributing to the transformation of Bulgaria. Two main parts of this section will be the European Union membership factor affecting the policies of the Bulgarian state and the neoliberal restructuring triggered by the desire to fit in to a world without the walls of the Cold War and the neoliberal transformations elsewhere in the continent or the world. Privatization processes, the issues of corruption and unemployment will be evaluated in terms of the shifts that

have caused within the Bulgarian society and the discontent of a portion of the Bulgarian population with the ongoing process of rapid and sometimes ill-fated transformation.

The radical transformation of Bulgaria definitely changed the course of the political, social and economic life in Bulgaria. However, some issues such as the issues of minorities and the dependency factor have remained dominant in the political rhetoric like before and the courses of action in the Bulgarian political life, paving the way for the reproduction of authoritarianism in Bulgaria, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

3.1 Internal Factors

3.1.1 Main Political Parties in Bulgaria

The Bulgarian Communist Party was transformed to Bulgarian Socialist Party following the end of the Zhivkov regime. New political parties emerged, most of which have utilized a rhetoric that drew connections to the historical legacy of the state. Although the newly emerging parties were anti-communist, their rhetoric did not focus on anti-Russian nationalistic sentiments. The nationalistic policies and slogans focused on the neighboring countries that were perceived as threats on the outside, and on the ethnic minorities of the country within the state were restricted due to Bulgaria's quest for integration with the Western institutions, especially the EU. The leaders of the anti-communist opposition had to present themselves as "liberal cosmopolitans focusing their propaganda and policies on the universal human rights which were suppressed under the rule of the Communist Party" and to avoid radical nationalist ideas to be reflected in their rhetoric.⁶³

Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB)

GERB was founded on December 2007, by the mayor of Sofia at the time, Boyko Borisov. Its political programme has emphasized family values, low taxes and the need to fight against corruption and crime. It entered the political scene at the

⁶³ Nikolai Genov, *op. cit.*, p.36.

time when all the previous governments failed to fulfill the desires of the electorate that GERB has touched upon. GERB is currently the strongest party in the Bulgarian parliament, after receiving 36.7% of the votes and 116 seats out of 240 seats, which is 4 short of forming an absolute majority.⁶⁴ GERB is a center right party and unlike ATAKA, it rarely adheres to the xenophobic and racist discourse. However, following the 2009 elections, it managed to get the support of ATAKA and the 'Blue Coalition', another center right party.⁶⁵

GERB has strongly encouraged Bulgaria's membership in Western institutions such as the EU and NATO. Rather than acting on a pro-Russian sentiment, it encourages pragmatic economic ties with the Russian Federation. After the socialist-led government of Sergei Stanishev siding more with the Russian Federation, Borisov has pursued closer ties with the US and the EU instead.⁶⁶ The party's rhetoric, especially concerning the foreign policy of the state such as 'zero problems with neighbors' was tested after the party's coalition with ATAKA and the populist attitudes of its leadership in order to appeal to a wider electorate. For instance, prior to the 2009 parliamentary elections, Borisov declared that "all newborn children in Bulgaria should be given Christian Bulgarian names, but they could retain their father's family names, regardless of ethnic background."⁶⁷

Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF)

"Turkish National Movement in Bulgaria" (TNMB) formed the basis of Movement of Rights and Freedoms, which was formed under the leadership of Ahmed Doğan. The aim of this movement was to resist to the assimilatory policies of the Bulgarian administration during the Revival Process and stick to the Turkish ethnic identity, which had been constantly denied and ignored during this period. The

⁶⁴ Stefanos Katsikas, *Negotiating Diplomacy in the New Europe* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 63.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 63-64.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 64.

Party itself represents not only the Turkish minority in the country, but also other minorities.

The existence of this party is regarded as a controversy for a portion of the society and political figures. Article 11 Bulgarian Constitution of 1991 states that “political parties may not be founded on ethnic, racial or religious bases”.⁶⁸ On the basis of this provision, MRF was initially denied the right to run for office along with some other minority parties. However, MRF succeeded in persuading the judiciary that it was a movement rather than a party.⁶⁹ Throughout its history it participated in various coalitions and continues to be the third largest party in the Bulgarian parliament.

Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP)

After the resignation of Zhivkov following a 35-year long rule in November 1989, in April 1990, the name of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) was changed to BSP in the congress. The leadership of the party remained the same. The new leader of the country became Mladenov following the end of the Zhivkov regime. This marked a period in which the minority rights were restored. Regarding the issue of minorities he stated that the party would respect the rights of Muslim minority, although Eastern Orthodox Christianity would be the traditional religion of Bulgaria. This meant the official end to the assimilation policy and lifting of all restrictions concerning the Turkish people within the country. The emigrating Turks were allowed to come to Bulgaria and 50 Turks who were imprisoned for criticizing government policies were released. After taking power, new leader Mladenov apologized for the assimilation campaign.⁷⁰ The existence of Turkish people living within the Bulgarian borders was recognized as well as their rights to have Turkish and Arabic names, to practice their religion openly and freely and education in

⁶⁸ Nikolai Genov, *op. cit.*, p.39.

⁶⁹“World Directory of Minorities”, *Minority Rights Group International*, <<http://www.minorityrights.org/?lid=2426&tmpl=printpage>>, accessed on 1 August 2012.

⁷⁰ Birgül Demirtaş-Coşkun, “Turkish-Bulgarian Relations in the Post-Cold War Era: The Exemplary Relations in the Balkans” *The Turkish Yearbook* Vol.32, 2001: 29. <<http://dergiler.ankara.edu.tr/dergiler/44/672/8556.pdf>>, accessed on 10 September 2012.

Turkish.⁷¹ A Law on Public Education passed in October 1991, allowing teaching in minority languages in schools.⁷² With the new legislation that was passed, the properties of those people who fled the country were restored. After November 1989, minority-language publications and cultural groups were re-founded. In March 1990, the parliament adopted the law for Muslim people (including the Turkish minority) to resume using their own name.⁷³ The 1991 Constitution of the time retained Bulgaria as the official language but the right was permitted to “citizens whose national tongue is not Bulgarian . . . to study and use their own languages.”⁷⁴

The remarkable point is that, just like in the last few years of the Bulgarian Communist Party, the BSP continued to represent the nationalist groups and their members, although the party was generally considered left-wing. The roots of the nationalist attitude of the BSP have been connected to the historical legacy of the formation of Bulgaria as a product of the Russian-Turkish War. The perception of the Soviet Union as the liberator enabled a long-lasting positive public perception towards this state. Even in World War II, in which Bulgaria was a German ally, the brief Soviet presence in the country did not allow the development of anti-communist propaganda and anti-Russian nationalism. Although, such slogans were present at times, they were never sufficient to appeal to a broad audience.⁷⁵

BSP is a part of the Coalition for Bulgaria along with Party of Bulgarian Social Democrats, Agrarian Union “Aleksandar Stamboliyski” and Movement for Social Humanism. Period up until 1997 was marked by the BSP dominance in Bulgarian politics, with the exception of elections of 1991, in which UDF was the victor.

⁷¹ Richard J. Crampton, *A Concise History of Bulgaria*. 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 217.

⁷² “World Directory of Minorities”, *Minority Rights Group International*, <<http://www.minorityrights.org/?lid=2426&tmpl=printpage>>, accessed on 1 August 2012.

⁷³ Birgül Demirtaş-Coşkun, *op. cit.*, p.23.

⁷⁴ “World Directory of Minorities”, *Minority Rights Group International*, <<http://www.minorityrights.org/?lid=2426&tmpl=printpage>>, accessed on 1 August 2012.

⁷⁵ Nikolai Genov, *op. cit.*, p.36.

Union of Democratic Forces (UDF)

UDF was established on December 7, 1989 as a coalition of thirteen political groups as United Democratic Forces. It forms the Blue Coalition together with Democrats for a Strong Bulgaria and United Agrarians. It had been the major opposition party across BSP in all elections with the exception of the elections of 1997. As a result of the deep economic crisis, causing the voters to distrust BSP, in the elections of 1997 UDF got more than half of the votes.

In the beginning “UDF resembled a political movement seeking to reform the totalitarian system rather than a political force prepared to administer state government,” linking its existence with the fight against authoritarianism.⁷⁶ In the early stages of post-Communist party rule, UDF advocated autonomy from Russia and raised the issue of NATO membership, demonstrating a rupture with the previous period. Especially the defeat in the 1990 parliamentary elections has lead UDF towards a more radical path, seeking a break with the Communist Party period. During the transitional period, Bulgaria remained stable in terms of the situation of ethnic minorities. At times, it was even set as an example and a model for ethnic tolerance unlike some of the other states in the region which experienced all out ethnic wars in the transition period. According to some scholars “the manifest non-nationalist liberalism of the major anti-communist political forces together with the careful policies of the BCP/BSP prevented potential inter-ethnic tensions.”⁷⁷ The possibility of an ethnic conflict was always present given the long history of tensions between the ethnic Bulgarians. Especially following the ‘revival process’ and the radical changes being brought by the democratization process, the sustainability of ethnic peace became more difficult.

3.1.2 The Political System and Elections

“The entire decade of the 1990s was characterized by a political Ping-Pong game between the BSP and the UDF, with power shifting perennially back and forth

⁷⁶ Stefanos Katsikas, *Negotiating Diplomacy in the New Europe* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 64.

⁷⁷ Nikolai Genov, *op. cit.*, p.37

between them, and with the MRF always playing a decisive role.”⁷⁸ Apart from this constant shift of power, there had been various groups with ultra-nationalist rhetoric such as the Bulgarian National Radical Party and Bulgarian Christian-Democratic Party. However, these groups remained marginal in Bulgarian politics.⁷⁹

They were held on 10 June 1990, with a second round for eighteen seats a week later. The electoral system was changed. Instead of 400 single-member constituencies used during the Communist-era, a dual system in which half were elected in single member constituencies and half by proportional representation was adopted. The result was a victory for the Bulgarian Socialist Party, which won 211 of the 400 seats and 47% of the vote. This was made possible by the “political and ideological mixture of communist egalitarianism with Bulgarian nationalism”.⁸⁰ This allowed it to form the government alone. UDF received 36% of the votes and this was decisive in the party’s identity.

The importance of these elections was that it was democratic and open, with the participation of multiple parties after a very long time and for the first time, the Turkish minority was allowed to participate in the political process with the political party that represented them, which showed a clear break from the Communist Party rule. Voter turnout was 90.3%, signifying an eagerness on the side of the electorate to take part in political decisions concerning the newly established democratic state. The following 1991 Parliamentary elections were held on 13 October 1991, resulting in the victory for the Union of Democratic Forces, which won 110 of the 240 seats. Voter turnout was relatively lower than the previous elections with 83.9%.

The next Parliamentary elections were held in Bulgaria on 18 December 1994. The result was a victory for the Bulgarian Socialist Party, which won 125 of the 240 seats. Following the election, Socialist Party leader Zhan Videnov became Prime Minister.

⁷⁸ Kristen Ghodsee, “Xenophobia, Neo-totalitarianism, and Populist Politics in Bulgaria,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 55, No. 3 (May/June 2008): 28.

