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***The Role of Political Parties in Accession to the EU***

***Sofia, Center for the Study of Democracy, 1999***

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## Introduction

*The process of Bulgaria's EU integration is a multifaceted political, institutional, economic, socio-structural, and psychological process. It is essentially a complex social transformation aimed at establishing particular public structures, standards, consensual attitudes, and strategies, compatible with EU and acceptable to its member countries. This process involves diverse actors who cannot be reduced solely to the efforts of state institutions and above all, of the legislature and the executive. One of the most powerful, though frequently overlooked, channels bringing Bulgaria closer to EU, are political parties.*

*The inclusion of political parties in the domestic political process cannot be reduced exclusively or primarily to the time in which they exercise executive power. In opposition or even outside parliament, political parties can still occasionally exert considerable influence over the conditions in which foreign policy is conceived and implemented. Parties can sometimes be an exceptionally important source for Bulgaria's international image which strongly influences the positions of the country's international partners, and in particular, the EU member states, in terms of Bulgaria's accession to EU.*

*Political parties, along with everything else, have several essential functions immediately related to Bulgaria's integration in EU:*

- *they are very frequently the channels for the introduction of European political standards in Bulgarian politics;*
- *they represent the Bulgarian political palette of strategies and ideas;*
- *they create an additional lobby network among the EU political class in favor of Bulgaria's accession;*
- *they are in position to structure political life in Bulgaria in line with EU standards.*

*That is why the study of the role of political parties in the process of Bulgaria's EU integration is an essential element of the conception of a general idea, and theoretical model, of the process. In theoretical terms, parties are part of the political system and a connecting link between the political, and civil, society. Their role in foreign policy is typically related to positions of power. But the internationalization of party life in the past decade has provided parties with new opportunities for participation in the foreign political process. In Bulgarian political life parties are an important, if not the chief, instrument for assimilation of foreign political experience. Their activity as international actors, their international contacts, the international forums organized by them, are an irreplaceable channel through which public opinion in Bulgaria gets informed about foreign political standards, about the rules and norms of political life in EU countries, for instance.*

*Naturally, the influence of parties on the foreign policy and international image of a given country is a function of its political system and above all, of the role, status, and functions of political parties within it. Since 1989 Bulgaria has developed a "European" type of party system, in which political organizations are institutional structures striving to represent politically significant social interests. Under this model, parties are involved in the domestic political process as representatives of a certain part of public opinion. In the U.S., along with that function, parties are involved in foreign policy mainly through the influence they have in various foundations which sponsor projects and research institutions. In a sense, the American party-system model is based more on the "expert" participation of political parties in the foreign political process. In Bulgaria there are few elements of expert participation of parties in the foreign political process, though certain "think tanks", related in some form or other to political parties, do exert some influence, largely through developing and presenting before foreign partners alternatives to government policies.*

# **1 The European political models as national political culture.**

The role of political parties in Bulgaria for the adoption of European standards of political life is related to a peculiar characteristic of Bulgarian political culture. Political life in this country has always been receptive to foreign models. The openness of Bulgarian politics to foreign models could be observed already at the dawn of Bulgarian political life. European political models have themselves become properly national Bulgarian political culture. The entire political experience of the nation has been accumulated in a process of assimilation of political models coming from Europe.

## ***1.1 Bulgarian institutions in the mirror of Western political tradition.***

In Bulgaria politics have come from abroad. Modern political life since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century has been a series of borrowings from foreign political models. Already at the dawn of Bulgarians' political awakening, around the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, "talking politics" in the local café mainly concerned how "European affairs" were going. Such was the situation across the Ottoman Empire, of which Bulgaria was part. There was no political life in the Empire. Politics was found beyond its borders, in Europe. The political was reduced mainly to the relations of the Empire with foreign states.

The fundamental message of the Bulgarian Renaissance was formulated in 1762 by Paisij, in his Slav-Bulgarian History - Bulgarians used to have their own kingdom and realm, i.e., they had once been as glorious as the other European peoples. In other words, the communicated "let's be like the others" or "let's become like the others" idea was a political agenda which meant "introducing politics" in Bulgarian territories. Modern politics begins with the state, the restoration of statehood was the primordial political issue. The restoration of statehood meant "becoming like the others" and already implied taking up the general European model of the nation-state, of the nation organized into a state.