⁷⁹ Nikolai Genov, *op. cit.*, p.37

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 36

The next Parliamentary elections were held in Bulgaria on 19 April 1997. The result was a victory for the United Democratic Forces (an alliance of the Union of Democratic Forces, the Democratic Party, the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union-Nikola Petkov and the Bulgarian Social Democratic Party), which won 137 of the 240 seats. Voter turnout was 62.9%. Following the election, UDF leader Ivan Kostov became Prime Minister. The low pace of the political and economic reforms and corruption in this era lead people to vote for a different party reflecting their desire for change along with the demonstrations on the streets that became common.

This election was very significant because it was a result of the “coup from below” that forced BSP to resign due to massive protests.⁸¹ This development was interpreted as part of the democratization process of the country. Same year, Petar Stoyanov from UDF, became the President.

The 2001 Parliamentary elections that were held on 17 June 2001 had National Movement – Simeon II, which was recently formed, as the winner and won 120 out of 240 seats. United Democratic Forces, which was the winner of the previous elections, came in second 18%. Third party was Coalition for Bulgaria, led by the BSP with around 17% and the last that entered the parliament was the Movement for Rights and Freedoms, getting around 7%. Voter turnout was 67.0%. Following the election, Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, the country’s last Tsar, became Prime Minister and his party, the National Movement Simeon II head the government in a coalition with the Movement for Rights and Freedoms. The elections came four years after the last parliamentary elections in 1997, marking the first occasion since the fall of Communism that a full term had been completed.

3.2 External Factors

The democratization attempts in Bulgaria were related to Bulgarian wish the “return to Europe”. The basic goal of Bulgaria at this time was becoming part of the West after a break of nearly 50 years. Bulgaria was in need to find new allies after

⁸¹ Emil Giatzidis, *An Introduction to Post-Communist Bulgaria: Political, Economic and Social Transformation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 69.

the collapse of the Soviet Union. Under this new aim, Bulgaria started to reform its political institutions in accordance with the Western values and norms.

Soon after the collapse of the Communist party Rule in 1989 in Bulgaria, a rapid structural transformation has begun in the state of Bulgaria. While many domestic political parties were formed that situated themselves on different parts of the left-right spectrum, the changes that were brought were tightly linked to some external factors or trends that spread to Bulgaria. The main drivers of this transformation has been Bulgaria's quest for the European Union membership and the neoliberal restructuring that arrived from the Western Europe to integrate Bulgaria to the new European (or world) order.

Social fragmentation and discontent as characterized the Post-Cold War era in many ways. This is due to the fact that the end of the Communist Party rule has led to an era of uncertainty, social dislocation and reconfiguration of social networks.⁸²

3.2.1 The EU Factor

The two main aims of Bulgarian state after 1990 following the end of the Communist Party rule had been membership to EU and NATO. The relationship between Bulgaria and the EU has been a difficult one, since Bulgaria had not experienced democracy within the Western institutions and the demands of EU were at times hard to fulfill for the country. During the EU membership process, up until the day of accession or even after, the slow pace of democratization and domestic economic reform has been an area of criticism, "necessitating the enactment of special measures to account for the 'Balkan exceptionalism' of Bulgaria".⁸³

Different from the previous enlargements, this round included more demands or rules to be adopted as a prerequisite for accession. Especially once the membership prospects of Romania and Bulgaria became greater, demand for harsher

⁸² David Stark, "Recombinant Property in East European Capitalism," *The Journal of Sociology*, 101/4, 1996: 993-1027.

⁸³ Dimitris Papadimitriou and Eli Gateva, "Between Enlargement-Led Europeanisation and Balkan Exceptionalism: An Appraisal of Bulgaria's and Romania's Entry into the European Union," *Perspectives on European Politics and Society* 10, No. 2 (June, 2009): 152-166.

conditionality and stronger mechanisms of EU monitoring were demanded. Regional policies were applied in Bulgaria with the influence of the EU. However, the Europeanization of Bulgaria has been set as the ultimate goal and was embraced by all political parties in Bulgaria. The very nature of the accession negotiations structured around the need for full compliance with the EU's *acquis communautaire* coupled with the extremely tight timeframe and profound power asymmetries between the negotiating parties have unleashed massive pressure for domestic adaptation across Central and Eastern Europe.”⁸⁴

The principle of conditionality, even after the completion of the EU accession on January 1, 2007, has been a driving force in the Bulgarian transition. Especially in the Central-Eastern Europe, this principle of conditionality was widely monitored. Conditionality is defined as “bargaining strategy of reinforcement by reward, under which the EU provides external incentives for a target government to comply with its conditions”.⁸⁵ On Commissions report dating 26 September 2006 confirmed the entrance of Bulgaria to the EU. With this, however, EU was invested with extra power to monitor the post-accession conditionality that was expected from the Bulgarian state. Failure to comply with the EU norms gave the EU power to impose various sanctions, such as the withdrawal of the EU funding or the unilateral suspension of bilateral cooperation with other EU member states on judicial matters.⁸⁶

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the formation of many individual states in the Central and Eastern Europe, many states prioritized strengthening state capacity and nationality. This way the alienation, discrimination and politization of minority groups became a possibility and a risk for these states. The violent conflict in Yugoslavia and in certain areas of the former Soviet Union encouraged European Union to exert harsher preconditions to similar former Eastern-Bloc countries for EU

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁸⁵ Frank Schimmelfennig and Ulrich Sedelmeier, “Governance by conditionality: EU rule transfer to the candidate countries of Central and Eastern Europe,” *Journal of European Public Policy*, 11/4, 2004: 662.

⁸⁶ Dimitris Papadimitriou and Eli Gateva, *op. cit.*, p.160.

accession. Bulgaria had to accommodate a 7-10% of its minority population to avoid an ethnic confrontation within the state itself.⁸⁷ ‘Respect and protection of minorities’ has been a constant issue between Bulgarian-EU negotiations.

Bulgaria and Romania, the two former Eastern bloc members, faced the EU conditionality during the negotiation of their Association Agreements in 1992. Starting from that period onwards, most of the reports issued either by the Commission (since 1997) and by the European Parliament reports the speed of the domestic reforms on a variety of areas were questioned. The concern of the EU in this regard was expressed in the Treaty of Accession signed on 25 April 2005.⁸⁸

Bulgaria adopted policies for protection of minorities, for avoiding discrimination and more importantly, to actively promote minority identities.⁸⁹ In the regular reports of the EU, the situation of Roma minorities has been a constant issue, although Bulgaria has had a significant minority population other than Roma. This, according to Sasse, is because the Roma minority is non-territorialized, internally diverse and marginalized. They also remain under-represented in politics both in national and municipal level, despite some improvements in the latter in the last few years. On the other hand, minority groups like Turks are territorialized and politically mobilized.⁹⁰ In order to fulfill the criteria for accession to the EU on the planned schedule, which was January 2007, special steps were taken to improve the minority rights in the country, mostly aiming the situation of Roma.

Throughout the accession process, the Commission’s emphasis has shifted from the adoption of the *acquis* to capacity and implementation. For Bulgaria, for instance, the 2002 Report on Bulgaria pointed out that “there are increased tension between the Roma and the ethnic Bulgarians.”⁹¹ Concerning the policy for Roma,

⁸⁷ Gwendoly Sasse, “EU Conditionality and Minority Rights: Translating the Copenhagen Criterion into Policy,” *EUI-RSCAS Working Papers* No. 16, 2005: 7.

⁸⁸ Official Journal (2005b) Treaty . . . concerning the Accession of the Republic of Bulgaria and Romania to the European Union, L157, 21 June

⁸⁹ EUMAP, 2002, 25.

⁹⁰ Gwendoly Sasse, *op. cit.*, p.12.

however, the reports of the Commission and the response of the states have been somewhat inconsistent at times. 1999 report on Bulgaria, for instance, stated that “significant progress was achieved concerning further integration of Roma through the adoption of Framework Programme for ‘Full Integration of the Roma Population into the Bulgarian Society’ and the establishment of relevant institutions at central and regional level.”⁹²

Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) is constantly referred to in the reports of the European Union. This document was opened for signing in February 1, 1995 and was immediately signed by Bulgaria, although its ratification and implementation took a longer period of time. Bulgaria added a special declaration to this Convention and referred “to the policy of protection of human rights and tolerance to the persons belonging to minorities and stipulates that the ratification and implementation of the Framework Convention do not imply any right to engage in any activity violating the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the unitary Bulgarian, its internal and international security.”⁹³ In May 1999 Council of Europe’s Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities was ratified.

The pre-conditionality of EU also lead Bulgaria to include a specific ‘human rights clause’ in the preamble of the Europe Agreement that explicitly referred to the protection of minority rights. Also, a unilateral suspension clause that enabled either side to suspend cooperation in case of the failure of the opposite side to fulfill its obligations was put to Article 118 of the Final Provisions of the Agreements⁹⁴.

Education in minority languages is allowed in Bulgaria, but at times implementation of the existing law fails to some degree. Similarly, by law, public

⁹¹ Report on Bulgaria 2002, 33.

⁹² Report on Bulgaria 1999, 75.

⁹³ Bulgaria, Declaration of 7 May 1999, in Gwendoly Sasse, “EU Conditionality and Minority Rights: Translating the Copenhagen Criterion into Policy,” *EUI-RSCAS Working Papers* No. 16, 2005: 17.

⁹⁴ Dimitris Papadimitriou and Eli Gateva, “Between Enlargement-Led Europeanisation and Balkan Exceptionalism: An Appraisal of Bulgaria’s and Romania’s Entry into the European Union,” *Perspectives on European Politics and Society*, 10/2, June 2009: 160.

broadcasting can be done in languages other than Bulgarian, but in practice, radio and television programs done in minority languages are rare. Among the steps taken for the improvement of the situation of minorities in this period, one was the introduction of training programs for Romani-language teachers in two universities. Anti-discrimination laws were passed in 2003, which enabled civil society organizations to file lawsuits for public interests.⁹⁵ A health initiative taken in 2005 recognizing the special needs of the minority groups and the adoption of regulations aiming to reduce the segregation of Roma in schools both aimed at reducing the alienation of this minority group from the society.⁹⁶ Still, Roma minority has remained on the sidelines of the Bulgarian society and “routinely confront police abuse and harassment; complaints of ill treatment are often not investigated. In a 2004 case, the ECHR ruled that by failure to investigate violence and killings of Roma by Bulgarian police, Bulgaria had violated the right to life and the prohibition on discrimination enshrined in Convention Articles 2 and 14.”⁹⁷

The significance of the EU factor in terms of the rise of ATAKA and its appeal to the voters was that up until ATAKA, the political leadership in Bulgaria was never engaged in debates or disagreements about the path towards European Union membership. The information that the public received about these negotiations only amounted to the opening and the closure of the ‘chapters’. However, the chapters’ content and the nature of the negotiations with the EU remained mostly unknown for the Bulgarian public. While some scholars claim that the reforms had to be carried out the way they did due to the delicate and sensitive nature of some of the topics discussed and because some of the topics require high level of specialization and information. They also claim that the reforms had to be done in a speedy manner in order to not lose momentum. In addition, the skepticism in the Western Europe

⁹⁵ “World Directory of Minorities”, *Minority Rights Group International*, <http://www.minorityrights.org/?lid=2426&tmpl=printpage>, accessed on 1 August 2012.