However self-taught many of the figures of the Bulgarian Renaissance and of the national liberation movement, they were all under the influence of European political ideas of their time. Despite the commonly shared idea of the restoration of Bulgarian statehood, by mid-19<sup>th</sup> century the national liberation movement already displayed a whole palette of political projects borrowed from Europe. The very separation from the Empire, the achievement of independence, was in the optic of modernization - the Ottoman Empire was synonymous to the old, the archaic, the outdated, while Europe equaled progress, advancement, enlightenment. The Empire was the past, Europe was the future.<sup>1</sup>

This receptivity of the nascent Bulgarian political society to European political models and foreign political models in general has been an invariable characteristic of political life after the Liberation. The first Bulgarian constitution of 1879, as is commonly known, was modeled after the Belgian constitution of 1831. And that was hardly a Bulgarian originality: all of the new states which appeared on the European map in the 19<sup>th</sup> century "received" a political regime of constitutional monarchy, as agreed by the Great Powers. What was more specific was that the model adopted in Bulgaria was European down to its very last detail (state constitution, judicial system, administrative-and-territorial division, education, communications, healthcare, etc.) and was thoroughly different from the Russian model of government which had been introduced immediately after the Russian-Turkish War. To the Bulgarian elite of the time Europe was a model of modernization and it was adopted despite the huge influence and authority of Russia, with its halo of liberator. To Bulgaria the

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<sup>1</sup> Even in the present political discourse we frequently encounter the opposition "Europe-Asia" as synonymous to "advancement-backwardness". Bulgaria's accession to the European or Euro-Atlantic structures is opposed to an orientation towards the East, Asia (including Russia), and generally towards the old and the obsolete.

European political model of a constitutional monarchy was a “civilizing” means, a means to break away from the legacy of the Ottoman Empire.

Subsequent constitutions from the communist era more or less took after foreign models as well. The Constitution of the People’s Republic of 1946, despite its specific features, sought to fit together the general democratic principles of representative democracy and the Soviet model, at least at the level of its alleged goals. On the one hand, it established a parliamentary republic with multiparty system and pluralism of ownership, yet on the other hand, proclaimed principles of soviet communism. The constitution of 1971 was entirely in the spirit of the general East-European communist model of state constitution.

The new constitution of 1992 appears to be the most eclectic one. A parliamentary republic with pluralist party system, yet with a directly elected president, aided by a vice-president. This palette of constitutional borrowings features elements of the experience of Germany, France, Italy, and USA. As if it was the aspiration of the founders of the new republic to incorporate “the very best” of Western democracy. In fact, part of the constitutional debates in 1990-91 concerned precisely which constitutional model to adopt (French, American, German, or Italian). Revealingly enough, despite the strong appeals in public space for the simple restoration of the Turnovo Constitution, the opinion prevailed, that it was better to work out a contemporary constitutional model in line with the standards of the West.

### ***1.2 The European genealogy of party labels.***

The borrowings from political models are most conspicuous in the choice of party labels. Immediately after the Liberation the traditional parties of the “young” and “old” turned into liberals and conservatives. Subsequent labels were entirely of a European origin: democrats, social democrats, radicals, republicans, communists. In the Bulgarian political tradition there lack labels of the type of “Party of the True Path” (Turkey), National-Tsaranist Party (Romania), or “Party of Petty Owners” (Hungary). The unintelligibility of the new labels led to the appearance of personalized ones - the Bulgarian versions of the party names took the form of family names (“Stambolovists”, “Radoslavists”, “Tonchevists”) or of resonant neologisms such as “narodnyatsi” [populists] or “druzhbashi” [fraternizers].

Naturally, it is not just a matter of party labels. Already upon their emergence, political parties in Bulgaria assumed the respective roles and functions characterizing their West-European analogues. In the very process of preparation of the party programs the founders of the Bulgarian parties typically borrowed from the respective programs of political parties in European countries. Education was another channel of European influence - a great many of the political figures of early 20<sup>th</sup> century received their education at European universities and, along with that, came to embrace various European political ideologies which they then brought over to Bulgaria.

Another aspect of the widespread borrowing from foreign political models is the invariable “philophobia” in Bulgarian political life. There has not been a single political party or political project which did not, or does not, declare its sympathy for some foreign state or other. It is typically one of the Great Powers, which can be a patron of Bulgaria and back Bulgarian national interests. Bulgarian political life has traditionally had its “russophiles” and “russophobes”, “anglophiles” and “germanophiles”, “turkophiles” and “trukophobes. Even the political parties declaring extreme sensitivity to the “national idea” have not remained outside the “philophobia”. The reasons for this can, among other things, be traced back to the behavior of the Great Powers regarding the Bulgarian national question. The creation of the Bulgarian national state was intertwined into a knot of contradictions among the big states. Moreover, the same Great Power could not be said to always be either a friend or

adversary of Bulgaria. The objects of “philophobia” of Bulgarian political parties therefore tended to change depending on foreign political circumstances.