⁹⁶ “World Directory of Minorities”, *Minority Rights Group International*, <http://www.minorityrights.org/?lid=2426&tmpl=printpage>, accessed on 1 August 2012.

⁹⁷ “World Directory of Minorities”, *Minority Rights Group International*, <http://www.minorityrights.org/?lid=2426&tmpl=printpage>, accessed on 1 August 2012.

towards the enlargement of the EU, causing Bulgaria's EU membership to be uncertain at times, also affected the Bulgarian public. At the same time, due to various historical, cultural, geo-strategic, economic and even geographic reasons, Bulgaria did not possess the same negotiating power vis-à-vis the EU unlike some of the other new candidates like Poland or Czech Republic.⁹⁸

In order to fulfill the criteria for EU membership, Bulgaria had to take some steps that were at times clashing with the national interests. The closing down of the Kozloduy nuclear power plant was an example to this kind of action that raised questions of legitimacy of the EU and the surrender of sovereignty. Combined with the historical legacy of dependency of outside powers, the EU factor definitely helped the reproduction of authoritarianism in Bulgaria and the formation of a support base for ATAKA.

3.2.2 Neoliberal Restructuring

The social and economic change in Bulgaria following the end of the Zhivkov regime, was abandoning the centrally planned economy and following the liberal democratic trends and market capitalism already widespread in Western Europe. The main direction that Bulgaria was headed to after the end of the Zhivkov regime, was the neoliberal restructuring. This complemented Bulgaria's primary aim of integrating with the Western institutions like many of the former Eastern bloc members. The rapid transition from a planned economy to a market driven one has not been completely smooth and changed the societal dynamics of the state to a large extent. Its performance was somewhat average for the countries with transforming economies. During this transition, the declines in output as well as inflation and unemployment were the main obstacles that the country faced. This period marked the introduction of "shock therapy", which was brought from Western Europe and its financial institutions. Most important aspects of shock therapy are tight monetary and fiscal policies, and the goal of eventual export-led growth. Moreover, this new period

⁹⁸ Nikolai Genov, *op. cit.*, p.38.

introduced shortages and uncertainties.⁹⁹ At least in the early stage of shock therapy (in the short term) the strong players with larger sizes and more assets got stronger whereas the weaker got weaker in terms of their market share. Thus, increasing poverty combined with the economy that went downhill, created discontent within a big portion of the society.

Bulgaria, prior to the end of the Communist Party rule, had extremely limited trade links. Even with the high rate of industrialization through heavy industry, chemicals and energy sectors, Bulgaria carried most of its trade with the Soviet Union, which constituted over 80% of its trade by the late 1980s.¹⁰⁰ During the Communist Party rule, central institutions of the state were the primary actors of production and the primary recipient, as well as the primary employer of the workers. With the end of central planning, both the biggest supplier and coordinator had been lost. Thus; the end of the Zhivkov regime signified a radical change in the structure of economy in Bulgaria. In the following two years the BSP government was ineffective in launching the systemic reforms for integration to the free markets. The only exception was “the imposition of partial macroeconomic shock therapy in early 1991 (price liberalization, tight credit policy, reduced government subsidies to enterprises, and monetary reform), changes that were forced on the government by international financial institutions in exchange for loan guarantees.”¹⁰¹

The neoliberal restructuring strategy of Bulgaria started simultaneously from various directions. Some steps taken regarding certain areas of economy were extremely rapid, whereas some others had an unexpectedly slow pace. Radical steps were taken towards liberalization of prices, formation of a competition policy, and privatization quick privatizations on a small scale. On the other hand, Bulgarian economy was extremely slow in the privatization of large state owned firms and in dealing with its growing debt.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Kenneth I. Spenner and Derek C. Jones, “Social Economic Transformation in Bulgaria: An Empirical Assessment of the Merchant Capitalism Thesis,” *Social Forces*, 76/3, March 1998: 940.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* , 945.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 946.

The initiation of the neoliberal restructuring was also nothing but easy. The economic situation following the end of the Communist Party rule in Bulgaria and the collapse of the Soviet Union was not easy to deal with. The trade with the states from the Eastern Bloc had deteriorated, decreasing the opportunity for the Bulgarian industrial products to find markets. Foreign credit and investment opportunities had decreased the availability of energy and other production inputs were being questioned, the possibility of the escalation of ethnic tensions and even the risk of turning into an all-out war, the political obscurity and the blurring of the direction of the state and economic relations were all present at one. Soon after Bulgarian exposure to open Western markets, the decline of the Bulgarian economy started in 1991. Bulgaria's gross domestic product fell almost 12% in 1990 and over 20% in 1991, as well as the industrial output¹⁰³. Foreign trade had also significantly decreased mostly due to the demise of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance. "The dollar value of Bulgaria's exports fell more than 30% in both 1990 and 1991, while the value of imports fell about 25% and 40%, respectively, during the same two years."¹⁰⁴

The privatization process, which became one of the landmarks of radical structural change, started of slow prior to 1992. Privatization was necessary for facilitating the "participation of the country in the international division of labor, to increase productivity and the general efficiency of the national economy."¹⁰⁵ Legislative measures necessary for the transition to a market economy were slow both in passing and implementation. For instance, "legislation on restitution, foreign ownership and privatization of state-owned enterprises passed parliament in Bulgaria in late 1991-early 1992...Even into 1997, ... bankruptcy laws await supporting regulations and effective implementation in the cases of large state-owned

¹⁰² *Ibid.* , 950.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 951.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 952

¹⁰⁵ Nikolai Genov, *op. cit.*, p.37.

enterprises.”¹⁰⁶ Another problem with changing the legislation to direct the economy has been the slowness of the implementation of the changed legislation.

Another aspect of privatization that attracted criticism from the Bulgarian society and raised eyebrows in the public was about whether the speedy privatizations were really in line with the national interests, such as in the case of the privatization of the national air carrier “Balkan” in 1999. In this particular case, the national carrier had to be re-nationalized leading to a big amount of financial loss for the state.¹⁰⁷ Many similar examples in Bulgaria raised doubts in the electorate’s mind about whether the policy-makers were considering the national interests when taking these big steps and this issue attracted a lot of criticism from all parts of the society.

Another huge obstacle to overcome in the period of transition was the problem of inflation, which at one period was the highest in CEE. Price liberalization and increased monopoly power of the domestic firms were the primary reasons for this phenomenon. Another problem that needed to be tackled as a result of the transformation was high rates unemployment.¹⁰⁸ Soon after the initiation of the transformation, the unemployment rate increased from less than 2% in 1990 to about 12% by late 1992.¹⁰⁹ The reason for this was that the expectations for future output had been declining. At the same time, the newly emerging private sector was not able to accommodate every individual that was out from work in the shrinking public sector or the ones that just entered into labor force. Especially in the first few years of transition, Bulgarian citizens also witnessed a sharp decline in their real wages and purchasing power.¹¹⁰

Corruption has been a major issue to be tackled in the Bulgarian politics and economy, with the problem escalating during the period of transition. The EU tried to

¹⁰⁶ Kenneth I. Spenner and Derek C. Jones, *op. cit.*, 940.

¹⁰⁷ Nikolai Genov, *op. cit.*, p.37.

¹⁰⁸ James Angresano. “Institutional change in Bulgaria: A socioeconomic Approach.” *Journal of Socio-Economics* 23, No. 1/2 (Spring/Summer, 1994): 2.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* , 2.

¹¹⁰ James Angresano, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

tackle this problem through the condition of preconditionality as well. Through various Commission reports, Bulgaria's failure to tackle this problem was emphasized and the constant failure of Bulgaria in dealing with the issue resulted in the withdrawal of 220 million Euros of EU funding.¹¹¹ The economic and general crime, re-distribution of property and political power, long-term unemployment, impoverishment and mass emigration of hundreds of thousands of young and well educated Bulgarians have been the major problems of this period, which was perceived a result of neoliberal structuring and its mismanagement by the policy-makers.

The governments of Ivan Kostov (1997-2001) and of Simeon Saxe-Coburggotski (2001-2005) aimed at establishing economic and political neo-liberalism, while trying to avoid doing it through the expression of nationalist ideology and policies. Thus," under the pressure of international circumstances neither the political left nor the political right or any centrist political formation in the country wanted to be identified with nationalism or even with any special stress on national interests.¹¹²

CONCLUSION

The profound changes that the country has gone through following the end of the Communist Party rule, transformed the state and the economic as well as the institutional apparatus from its core. The newly introduced reforms either aimed to integrate Bulgaria into Western institutions or to comply with the open market and rules of free competition. The incredibly fast pace of reform, combined with the weakness of the Bulgarian system for entering the world of free market resulted in undesired results, such as inflation, unjust or primitive privatization and corruption. These ongoing processes that somehow became inseparable with the process of

¹¹¹ Dimitris Papadimitriou and Eli Gateva, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

¹¹² Nikolai Genov, *op. cit.*, p.37.

transformation created a group within the Bulgarian state that had a feeling of “being forgotten” by the new regime with the arrival of democracy. Especially the urban centers were perceived as being corrupt and utilizing the country’s resources for their own benefit unjustly. This frustration has provided a good base for ATAKA in the future for channeling the voters’ anger for its own electoral success.

The changes that were introduced to the Bulgarian society around this time brought a high degree of uncertainty and lead to in-group identification and in-group biases. Because of the uncertainty of reforms and the need for readjustment to new living conditions and a brand new political system, people increasingly tended to orient themselves to networks of family and friends for assistance and support.¹¹³ Uncertainty, on the other hand, “accelerates the rate of dissolution of ties between non-similar others and the formation of niches of similarity in social space.”¹¹⁴ These processes, in the end, lead to more social fragmentation and increasing distance between dissimilar entities. In the light of these changes that profoundly altered the Bulgarian state and society, there was room for the emergence of ATAKA and the reproduction of authoritarianism prominence in a medium where disparate social groups seem to be getting further away from each other.

The critical rhetoric of the political leaders of Bulgaria in this period was that Bulgaria had been subject to harsher preconditions than the current member states, most of which went through the accession process more smoothly. This ‘Balkan exceptionalism’ as an “exclusively EU-driven discourse leading to discrimination and the imposition of enhanced conditionality against the 2007 entrants fails to encapsulate fully the complexities of their relationship with the EU since 1989”, but has still been utilized by the Bulgarian political leaders “to advance their political ambitions”.¹¹⁵ Similar to the issue of corruption, ATAKA managed to invest on the issue of integration with the Western institutions and especially with the European

¹¹³ Stoyan V. Sgourev, “Predicting Unpredictability: The Emergence of an Electoral Surprise,” paper presented at the annual meeting for the American Sociological Association, New York, August 11-14, 2007, 13.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹¹⁵ Dimitris Papadimitriou and Eli Gateva, *op. cit.*, p.160.

Union and the feeling of making concessions about the sovereignty or the independence of the Bulgarian state.

Another important driver of change in this period has been the transition from a centrally planned economy to a market-oriented one. The transition was by no means smooth and at the same time shook the societal relations to its core. The economic crisis in this transitional period also created resentment in some portion of the society against fast change. The grievances of the affected people, who thought of themselves as worse-off in the transition process, accumulated and in turn, paved the way for the creation of an outlet in the political sphere like ATAKA.

CHAPTER 4

REPRODUCTION OF AUTHORITARIANISM AND THE RISE OF ATAKA

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will examine the rise of the political party of ATAKA in terms of the reproduction of authoritarianism in Bulgaria. The main themes discussed in the previous chapters that have been constant issues and the problems in the Bulgarian political life such as the treatment of minorities and dependency on outside powers will be reevaluated in terms of how they are utilized in the rhetoric of ATAKA for the attraction of voters.

The first section of the chapter will focus on the formation of the Coalition of ATAKA and its electoral history in the parliamentary and presidential elections. After portraying the sudden success of ATAKA in appealing to a broad audience, the rhetoric of ATAKA regarding the ongoing processes in the Bulgarian political and social life will be presented. Special focus will be given to how ATAKA evaluates some of the key issues about the Bulgarian state such as membership to the NATO and the EU or the treatment of minorities. After examining ATAKA's rhetoric, the remaining sections of the chapter will mainly focus on the roles of different factors in ATAKA's success. The third section of the chapter will focus on the role of the media and the personality of Volen Siderov, the party's leader, in ATAKA's success. Siderov's background as a prominent TV personality, combined with his strong choice of words and slogans, certainly contribute to the party's success and the clarity of its messages tried to be conveyed. Although ATAKA's success cannot be separated from the popularity of its leader Volen Siderov, there are also other prominent factors that contribute to the rise of this ultra-nationalist party. Affected by the ongoing political trends elsewhere, ATAKA's rise can also be partly attributed to the rise of the right-wing parties elsewhere in Europe. The fifth and the final section will focus on the theories that make an attempt to explain the rise of ATAKA in a cause and effect manner and whether this rise is sustainable in the short and long run.

4.1 Formation of ATAKA and Its Electoral History

The nationalist-populist National Union “ATAKA” (Nacionalen Sayuz ATAKA) was established in April 2005 through the coalition of several political organizations. Just after two months after its formation, barely on time to meet the deadline for completing the necessary documents and the registration for participation in the elections, it managed to enter the parliamentary elections held on 25 June 2012.

As many scholars point out, the analysis of the ATAKA vote is a difficult one. The heterogeneous nature of its voters, combined with the explosive nature of its rise, it is difficult to point out the exact cause and effect scheme. For instance, although regional policies were applied during the course of the quest for Bulgaria’s EU membership, “regional logic has had very little influence in Bulgaria from a historical and institutional point of view.”¹¹⁶ Serre and Tashev point out that from a historical point of view, Bulgaria’s territory has been its smallest since the First Bulgarian Kingdom that existed between the 8th and 11th centuries. Thus, the contemporary territory of Bulgaria altogether has not had a distinct long-term history. This is also conveyed in the 20 principles of the ATAKA party. Although these 20 points illustrate the policies of ATAKA, the subject of regions and their potential threat to the “homogeneous” Bulgarian nation was never mentioned.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Adrien Serre and Georgi Tashev, “Bulgarian Extremist Party Ataka,” 2. Available at <http://www.sciencespo.fr/coesionet/sites/default/files/Bulgaria%20ATAKA.pdf>

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

ATAKA 's Electoral History

Table 1: Election results for the 25 June 2005 parliamentary elections

	Percentage of Votes %	Number of MPs
Coalition for Bulgaria	34.17	82
National Movement Simeon II	22.08	53
Movement for Rights and Freedoms	14.17	34
Coalition Union Attack	8.75	21
Union of Democratic Forces	8.33	20
Democrats for Strong Bulgaria	7.08	17
Bulgarian People's Union	5.43	13
Total	100	240

Source: **OSCE/ODIHR ELECTION ASSESSMENT MISSION REPORT (25 JUNE 2005)**, available at “<http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/bulgaria/16816>”.

Table 2: Election results for the 5 July 2009 parliamentary elections

Party/alliance	Votes	Votes (%)	PR list seats	Plurality seats	Total seats	Total seats (%)
Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB)	1.678.641	39.7	90	26	116	48.3
Coalition for Bulgaria (KB)	748.147	17.7	40	-	40	16.7
Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF)	610.521	14.5	33	5	38	15.8
Party ATAKA (PA)	395.733	9.4	21	-	21	8.8
The Blue Coalition (SK)	285.662	6.8	15	-	15	6.3
Order, Law and Justice (RZS)	174.582	4.1	10	-	10	4.2
Lider	137.795	3.3	-	-	-	-
National Movement for Stability and Progress (NDSV)	127.470	-	-	-	-	-
Others	67.702	1.6				
Total valid votes	4.226.194	100	209	31	240	100
Invalid votes	97.387	2.3	-	-	-	-
Total votes	4.323.581	60.2	-	-	-	-

Source: Central Electoral Commission (2009) in Maria Spirova. “The 2009 Parliamentary Elections”, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2009.12.002>

Table 3: Election results for the 2006 presidential elections

Candidates	First Round	
	Votes	Votes (%)
Georgi Parvanov-Angel Marin	1,780,119	64.05
Volen Siderov & Pavel Shopov	597,175	21.49
Nedelcho Beronov-Yuliana Nikolova	271,078	9.75
Georgi Markov- Mariya Ivanova	75,478	2.72
Peter Beron- Stela Bankova	21,812	0.78
Grigor Veleov-Yordan Mutafchiev	19,857	0.71
Lyuben Petrov- Neli Topalova	13,854	0.50
Electorate	6,450,920	
Valid Votes	2,779,381	43.09

Source: OSCE/ODIHR Election Assessment Mission Report (22&29 OCTOBER 2006), available at
“<http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/bulgaria/24138>”

Table 4 Election results for the 2011 presidential elections

Candidate pair (party)	First Round		Second Round	
	Votes	Votes (%)	Votes	Votes (%)
Rossen	1,349,380	40.1	1,698,136	52.6
Plevneliev- Maria Popova (GERB)				
Ivailo Kalfin- Stefan Danailov (BSP)	974,300	29	1,531,193	47.4
Meglana Kuneva- Lubomir Hristov (independent)	470,808	14		
Volen Siderov- Pavel Shopov (Ataka)	122,466	3.6		
Stefan Solakov- Galina Vassileva (NFSB)	84,205	2.5		
Rumen Hristov- Emanuil Yordanov (Rightist Union)	65,761	2.0		
Atanas Semov- Polya Stancheva (RZS)	61,797	1.8		
Svetoslav Vitkov- Ventzislav Mitkov (independent)	54,125	1.6		
Others	181,242	5.4		
Total votes	3,364,084	100	3,229,329	100
Eligible voters and turnout	6,873,589	52.3	6,910,491	48.2

Source: Central Electoral Commission (2011) in Ekaterina R. Rashkova, “The 2011 Presidential election in Bulgaria: Have Bulgarians left the Left?”, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2012.03.003>

Table 5: Electoral Performance of ATAKA through Elections

ELECTION YEAR		2005	2006	2007	2009	2011
National Assembly	Number of seats won	21			21	
	Number of total votes	296,848			395,733	
	Percentage of popular vote	8.1%			9.36%	
Presidential Elections	Number of total votes in the first round		597,175			122,466
	Percentage of popular votes in the first round		21,5%			3.64%
	Number of total votes in the second round		649,387			
	Percentage of popular votes in the second round		24.1%			
European Parliament	Number of seats won			3	2	
	Number of total votes			275,237	308,052	
	Percentage of popular vote			14.20%	11.96 %	

Source: Central Electoral Commission (2009) available at:

<http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/bulgaria/16816>

Two months after its formation, ATAKA participated in the 2005 parliamentary elections that was held on June 25th, and managed to get 8.93% of the votes, meaning 21 out of 240 seats.¹¹⁸ It beat all the center-right parties and became the fourth largest party out of seven represented in the parliament. Despite all democratization reforms and accession processes, it demonstrated the reproduction of authoritarianism in Bulgaria through nationalism targeting the ethnic minorities. The biggest surprise of the election was the fact that it managed to get the vote of roughly 300,000 people with an openly nationalist platform, a very recent past and little time for campaigning. This election was particularly striking due to the lowest voter turnout in the Bulgarian history with 55,76%, which was a decrease of approximately 150,000 voters from the 2001 parliamentary elections.¹¹⁹

The following elections that ATAKA participated in was the presidential elections of 2006, which consolidated ATAKA's power and demonstrated that it represented a significant portion of the society after its surprise emergence in 2005. The first round was carried out 22 October 2006 and the runoff took place on 29 October 2006. The support of some of the right-wing parties were towards Nedelcho Beronov. In the first round of elections, however, the current president Georgi Parvanov received 64% of the vote and ATAKA's leader came in second with 21.5% of the vote. In the second round, Parvanov emerged as the new president of Bulgaria in his second term, receiving 75.9% of the votes. This election was marked by a very low voter turnout in both rounds. The anti-corruption slogans together with anti-Turk and anti-Roma rhetoric marked was the core of the campaign Volen Siderov carried out.