The reference to foreign political models has been an essential part of the party identity of most Bulgarian political formations. Moreover, it is not a matter of superficial allegiance to potential patrons or hostility to supposed adversaries. The pro-Russian stand of the conservatives, the pro-Entente position of the democrats, the pro-soviet attitude of communists was an inherent part of their political identity. The foreign state is emblematic of the proposed political model, and the declared sympathy with it does not constitute “national treason”. Least of all, because the Bulgarian analogues to European party labels have been sufficiently specific, sufficiently “national” and “local”, both ideologically, and in terms of their social base. On the other hand, the “philiias” and “phobias” have been all too changeable, depending both on the ruling political model in the foreign state of reference, and its specific Balkan policy. Stambolov started out as a “russophile” and ended up a fierce “russophobe”; the so-called “narrow socialists” were “russophobes” up to 1917 and “russophiles” after that. Probably with the sole exception of Turkey, by tradition perceived as a “national adversary” (reminiscence of the rejection of the Ottoman political legacy), there have hardly been any stable mass “philiias” or “phobias” in Bulgarian political history.

Fascism in Bulgaria, for instance, was an obvious borrowing from abroad. And this is evident from the problematic ideological combination of the race theory and the national identity. The attempt to demonstrate the “non-Slavic” nature of Bulgarians in answer to the scheme of “superior” and “inferior” races, the passing of anti-Jewish laws in the absence of traditional antisemitism in Bulgaria - all of this was driven by the wish to adopt a completely foreign political model, the model of the new foreign patron - Nazi Germany.

The communist political project was entirely modeled after the soviet one. It was applied as an international strategy and initially declared its renouncement of all “national differences”. Many saw in communism after 1944 the road to modernization, once again eclectically combining the “European progressist project” and the “Russian soviet model”.

Since 1989 the “philophobia” has once again come to permanently mark the political debate. USA, Russia, Europe, Turkey - a whole range of foreign models of reference, present in the political identity of each of the current political parties. The Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) is visibly wavering between America and Europe, the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), between Russia and Europe, the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF), between Turkey and Europe, and even the nationalists are hesitating in their choice of reference (Orthodoxy, the Slav community).

## **2 The European idea as a factor in the differentiation of political space in Bulgaria.**

The reasons for party differentiation in Bulgaria in the beginning of the transition to democracy were above all domestic ones. But the “European idea” has played an important role in this process. To what extent has the aspiration to Europe set the parameters of political differentiation in Bulgaria? Already at the outset of the transition the common goal which raised no objections or debates was described as the “road to Europe” or “return to Europe”. Once again there appeared the syndrome of the desired modernity, dating back to the time after the national Liberation. Europe (EU) is the model to be followed, undisputed by any influential political power.<sup>2</sup>

The theme of “Europe” differentiates political space for several reasons: institutional, political, axiological, and epistemological. Institutionally, there is not a single political party in Bulgaria, regardless of its name, program goals, or social role, which can legitimize itself as exclusively “European”. The strong legitimizing power of the theme of “Europe” makes it too taxing for a single political actor. Thus the conditions are created for a competition of sorts among the parties on the European theme, a kind of rivalry concerning which party most fully, efficiently, and comprehensively embraces the “European idea”. This rivalry in itself stimulates differences in pro-Europe argumentation and becomes the basis for differentiation of various European projects related to different political parties.

The European theme also differentiates political space in Bulgaria on account of the political pluralism of Europe (EU) itself. The undisputed value of the European political model as pluralist representative democracy to all political actors in the Bulgarian transition to democracy (even the extreme nationalists refer to “European standards”) almost automatically legitimizes political pluralism in Bulgaria. The realization that so many different political tendencies coexist in Europe has stimulated the unfolding of a similar spectrum in Bulgaria from the very beginning of the transition to democracy.

The “European theme” also influences party differentiation in Bulgaria in terms of values. Even after 1989 political parties in Bulgaria appear strongly inclined to legitimize themselves through the choice of a foreign political model. Declared partiality for a certain Western Great Power accompanies the building up of nearly all new political parties. When they embrace a certain Western national political model (the “German”, “French”, “American”, “Spanish”, or “Greek” model) as part of their own legitimization, Bulgarian political parties become susceptible to the political messages of the ruling political power in the respective country and thus together and as a whole reproduce the political pluralism characteristic of EU.