The performance of ATAKA following the success of Volen Siderov in the Presidential Elections continued in the European parliament elections of 2007. The party sent 3 members of the European Parliament that joined the right-wing parliamentary group of *Identity, Tradition and Sovereignty*. The inter-ethnic tensions were an issue that was touched upon quite often by the representatives of ATAKA in

¹¹⁸ "Osce/Odihr Election Assessment Mission Report", 2 November 2012:17.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.

this medium. This success continued in the following European Parliament elections of 2009, in which it managed to send two representatives to the European Parliament.¹²⁰

ATAKA received 9.36 percent of the votes and received 21 seats in the Bulgarian Parliament in the Parliamentary Elections of 2009. Compared to the parliamentary elections of 2005, ATAKA managed to increase the number of votes it attracted by roughly 1 percent. Despite ATAKA's internal quarrels and organizational instabilities including organizational splits, this slight increase in its votes allowed ATAKA to keep the same number of seats in the Bulgarian Parliament.¹²¹

These elections held on June 2009 brought major changes to Bulgarian politics: Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria (GERB), which was previously unrepresented in Parliament, won the elections and formed a minority government.¹²² The electoral system was altered and it adopted a new mixed form of dominantly proportional representation accompanied by a single-member district component. The voter turnout was approximately 5% more than the previous elections of 2005. For the first time since 2001, a clear winner emerged. "GERB received about 40 percent of the PR votes, won in 84 per cent of the SMD districts and, as a result, filled 48 per cent of the seats in Parliament."¹²³ Demonstrating the volatile nature of the electorate, these elections witnessed two of the political parties leaving the parliament instead of the two new parties that entering. Another significant dimension of these elections was the success of the MRF, increasing its votes as much as 16% in the single-member district and 14% in the proportional representation seats. In these elections, BSP suffered a high percentage (approximately 10%) of voter loss because of its participation in the previous

¹²⁰ Nikolai Genov, *op. cit.*, p.35.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹²² Romyana Kolarova and Maria Spirova, "Bulgaria", *European Journal of Political Research*, No:49 (2010): 909

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 913.

government which failed to tackle the long-lasting problems of corruption, organized crime and misuse of the EU funds. Therefore, BSP abandoned the government and took on the role of opposition.¹²⁴

GERB, being the clear winner of these elections attempted to form a single-party minority government. GERB asked for parliamentary support from the Blue Coalition, MRF and ATAKA. While GERB offered a written agreement to the three parties, only ATAKA signed it.¹²⁵ Therefore, ATAKA has become GERB's fulcrum in the Bulgarian Parliament. Besides locating themselves on the right wing of the political spectrum, the major common ground for the coalition between the two parties was the "similar nationalist assessment of the interethnic relations in the country."¹²⁶

Since July 2009, ATAKA has located itself with the mainstream right party of GERB, providing GERB with a de facto majority in the Parliament. In a way, by signing the proposed agreement, ATAKA declared its support for the government of GERB unconditionally. This support, however, has led to clashes at times due to ATAKA's ongoing radical rhetoric. Finally, ATAKA decided to abandon its support for the minority government of GERB and the Prime Minister Boyko Borisov after 2 years of support. From this point on, Siderov often criticized Borisov and his Cabinet for "working for big business and allowing foreign-owned monopolies "to continue draining" the Bulgarian economy"¹²⁷.

The first round of the latest presidential election that was held in Bulgaria was on 23 October 2011, with a runoff held on 30 October 2011. No winner was declared in the first round. After the second round-off between Rosen Plevneliev of GERB and Ivaylo Kalfin of the Bulgarian Socialist Party; Plevneliev was declared as the

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 913.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 915.

¹²⁶ Nikolai Genov, *op. cit.*, p.35.

¹²⁷ "Bulgarian Nationalists 'Ataka' Cut Off Support for Borisov's Minority Govt", July 8, 2011, <
http://www.novinite.com/view_news.php?id=130067. Accessed on 1 September 2012.

new President. Volen Siderov came in fourth with 3.64% percent of the votes, a huge decline from the previous presidential elections.¹²⁸

Voter Profile of ATAKA Through Elections

ATAKA, from the beginning of its establishment, managed to attract voters from almost all of country's demographic groups. The rise of ATAKA and its appeal to the voters is the result of an electoral profile that is usually deemed and heterogeneous and non-linear at first sight. What almost all scholars agree on is that the rise of ATAKA so soon after its establishment was an outcome of a process of contagion that swept up a critical mass of people into voting for a party they knew little about.¹²⁹ The ambiguity surrounding the newly formed coalition allowed a heterogeneous electorate to vote for the party. The electorate that came together on a bandwagon had little in common except their discontent with the present. This coming together, according to Sgourev, was spontaneous rather than strategically planned.¹³⁰ If ATAKA was a classical protest party, it would have attracted a more homogeneous electorate from the underprivileged portions of the society and those that have lost their positions during the transition period. In fact, the absence of strategic planning and the broad range of electorate give the party credibility to some extent in the eyes of the voters and so, it can be a valuable asset.¹³¹

From a geopolitical point of view, the votes of ATAKA cannot optimally be studied on the "oblast" (province) level as well as the regional level. The "oblasti" have been the "traditional territorial-administrative units in Bulgaria" and these territorial levels play a role in the self-identification of the Bulgarian citizens. The

¹²⁸ Veselin Toshkov "Bulgaria President Rosen Plevneliev Elected", 10 November 2011 http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/10/31/bulgaria-president-rosen-plevneliev_n_1066843.html, Accessed on 20 August 2012.

¹²⁹ Stoyan V. Sgourev, *op. cit.*, p.3.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.* , 3.

¹³¹ David Stark, "Recombinant Property in East European Capitalism," *The Journal of Sociology* 101, No. 4 (1996): 993-1027.

oblast usually corresponds to the electoral constituency for the legislative, presidential and European elections.¹³² Comparing different oblasti gives a picture of the preference of the voters in each province. However, when the different oblasti are compared, the numbers that represent the average preference of the oblasti are unable to explain the severe differences between the central city of each oblast and the peripheral territory. Therefore, regarding the vote for ATAKA, level of administrative unit to consider for the best evaluation is the extremely local level of the municipal, the city and village-level. The reason is that this level is the only one that allows a valid geopolitical map regarding the ATAKA vote to be deduced. Serre and Tashev argue that “at this level the profound dissatisfaction of the Bulgarian people can be traced to underlying dynamics.”¹³³

Looking at the electoral profile of the voters, it is safe to assume that ATAKA is a “middle-status phenomenon and not merely just the revolt of the poor or the factions of society that have been worse-off in the post-Communist period. The voters, instead, are “possibly driven by frustration with limited mobility or the rising distance from those higher in the social order”¹³⁴. When ATAKA first emerged in 2005, the party mainly attracted the votes of urban voters, “60% of the 2005 ATAKA votes originated from big agglomerations, 18% came from the capital alone”.¹³⁵ Tashev and Serre argue that this was because the party was so young and it only had time to create awareness about itself in bigger centers of population and mainly Sofia.

Sgourev argues that the “probability of voting for ATAKA is similar for opposite ends of the educational and income spectra”.¹³⁶ The electorate that can be

¹³² Adrien Serre and Georgi Tashev, “Bulgarian Extremist Party Ataka,” 2. Available at <http://www.sciencespo.fr/coesionet/sites/default/files/Bulgaria%20ATAKA.pdf>. Accessed on 1 June 2012.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹³⁴ Stoyan V. Sgourev, *op. cit.*, p.9.

¹³⁵ Adrien Serre and Georgi Tashev, *op. cit.*, p.5.

¹³⁶ Stoyan V. Sgourev, *op. cit.*, p.9.

defined as middle-class (considering the education level and financial power) has a bigger chance of voting for ATAKA. As the education and income level rises or falls, the electorate becomes more unlikely to vote for ATAKA. Sgourev's argument defies the deterministic notion that ATAKA has simply been a 'revolt of the poor' and the ones that feel alienated in the post-Communist rule in Bulgaria. Another fact Sgourev points out is that "those who perceive themselves to be in the middle of the social order appear to be significantly less likely to vote for ATAKA than those view themselves as low or high in status. Similarly those with high and low level of social integration are much more likely to have a preference for ATAKA than those placing themselves in the middle of the scale."¹³⁷ The probability of voting for ATAKA is similar for the people who are on the opposite poles in scales of income, education or integration to the society. What this means is that "ATAKA manages to bring together disparate social groups into an amorphous whole that resists easy categorization in terms of "winners" or "losers".¹³⁸

The protest vote attracted people from all age groups and from all educational and occupational categories. The themes ATAKA touched upon such as corrupt privatizations, corrupt politicians and economy being dominated by the foreigners, have been appealing to a wide range of the Bulgarian population.

After the Party's surprising success in the 2005 elections, mainly attracting votes from urban centers, local ATAKA cells were created with the aim of spreading the Party's ideology beyond the large urban centers. This policy paid off in the elections of 2009. When compared with the elections of 2007, ATAKA lost 1231 votes in Sofia, the state's capital, but gained 34046 votes in the provinces of the country. This way, ATAKA has shifted from being mainly an urban phenomenon to being a peripheral phenomenon.¹³⁹ Similar to the shift of the votes from the city to the province, a shift of popularity from the center to the periphery can also be deduced from the change of the voter profile of ATAKA. Serre and Tashev argue

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹³⁹ Adrien Serre and Georgi Tashev, *op. cit.*, p.3.

that this is related to the vast inequalities between the center and the periphery, both in the urban and provincial centers. In this context, periphery has been the main victim of the radical transformation the country has gone through in the 1990s. Not just between the urban and the provincial centers, but between the center and the periphery in the urban centers there have been vast differences in terms of the perception of what the radical internal and external changes brought to the people. ATAKA portrayed the political elite in the urban centers as corrupt and exploiting the periphery and this was appealing to many of the voters feeling the same way.

4.2 The Rhetoric of ATAKA

One of the core issues that all the political parties in Bulgaria reflect upon is 'nationalism'. That is why examining the rise of ATAKA and its rhetoric is especially important to grasp the means through which ATAKA has been able to attract voters with its ultra-nationalist rhetoric, which has always been present in the Bulgarian politics and in the rhetoric of other main stream political parties.

The discourse of ATAKA has been emphasizing the 'Bulgarianness' of Bulgaria and arguing for taking back the rights given to Turks during the transitional period in Bulgaria. ATAKA's motto has been "To get Bulgaria back" according to Desislav Chokolv, a member of the European Parliament."¹⁴⁰ The party also supports the re-changing the Turkish names back to Bulgarian ones, just like in the period of harsh assimilation and revival process. It also claims that Bulgarian public channel should stop broadcasts in Turkish and that the MRF should be abolished, claiming it unconstitutional. Volen Siderov once declared that "Bulgaria is not a free country. Bulgaria is still under Turkish rule."¹⁴¹ This demonstrates how the party and its leader perceive the presence of Turkish ethnic minority as a threat to the Bulgarian population, as the presence of the Turkish minority has the potential to attract

¹⁴⁰ "Ataka newspaper- Volen Siderov: elections pass, the temples remain forever", 5 June 2009, <http://slavibinev.com/index.php?lang=en&cont=data&page=1600>. Accessed on 1 September 2012.

¹⁴¹ "Successories", <http://www.successories.com/iquote/author/40297/volen-siderov-quotes/1>, accessed 1 September 2012.

Turkish intervention to Bulgaria's domestic affairs. ATAKA associates the Turkish minority in Bulgaria as bearers of radical Islam, bearers of extremism and perceives it a threat to Europe.¹⁴² A similar perception of threat against the 'Bulgarianness' of the state and the country, according to ATAKA, has been the presence of Roma. ATAKA distributed brochures titled "Gypsy Crime - a Threat to the State" and leaflets in which Siderov mentions the 'gypsisation' of Bulgaria and the gypsy crime. The 'privileged situation' of the minorities is a recurring theme in the speeches of Siderov and the rhetoric of ATAKA, that successfully mobilizes people's fears into voting for the party.

An example to the reflection of the anti-Turkish sentiments was the rally against the Turkish membership in the EU on October 20, 2010. The speech of Volen Siderov gave one of the examples of how ATAKA has utilized historical legacy of the Ottoman rule and dependency for making a case of not accepting Turkey to the EU. In his speech, Siderov claimed that the Ottomans carried out a genocide over Bulgarians on 30 April 1876. In addition, he mentioned the "inhumane discrimination, extremely high taxes and the absence of legal rights"¹⁴³. He also talked about the restrictions that Bulgarians allegedly faced under the Ottoman rule such as possessing arms, wearing clothes representing their culture, building houses and churches standing higher than the buildings of the Turkish people. What is more, Siderov talked about the "innumerable massacres throughout the Ottoman rule", the presence of the ongoing assimilation of Bulgarian male children to be turned into janissaries, the usage of racial slurs and the killing of Bulgarian peasants by the armed bands of Turks called the 'kurjalii'.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² "Bulgarian Nationalists Want to Strip Turkish Leader of MP Immunity", <http://sheikyermami.com/2011/05/22/bulgaria-you-are-bearers-of-radical-islam-you-are-bearers-of-extremism-you-are-a-danger-to-the-entire-europe/>. Accessed on 29 July 2012.

¹⁴³ "Volen Siderov: The Attack Continues! We will not Accept Turkey in the EU!", <http://northfieldpatriot.blogspot.com/2010/11/volen-siderov-attack-continues-we-will.html>. Accessed on 1 September 2012.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Anti-Turkish sentiments in the rhetoric of ATAKA go well beyond the Turkish minority living in Bulgaria. ATAKA opposes Turkey's EU membership. Siderov criticized the Prime Minister Boyko Borisov for declaring that Bulgaria has supported Turkey in its quest for membership on 2010. Siderov declared that he "would like to say that ATAKA has never supported, does not support, and will never support Turkey's EU membership."¹⁴⁵ Siderov referred to the "attempts the country to be turned into an Anatolian province" and advocated that the "country has no need of minarets, but of churches, schools and hospitals"¹⁴⁶. ATAKA, appealing to the history of independence to outside powers and states, also often stresses the country's relations with the West. According to Siderov "there is no need to kneel down in front of the West".¹⁴⁷

The heated speeches of Volen Siderov also target the members of the Parliament. He called his colleagues in the parliament 'grunting pigs' and 'balls of fat', 'homosexuals' and 'former agents of the Communist State Security Services in different occasions. ATAKA, different from the other parties in the parliament, talked about "de-gypsization" and "de-turkization", processes necessary, according to Siderov, "to give Bulgaria back to Bulgarians".¹⁴⁸

For some scholars a point of debate has been whether ATAKA is a right-wing or left-wing party. ATAKA leaders claim that the party is "neither left, nor right, but Bulgarian". One of the chief concerns pointed out by various scholars has been that whether this "far-right party", which is the class ATAKA falls into according to the Western left-right distinction framework due to its nationalist and racist tendencies,

¹⁴⁵ "Bulgarian Far-Right Party Assails Borisov for Turkey Remarks". Accessed on 1 August 2012, <http://www.icare.to/article.php?id=29136&lang=en>.

¹⁴⁶ "Ataka newspaper- Volen Siderov: elections pass, the temples remain forever", 5 June 2009, <<http://slavibinev.com/index.php?lang=en&cont=data&page=1600>> . Accessed on 1 August 2012.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ Neda Galabarov, "Volen Siderov, the Big Mouth", <http://paper.standartnews.com/en/article.php?d=2006-10-23&article=1426>>. Accessed on 1 August 2012.

poses a serious threat to the young Bulgarian democracy.¹⁴⁹ Kristen Ghodsee argues that that ATAKA's nationalist rhetoric is "only part of a more complex and often contradictory political platform that includes deeper, radically leftist, neo-totalitarian elements. The party's agenda goes beyond single-minded ethnocentrism and appeals to the disenfranchised. ATAKA is a true populist party in that Siderov's charismatic leadership and anti-establishment stance enable it to promote ideas that originate on opposite ends of the political spectrum. Moreover, its less obvious left-wing politics has enabled it to consolidate its support among a wide variety of demographic groups."¹⁵⁰ The same blur between the right and left sides of the political spectrum is already difficult in post-socialist societies. For instance, Siderov criticized, in his first speech in the National Assembly, the deal on the national air carrier 'Balkan' on the grounds that it was done against the national interests. Although that particular decision was made by the right-wing conservative government of Ivan Kostov, demonstrating that ATAKA also acted like a populist party.¹⁵¹

Some of the political figures or scholars argued that the strong nationalist and even racist attitudes of the ATAKA leaders threaten the young Bulgarian democracy. On the other hand, some might argue that the emergence of ATAKA has had a positive impact on the Bulgarian democracy because it extended the political debate that has generally been covering the same issues to new borders. For instance, all the political parties established in Bulgaria prior to ATAKA all agreed on integration with the Western institutions like EU and NATO regardless of their position on the left-right spectrum. The changes brought in order to be eligible for membership in these Western institutions were embraced as these goals were of primary importance. Thus, the complete dependence on the West and especially the United States when it came to foreign policy were never fully questioned.

The party has been very critical of the condition of ethnic minorities in Bulgaria as being too privileged. In its campaigns the focus has been especially on

¹⁴⁹ Adrien Serre and Georgi Tashev, *op. cit.*, p.6.

¹⁵⁰ Kristen Ghodsee, "Xenophobia, Neo-totalitarianism, and Populist Politics in Bulgaria," *Problems of Post-Communism* 55/3, May/June 2008: 30.

¹⁵¹ Nikolai Genov, *op. cit.*, p.41.

the Roma, which was often referred in the context of “Roma terror against Bulgaria being tolerated by the state.”¹⁵² In terms of integration with the Western institutions, a policy which has been accepted in the Bulgarian political scene regardless of the parties, ATAKA has also been skeptical. ATAKA has been opposed to NATO, Bulgarian participation in the Iraq War and having a close relationship with the United States. Instead, ATAKA advocates stronger ties with Russia.

An example to ATAKA’s way of conveying its message and the dominant themes in its rhetoric occurred earlier in 2012 on the National Liberation Day, when ATAKA organized a march. In his speech Siderov demanded the resignation of two of the cabinet ministers, Dajnkov and Traikov for “betraying national interests and working for colonizers and for the impoverishment of Bulgarians”¹⁵³. In the same speech, he advocated decent jobs and European wages for all Bulgarians, elimination of monopolies and transferring all the business back to Bulgarians. Along with the Bulgarian leaders, Siderov also criticized the European leaders and accused them of “trying to cut Bulgaria to pieces, as all Great Forces have done, not caring about Bulgarian people and their well-being, and labeled the EU the ‘new Soviet Union’”.¹⁵⁴ He also claimed that “any action against ATAKA only serves Turkish and Gipsy interests, and all enemies of Bulgaria”.¹⁵⁵

The emergence and the rhetoric of ATAKA also allowed the questioning of some of the internal policies of the Bulgarian policy-makers such as the liberalization and the privatization in the economic sphere. These processes started suddenly following the end of the Communist Party rule and were held at times ruthlessly with no real opposition or criticism from any part of the political community. The attempt to erase all the remnants of the Communist Party rule was embraced by all the political parties and liberalization and privatization policies were perceived as parts

¹⁵² Stoyan V. Sgourev, *op. cit.*, p.5.

¹⁵³ “Top Bulgarian Nationalist with Liberation Day 'Comeback' Speech”, 3 March 2012, http://www.novinite.com/view_news.php?id=137217. Accessed on 1 August 2012.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

of this process. By focusing on the “corrupt” nature of these processes and the exploitation of these processes by the political elite, ATAKA has enlarged the scope of the political debate and brought it closer to the people “who felt alienated by the political elite, which seemed to refuse to take into account issues that were dear to the Bulgarian voters”¹⁵⁶.

All the scholars commenting on the rise and the rhetoric of ATAKA agree on one issue: The rhetoric and the suggestions that ATAKA leaders put forward about the problems that the country faces or about the concerns of the “worse-off” citizens are ones that are not acceptable in a democratic state and especially one like Bulgaria which cannot afford to be independent and isolated to the extent that ATAKA suggests. However, the Party’s achievement of extending the political debate is still remarkable in terms of the redefinition of some of the phenomena in Bulgarian politics as problems. Due to these radical stances regarding Bulgarian domestic and international politics, the parliamentary parties in Bulgaria stated their intentions of refraining from forming coalitions with ATAKA, mainly due to the fact that this will risk the ethnic peace in the country.

The party’s two program documents, the ‘20 Principles’ and the ‘Program Scheme’ illustrate the main rhetoric of ATAKA in its simplest way and cover both the external and internal policies of the Party which are all nationalistic. They define Bulgaria as a one-nation state and assert the supremacy of the state and the ‘Bulgarian nation’ above ethnic and religious diversity, but at the same time want to have an official religion and participation of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church in legislative work and in all important government decisions, as well as teaching of that Church’s doctrine in primary school. The ‘20 Principles’ envisage formulating a crime of ‘national betrayal’ and criminal prosecution of the ‘national traitors’. ATAKA has so far called the human rights and minority rights activists ‘national traitors’. The ‘20 Principles’ also envisage sanctions for defamation of the ‘Bulgarian national sacraments’ and for ‘slurs’ against Bulgaria.

The ‘20 Points’ or ‘20 Principles’ demonstrate that it is at times difficult to categorize ATAKA as simply an ultra right-wing party as its principles sometimes

¹⁵⁶ Adrien Serre and Georgi Tashev, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

encompass elements from the left side of the political spectrum. The first four points of the document covers the content of the articles that are present in the Constitution of Bulgaria, stressing the unitary nature of the state. Point 5 is related to the obligation and responsibility of the state to provide health, security and conditions for cultural development of all Bulgarians. Point 6 proposes state protection for the Bulgarian entrepreneurs, which is forbidden according to the EU regulations. Point 7 guarantees a balance between incomes, taxes and the needs of the Bulgarian population. Point suggests that privatization deals should be generally revised. A striking point is the 13th one, which suggests leaving NATO directly and the EU indirectly.¹⁵⁷

The ‘20 points’ suggest an unrealistic path for Bulgaria to follow. However, the attraction of ATAKA to voters stems not from the applicability of the ‘20 points’, but the simple fact that finally a political force significant enough to be represented in the parliament questions the basic domestic and foreign policies that the previous governments adopted with almost no real opposition or discussion.

Corruption:

One of the main issues of criticism pointed towards the political parties of Bulgaria has been the issue of corruption. The issue has been a constant problem in the Bulgarian politics and failure to tackle corruption was sanctioned by the EU with the withdrawal of EU funds even after accession ATAKA’s criticism on the issue has been a central focus on its rhetoric. ATAKA very often referred to the problem of having a ‘corrupt political elite’ and the actions taken by them. A bill was presented by the leaders of ATAKA that addressed the problem of high-level corruption by calling for an investigation of the 2004 privatization of the telecommunications monopoly (BTK), which was previously owned by the state. There had been various bids, including one from the New York-based American International Group (AIG). Nevertheless, BTK had been sold to an unknown “foreign” investor called Viva Ventures for \$250 million. The low price led to widespread speculation that Viva Ventures was a front for individuals close to the prime minister and his cabinet. Less

¹⁵⁷ Nikolai Genov, *op.cit.*, p.41.

than four years later, Viva Ventures was now reselling BTK to AIG for \$1.2 billion, making a giant \$950 million profit for the mysterious company. Seizing on the widespread public outrage at the resale, the party accused the government that had been in power at the time of the sale of stealing money from the Bulgarian people that otherwise could have been used for healthcare and education. The bill it introduced called for criminal charges against the politicians who had overseen the deal (and most likely taken the kickbacks) and suggested that BTK should be re-nationalized and sold directly to AIG so that the profits would accrue to the state budget. Not surprisingly, most of the members of parliament from previous governments voted against the bill, but still it managed to create an awareness and anger over the issue.¹⁵⁸

Transformation of ATAKA

The transformation of ATAKA from being a mainly urban phenomenon to a more provincial phenomenon was discussed in the previous section. Over time, not just in the voter profile but also in rhetoric, ATAKA has gone through some changes towards softening.