The “European theme” also differentiates political space in Bulgaria epistemologically, through the perception as universally valid of the explanatory paradigms of transition in Bulgaria and Eastern Europe produced by Western social thought. The point being that when the transition is explained in traditional Western political terms, when the opinion-differentiating axes are drawn along lines existing in Western societies (typically West-European), then public opinion itself begins to structure itself along the same lines followed by the political elite. This frequently leads to certain unexpected developments and denouements in Eastern Europe, to certain “illogical”, in terms of the prevailing expectations, results.

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<sup>2</sup> European aspirations give rise to great public expectations for quick and unproblematic settlement of the difficulties of the transition to democracy and to market economy. Public opinion as a whole sees in Europe, at least in the beginning of transition, a source of material and moral support for the changes, a guarantee that these changes will proceed smoothly and at low cost.

The “European idea” is opposed to communism and therefore all newly created parties which define themselves as democratic or as “non-communist” inevitably include “Europe” in their political identity. Regardless of whether it has any meaningful content or is simply a label allowing the new party to be ranked among the “democratic” ones.

“The road to Europe” is the name of this common perception of the transition. In any case, the first political programs and strategies from the beginning of the transition described the goals of the political movement in terms of approximation to European standards, adoption of European characteristics. The concise formula “democracy and market economy” summed up the essence of modern West-European society in the eyes of the new political actors.

Transition in Bulgaria is essentially conceived as a plan for bringing Bulgarian society closer to EU standards. The programs of all newly created parties invariably feature the following common elements:

- in the political sphere - true political pluralism, free and democratic elections, democratization of the state and establishment of the rule of law, effective and working state institutions, development of civil society as partner and controller of the state;
- in the economic sphere - abolition of state monopolies in the economy, and privatization, advancement of individual private enterprise, guaranteeing private property and encouraging foreign investment;
- in the social sphere - equal opportunities for everyone, especially in privatization, accessible education and healthcare, high standard of living;
- in the international sphere - a policy of peace, cooperation with USA, accession to EU and NATO.

This program consensus frequently remains unrecognized and unappreciated. But it does actually exist because it outlines the main features of Western society in the way it has been accepted as a model to be followed.

Along with this genuine program consensus, in the beginning of the transition there appeared a host of parties and organizations proclaiming their “European essence” - the ideological movement Road to Europe within BSP, the Party of World and European United States. But this is a matter of choice of label. What is more important is that there is actual consensus in favor of EU accession. In fact, at that time, and later on as well, public opinion was little aware of the difficulties involved in this accession, of the efforts it would demand, even in economic sphere alone. For the time being, what matters is to stress the “European identity” as synonymous to the values of innovation, modernity, and democracy.

### **3 The approximation of party structure to European models.**

Party differentiation in Bulgaria and the other East-European states after communism has already been subject to sufficiently extensive analysis. There also exist explanatory paradigms of the process of party formation. Herbert Kitschelt views the process as a progression through three consecutive stages of party organization: around a charismatic leader, on a client-patron type of basis, and finally - the emergence of a program-based party.<sup>3</sup> He sees the success of the political transition largely as a chance for establishment of party differentiation among program parties (ideally, since empirically each party is a symbiosis of charisma, clientage, and program elements). This process is also a progression from an unstable to a stabilized democracy and regarding political parties implies a high degree of party distinctness and not so pronounced individual characteristics. On the contrary, in the early stages of the process, parties are typically poorly distinguished in terms of their programs, but have salient characteristic features, largely related to their genealogy. In the beginning they therefore experience a strong need for legitimization in the political space.

Michael Waller notes the fact that new parties do not have clear-cut roles. They therefore need symbolic identification with universally accepted political models, such as the European model to Bulgaria.<sup>4</sup> Thus the newly created (transformed or restored) political parties in Bulgaria simultaneously legitimize themselves through a European model (prove to be its outcome), and introduce the European model (prove to be its factor) in political life.

#### **3.1 European parties in quest of analogues and partners.**

The activity of European political parties in the first years of transition in Bulgaria had a substantial impact on party differentiation. Newly created parties are typically more receptive to ideological and program messages coming from the Western political parties which are willing to help them. This help can come in the form of material support, but likewise, and most notably, through European legitimization. That is why the activity of international experts frequently sent out to help political parties in preparing for the first elections, in working out the first political programs and political advertising campaigns, proves so decisive for shaping the image of the influential parties, especially those belonging to the anti-communist opposition of the time. But even BSP, the successor to the Communist Party, is highly susceptible to messages coming from Western parties (mostly social democratic ones).