One prime example of this transformation was seen in the reaction of ATAKA in the economic crisis, which was much softer than one might expect from a far right-wing party. The global financial crisis that has started to hit Western Europe and the United States around 2007 reached to Bulgaria mostly in 2009, “when economic growth indexes fell below 100 for the first time since 1999 and the average salary per household fell by 12,6%”.¹⁵⁹ The reaction of ATAKA to this economic crisis was reminiscent of a traditional right-wing party rather than a radical, anti-establishment far-right party.

¹⁵⁸ Kristen Ghodsee, “Xenophobia, Neo-totalitarianism, and Populist Politics in Bulgaria,” *Problems of Post-Communism*, 55/3, May/June 2008: 26-39.

¹⁵⁹ Adrien Serre and Georgi Tashev, *op. cit.*, p.5.

4.3 The Role of Media and the Personality of Volen Siderov in the Party's Success

The role of mass media in the electoral success of is great in the case of ATAKA, arguably much more than in other parties, both because of Volen Siderov's background as a prominent TV personality and both because the role of the media in general is very capable of fuelling sentiments of ethnic intolerance, which is in line with the strong nationalistic sentiments often voiced by ATAKA. Although media does not always explain why all the variables that lead to ATAKA's success came together, its influence is one that is hard to miss.

Media, in general, successfully creates 'imagined communities' and allows for the fuelling of nationalistic sentiments and ethnic discrimination. Therefore, Ibroscheva and Raicheva-Stover argue that ATAKA's rise to prominence was largely aided by its skillfully crafted media coverage. The mass media, as some media scholars have argued, is after all an ideological state apparatus, with the potential to organize social imagery focusing on the concepts of nation, national interest, and national identity.¹⁶⁰

The role of media, along with being able to convey ATAKA's ultra-nationalist and extremist rhetoric, was especially more in the case of ATAKA because it was a very new political force, whereas its leader, Volen Siderov, causing widespread concern because of the extremist views expressed towards segments of the Bulgarian population in its campaign. Its leader, Volen Siderov, was a prominent TV personality, where his popularity was a result of hosting a discussion program, also called ATAKA, on a private channel called Skat TV. Prior to this show, he was the editor-in-chief of the newspaper titled 'Demokratiya', which was the major periodical publication of the then governing UDF. In the newspaper he published articles that support neo-liberal ideology and policies¹⁶¹. Regarding his television show, "the Electronic Broadcasting Council told the OSCE/ODIHR EAM that it had

¹⁶⁰ Elza Ibroscheva and Maria Raicheva-Stover, "The Politics of Hate: Media and the Rise to Power of Ultra-Nationalism in Bulgaria," *Limina*, 15, 2009: 2.

¹⁶¹ Nikolai Genov, *op. cit.*, p.40.

issued 10 warnings for hate speech to TV Skat prior to the election campaign, but had not acted during the campaign because that would have drawn unwarranted attention to the station.”¹⁶² The advantage of ATAKA’s relationship with Skat TV was that while other political parties had to pay for spreading their rhetoric through propaganda, ATAKA was able to do the same free of charge. For instance, on 22 June, TV Skat broadcast live the final ATAKA rally in Bourgas, where Siderov spoke for 40 minutes,” including content that could be defined as hate speech”.¹⁶³

The party’s popularity has often been in line with the popularity of its spiritual leader, Volen Siderov. Both the party and Siderov himself have experienced a decline in their popularity since the 2009 elections. The main reason is that, over time, Volen Siderov has softened its stance on a number of issues, which was also evident in the party’s reaction to the latest economic crisis that hit Bulgaria as well as the rest of the world. This softening has been directly linked to the desire of gaining more votes and appealing to a wider audience, but did not give the desired outcome. In addition, ATAKA faced many inter-party problems and scandal in the latest periods.

4. 4 Reasons for the Rise of ATAKA and its Sustainability

Following the end of the Communist Party rule and the shift to parliamentary democracy, the predominance of the left-wing parties in the nationalist camp continued up until the period of 1996-1997, which was marked by immense political and economic instability resulting in the decline of the influence of the left-wing and their nationalist slogans. The Bulgarian Socialist Party transformed itself, getting further away from the nationalist rhetoric towards social-democratic and even at times liberal practices.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² Republic of Bulgaria Parliamentary Elections.” OSCE/ODIHR Election Assessment Mission Report. Warsaw: 25 June 2005, 11. Available at <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/bulgaria/16816>, accessed on 10 August 2012.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁶⁴ Nikolai Genov, *op.cit.*, p.37.

The widely accepted policy of integration to western institutions and especially the EU, accompanied by the neoliberal restructuring lead to a widespread reform process within the state. Lots of problems were encountered regarding these reforms. At times, the pace of the reforms was slower than expected. Other times, the process was interrupted by economic mismanagement of the resources, corruption, and inefficiency of the state institutions, convulsions in the national political life and uncertainties concerning national history and identity.¹⁶⁵

ATAKA, the populist political party in Bulgaria that emerged as one of the winners of the 2005 parliamentary elections, has been quite successful in turning the frustrations of the Bulgarian people concerning the profound changes the country has gone through into votes. These frustrations concerning the changes following the Communist Party rule had deeper roots in the Bulgarian history dating back to the independence of the country.

The main reasons for the feeling of frustration and disappointment could not be fully tackled and deleted by the successive governments in Bulgaria; whether liberal, conservative or that of the former King Simeon II. The standard and the quality of living did not improve considerably in the aftermath of the Communist Party rule entirely. High rates of unemployment and poverty, in turn, lead to increasing crime rates. The feeling of insecurity, one of the key factors in explaining the rise of ATAKA, has always accompanied the transformation the country has gone through. In ATAKA's rhetoric, the main target population has been the ethnic minorities. This is another dimension for the insecurity of the ethnic Bulgarians in terms of the balance of the population.

Along with the insecurities stemming from the presence of minorities and the historical legacy of being dominated by outside powers, the end of the Communist Party rule introduced new international actors that dominated the Bulgarian agenda. A big portion of the Bulgarian economy and banking sector started to be dominated by the outside owners. Especially during the speedy neoliberal restructuring process

¹⁶⁵ Evgeniya Kalinova and Iskra Baeva, "Balgarskite prehodi 1939-2002" [The Bulgarian Transitions 1939-2002]. *Sofia: Paradigma*. (2002). Cited by Nikolai Genov in "Radical Nationalism in Contemporary Bulgaria": 38.

of the 1990s, there was “lack of explicitly nationalist and influential political actor(s)” that opposed or even criticized the transformation process from a nationalist point of view.¹⁶⁶

Party’s success in the 2005 elections soon after its establishment points out some of the social mechanisms that came into play to allow ATAKA rise to the position of being one of the main political parties in Bulgaria. There are a few different theories and interpretations on how to evaluate the rise of ATAKA in terms of the weight of different factors; whether they are historical or conjunctural, national or international. The main ongoing processes in that period, however, demonstrate how imbalances during transformations can mobilize people. These elections in 2005 witnessed the rise of ATAKA due to the going process of EU membership during which the allocation of funds, extra monitoring of Bulgaria, the surrender of sovereignty, expanding the minority rights. ATAKA suddenly became the common denominator for the people who were discontent with the mainstream Bulgarian political actors.

Following his electoral defeat in 2001, Prime Minister Ivan Kostov established the conservative party of “Democrats for Strong Bulgaria”, leaving the liberal UDF. Similar to the course ATAKA followed the criticized MRF to a great degree. However, his new party and movement never fully took off and became one of the prominent actors in Bulgarian politics. This is partly explained by the “inclination of Bulgarian voters to search and opt for new faces, new names and new slogans after the long series of disappointments with well known politicians”.¹⁶⁷ Siderov’s attraction to voters partly stemmed from the fact that his party and he could not be associated with a previous political party, organization or figure. He was already known for his nationalist stance and his allegations against the Bulgarian governments for their anti-national policies. “Thus, he attracted old nationalists, young people disappointed by the corrupt liberal democracy of Bulgarian style and a

¹⁶⁶ Nikolai Genov, *op. cit.* p.40.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 40.

strong protest vote against policies disrespecting the national identity and the national interests.”¹⁶⁸

George Reisch points out the three different models with which social scientists reproduce history: dynamically indeterminate, determinate and linear, and determinate and nonlinear models.¹⁶⁹ Dynamical indeterminate model has a weak and a strong form. In strong dynamical indeterminism each piece of historical event is unconstrained from the prior events, thus denying the existence of dynamical forces or causes that lead to certain results. Therefore, the explanations of events are mere chronicles. In weak dynamical indeterminism, the past events are somewhat connected to the present events, but only in the form of probability. Therefore, the future events are predictable based on the past occurrences with a probabilistic manner among a range of possibilities. Therefore, in both cases, we have no way of predicting what will happen and the reasons or causes behind a historical event.¹⁷⁰

Deterministic and *linear* models, on the other hand, claim that exact causes of events can be known. In other words, there is a linear cause and effect relationship between the events from the past and in the present. In the case of ATAKA, for instance, this model will explain ATAKA’s success in the 2005 parliamentary elections as a result of the discontent of the electorate about the present condition of the Bulgarian state and society. The failure of post-Communist Party period to respond to people’s demands, corrupt political leaders, unresponsive policy makers, unsuccessful attempts for shifting to a democratic rule are all factors that have contributed to the formation of an ATAKA electorate. According to this interpretation, the discontent guarantees the success of ATAKA in the upcoming elections and more discontent will bring more votes in the direction of ATAKA. However, this model will not be sufficient in explaining why this rise (and eventually, the fall) was so rapid. In these models, minor changes to the system have a limited significance, which are also encompassed in the error range of the future

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.* , 40.

¹⁶⁹ George Reisch, “Chaos, History, and Narrative,” *History and Theory*, 30/1, 1991: 4.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.* , 4.

predictions. Looking at ATAKA's rise with this framework, one has to argue that ATAKA's rise could be foreseen with the prior data and that the error range is the timing of this success. These, therefore, will not suffice to explain the heterogeneous voter profile of ATAKA, that comes together as a result of momentary collision of discontent. The rising discontent in this theory automatically increases voter attraction to ATAKA. This way, a clear-cut picture of voters of ATAKA can be drawn as all would presumably have much in common, which in reality is not the case.

The emergence and rise of ATAKA can be best explained by the *nonlinear* deterministic models in which "random occurrences are much more consequential... where small causes have disproportionately large impact".¹⁷¹ Choosing the nonlinear model in explaining the rise of ATAKA allows as well and the element of historical background or legacy to be included in the picture. Therefore, in the case of emergence and the success of ATAKA, the initial conditions themselves are not sufficient to create the same outcome at any other given time. The changes that were brought to Bulgaria through neoliberal restructuring and the quest for membership to the EU, the discontent with the current political system and the parties that run it all have a huge impact on the emergence of this electoral surprise, but their existence alone is not sufficient to explain why it occurred. The outcome of 2005 parliamentary elections in terms of ATAKA was irreducible to the initial conditions alone. Sgourev expresses that "in complexity studies this process is referred to as "emergence" - aggregation of discrete elements into a distinctive whole that amounts to more than the sum of the constitutive elements."¹⁷²

Why some scholars define ATAKA's rise as "unpredictable" is correlated to the "heterogeneity and ambiguity, borne out of complex, non-linear combinations of historical artifacts, such as interests, networks and grievances."¹⁷³ Heterogeneity refers to the many dimensions of the rise, non-linearity refers to the "relationships

¹⁷¹ Stoyan V. Sgourev, *op. cit.*, p.4.

¹⁷² *Ibid.* , 4.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 5.

between key predictors and the outcome deviating from linearity”, whereas ‘unorthodoxy’ refers to the “unorthodox, off-beat predictors having a large impact on the outcome”. In other words, the 8.7% of the vote ATAKA earned in the first elections it participated in 2005, is usually explained by the “unorthodox linking of otherwise trivial elements in the social milieu.”¹⁷⁴

This general theory of heterogeneity and ambiguity has manifested itself in this case through the “spontaneous aggregation of local grievances into collective protest themes that cut across socio-demographic lines and led to unscripted convergence of preferences among disparate social groups”.¹⁷⁵ The previously fragmented voters have been connected through social influence and imitation “in a remarkably swift, large scale manner that is nearly impossible to foresee.” Stoyan Sgourev points out that the “tendency attribute a logic of inevitability to surprising events is natural, given the need for closure and meaning, deeply ingrained in the human mind”.¹⁷⁶ In other words, the human mind is forced to directly connect the causes and effects in a straightforward way, even at times when they are not. Once the events occur, human mind tends to connect the outcome some of the related factors that have been present previously. Hindsight bias is defined as the “unconscious use of posterior information in accounting for the past or the tendency to believe that our forecasts were more accurate than they were.”¹⁷⁷ Another difficulty in assessing the Party’s rise, apart from the risk of hindsight bias, is the lack of data about the how the electoral support was formed since the party was recently established before its participation in the 2005 elections. Therefore, unlike many of the events in history that are somewhat expected outcomes after assessing the background; the perspective with which to assess the rise of the party focuses on “localized, ambiguous and contradictory nature of historical events, seeing ambiguity

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.* , 1.

¹⁷⁷ Paul Goodwin, “Why Hindsight Can Damage Foresight?” *Foresight: The International Journal of Applied Forecasting*, 17, 2010: 5-7.

and heterogeneity, rather than planning and self-interest, as the raw materials of which powerful political entities are constructed”.¹⁷⁸

The success of the party so soon after its establishment of the Party, as stated before, points out the presence of a somewhat complicated cause and effect scheme for the party, which has its roots in the Bulgarian history but is manifested stronger than ever with the contemporary trends and changes in the Bulgarian political scene. Therefore what we see is a combination of different logics of discontent in an unexpected manner for a short period of time without prior strategic planning. Combination of protest logics has been the case in the electoral success of ATAKA, which makes it hard to assess due to many variables. There has been no sign of strategic planning or market into combine these variables consciously.

The party has experienced a fall in support since the 2009 elections. A poll in December 2010 showed that 66% of the people being questioned had a negative perception of the party itself.¹⁷⁹ The radical agenda combined with the xenophobic and ultra-nationalist rhetoric limits the party’s appeal to the electorate. The only way to avoid this limitation at this point is to change the position of the party. Although ATAKA has softened its rhetoric to some extent over time, shifting slightly towards the centre-right, more moderation might mean losing its support base altogether.

CONCLUSION

The advantage of ATAKA in the Bulgarian political life, shortly after its establishment, was its ability “to blur political boundaries and connect the political left and right”.¹⁸⁰ However, the heterogeneity and ambiguity that surrounds its rise is also a curse for the future development of the party. This is due to the fact that its rise in the first place was not a direct result of some of the past events, but rather a rare

¹⁷⁸ John Padgett and Christopher Ansell, “Robust Action and the Rise of the Medici, 1400-1434,” *The American Journal of Sociology*, 98/6, 1993: 1259.

¹⁷⁹ Adrien Serre and Georgi Tashev, *op. cit.*, p.3

¹⁸⁰ Stoyan V. Sgourev, *op. cit.*, p.6.

combination of complex variables which is highly unlikely to happen in the future. The heterogeneous electorate came together partly because ATAKA, at the time of its establishment was unknown other than the fact that it was contesting some of the basic foundations of Bulgarian politics and reflecting the discontent that a portion of the society was feeling. Most discrete of these feelings were the quest for radical change in the political scene of the country, anti-Roma and anti-Turkish sentiments and sense of being alienated with the changes that go on in the society. “The “emergence” of ATAKA is attributable to a kaleidoscopic effect where different people see different things in the same phenomenon, reinforcing momentum in the making.”¹⁸¹

The diverse areas of discontent coming together in one party created a heterogeneous electorate whose desire for radical change was present, although with very diverse motives and perceptions. Historically, the nationalism in political life has been manifested under the cover of representing the national interests. The attraction of ATAKA to the voters, with its ultra-nationalistic rhetoric, has been partly due to the historical perception of lining the nationalist policies as representing the national interests.

The latest elections in which ATAKA suffered a massive voter loss is partly due to the problems within the party, personal scandals of the party leaders, its softening stance on a number of issues and losing its ‘edge’ for the ‘protest vote’ to some extent, the party’s inability to create a system that voters can benefit from.

One of the hurdles that ATAKA has to constantly overcome is the fact that some of the actions proposed in its rhetoric are highly unlikely to be realized in the reality. For instance, the point 6 in ATAKA’s ‘20 points’ suggests that all production facilities, trade and banks should be owned by the Bulgarians. This is not the case in Bulgaria and in order to achieve what ATAKA suggests, a large-scale nationalization is necessary. Although this is not applicable in reality, still, such radical ideas invoke the feeling of betrayal by a portion of the electorate and attract voters on the basis of mobilizing the insecurities and the discontent that the voters feel.

¹⁸¹ Stoyan V. Sgourev, *op. cit.*, p.7.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The electoral history of ATAKA is certainly an interesting one especially in terms of the very surprising rise following just a few months after its establishment. Following the first elections ATAKA participated in, ATAKA was able to hold onto the votes it attracted in the 2005 elections with its success in the 2009 elections. However, especially with the year of 2009 on, the party and its leader Volen Siderov experienced a sharp decline in their popularity.

The difficulty in assessing the sustainability of ATAKA's success is that its success in the 2005 elections in the immediate aftermath of its formation has been that this event was considered unpredictable by some scholars. For instance, Stefan Sgourev argue that in this sense, rather than an often-seen example of rise and fall of political parties, this phenomenon resembled a track that was similar to that of political revolutions. Looking back at the background and the political forces effective around the time ATAKA was formed, its rise is attributable to a number of factors that ultimately lead to the reproduction of authoritarianism looks more predictable.

The assessment of the history of the formation of the state of Bulgaria and its changing path following the end of the Communist Party rule demonstrate that there has always been a fertile ground for which the radical right ideologies get a chance to rise. Especially through the neoliberal restructuring and the reforms undertaken for becoming a member of the EU, left a portion of the society dissatisfied. In this context, the rise of ATAKA in 2005 was due to mostly bandwagoning of the personal grievances of the electorate that was not content with the status quo. Possessing such a strong rhetoric, ATAKA's leaders were a better medium for criticizing the status quo with appealing rhetoric rather than formulating alternative policies for the ones that they criticize. The sudden and unpredictable combination of local grievances was what made ATAKA a success in the 2005 parliamentary and then presidential elections. The party's leader, Volen Siderov has had a declining

popularity since the 2009 elections, in parallel with the party's decreasing popularity among the electorate around the same time. Such a momentous aggregation of individual grievances in such a grand scale is highly unlikely in the future for this party *only in the short-run* due to its close identification with its leader, Volen Siderov and his declining popularity.

The main issue of concern or argument regarding this party is whether it has reached its natural limits or not and whether a party with a strong nationalist rhetoric and radical ideas, has the chance to sustain its power *in the long run*. Being a far right-wing party with racist and xenophobic rhetoric, it is safe to assume that it does not possess the power to become a mainstream actor in the Bulgarian politics and become one of the chief policy makers. However, the party's rise, although sudden, stems from the long-lasting perceptions rooted in the Bulgarian history.

Bulgarian history is a timeline for consecutive hardening and softening of the nationalist manifestations and the rise of ATAKA in the recent years has been the outcome of the recreation of authoritarianism in Bulgaria, this time with a racist and xenophobic tone. The tone of ATAKA, while very strong, appeals to the fears and long-lasting perceptions of the 'enemy' both inside and outside of Bulgaria. As long as there is a part of the population that is discontent with the way the Bulgarian state is being directed to, there is room for the emergence of a radical tone and using the minorities as scapegoats. Therefore, even if ATAKA transforms itself either through lining with the more moderate party of GERB or changing its leadership, the elements it utilizes will still be present in the contemporary Bulgarian politics, allowing the room for a similar party to attract a substantial amount of voters.

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APPENDIX



TEZ FOTOKOPİ İZİN FORMU

ENSTİTÜ

Fen Bilimleri Enstitüsü

☐

Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü

☒

Uygulamalı Matematik Enstitüsü

☐

Enformatik Enstitüsü

☐

Deniz Bilimleri Enstitüsü

☐

YAZARIN

Soyadı : Karamollaoğlu

Adı : Nilay

Bölümü : Uluslararası İlişkiler

TEZİN ADI (İngilizce) : The Rise of ATAKA in Bulgaria

TEZİN TÜRÜ : Yüksek Lisans

☒

Doktora

☐

1. Tezimin tamamı dünya çapında erişime açılsın ve kaynak gösterilmek şartıyla tezimin bir kısmı veya tamamının fotokopisi alınsın. ☐
2. Tezimin tamamı yalnızca Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi kullanıcılarının erişimine açılsın. (Bu seçenekle tezinizin fotokopisi ya da elektronik kopyası Kütüphane aracılığı ile ODTÜ dışına dağıtılmayacaktır.) ☐
3. Tezim bir (1) yıl süreyle erişime kapalı olsun. (Bu seçenekle tezinizin fotokopisi ya da elektronik kopyası Kütüphane aracılığı ile ODTÜ dışına dağıtılmayacaktır.) ☒

Yazarın imzası

Tarih: 10.10.2012