As the process advances, party messages become ever more clear-cut, and their self-identification, more distinct. The party structure in general increasingly comes to resemble that of the stable democracies in Western Europe. There is gradual unfolding and stabilization of the spectrum of parties taking up the political space from the "far left" to the "far right". If a party corresponding to a certain position should lack in the Bulgarian political tradition, it is simply created, in order to balance the structure and bring it closer to the European standard. This is by no means done deliberately. Rather, either the political class intuitively seems to arrive at the formula or else, it is the initially adopted party differentiation formula which logically leads to the unfolding of a party palette such as it is found in the EU countries.

European parties actively influence party differentiation in Bulgaria through their efforts to find legitimate analogues and partners in Bulgaria. European parties themselves appear particularly eager to make sure that in the course of their evolution the new democracies work out the same roles which have already been established in Western Europe. This

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<sup>3</sup> See: H.Kitschelt (*Party Systems in East Central Europe. Consolidation or Fluidity?*- Glasgow, 1995).

<sup>4</sup> M.Waller, *Parties, Trade Unions and Society in East-Central Europe*.- Ilford, Essex, 1994.



would be a further legitimizing factor for the corresponding Western parties. European (national or international) parties typically act along two lines:

- seeking, finding, and legitimizing their own analogues in the existing political palette;
- transforming or creating their own analogue.

In the first case this strategy of the European parties provokes a competition among Bulgarian ones which has its positive aspects as well - it stimulates the adoption of European standards of making politics. In this respect, the best illustration are the parties from the social-democratic and liberal spectrum. Despite the extreme dispersion of these parties in Bulgaria, their aspiration to become legitimate partners of the respective European social-democratic or liberal formations stimulates the consolidation of the party system and the efforts at cooperation between parties of similar political orientation.<sup>5</sup>

Both strategies have an obvious impact on the shape and image of Bulgarian parties. This influence is most immediately felt with respect to program messages - in order to become proper analogues to the respective European parties, Bulgarian ones are inclined to introduce the necessary program changes. In some cases European parties themselves require such changes as a condition for legitimizing their Bulgarian counterparts. This, however, is a rare practice. Rather, the changes made are taken for granted. The first programs of the new political parties after 1989 extensively borrowed principles and even texts from program documents of their respective European analogues.

In this respect there are abundant examples of program reorientation of parties depending on the international support they can rely on.

Thus, for instance, the National Salvation Union (NSU) coalition in the present National Assembly has taken a pro-monarchist stand because it relies on the open support of Simeon II. Yet, not only MRF, but other members of the coalition as well, had never before professed pro-monarchy leanings.

UDF is gradually turning into a right-wing or right-centrist party, letting go its aspiration to cover the entire political space, from the social democrats to the conservatives. One of the reasons for this is the increasing closeness with, and support by, certain conservative and christian-democrat parties from the EU and USA.

The Civic Association for the Republic (CAR) is gradually sliding from more liberal, to more social-democratic positions with the emerging prospect for the newly created Euroleft to become the legitimate social democracy in Bulgaria and receive the support of the Socialist International and the Party of European Socialists.

This is not a matter of unprincipled political behavior, as such events are typically interpreted in the mass media. It is only a natural process of approximation of the Bulgarian party-and-political structure to that of EU.

One of the most effective channels through which European parties influence the differentiation of the Bulgarian political space is the activity of associated foundations. European party foundations and institutes are among the most active organizers and sponsors of various types of activities - seminars, conferences, campaigns - aimed at aiding the respective Bulgarian political parties, introducing a given set of ideas into the public debate, promoting a certain party strategy, and finally, making their own presence known in Bulgaria. The party foundations and institutes are a powerful means of supporting the very establishment of party pluralism in Bulgaria. The simultaneous operation of such organizations in this country supports diverse activities: formation and education of a party activist

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<sup>5</sup> Quite revealing is the process of consolidation of liberal formations ongoing around the figure and party of former president Zheliu Zhelev.

core; introducing the respective ideas into the party debate; program development of the parties; dissemination of knowledge and skills among the party nominated members of parliament.

Party foundations and institutes create in Bulgaria their own "clienteles" of sorts - associated with their activity are particular groups from the political and intellectual elite who play an active role in the political debate and serve as active intermediaries for the introduction into Bulgaria of the respective political ideas. Most active are the party foundations and institutes from Germany and the U.S.: the German foundations Friedrich Ebert (of the social democrats), Friedrich Naumann (of the liberals), Konrad Adenauer (of the christian democrats), Hanns Seidel (of the German CSU); the National Republican Institute and National Democratic Institute of USA. To a lesser extent, other NGOs associated with parties from a number of European countries are also active in this country - Jean Jaures Foundation, close to the socialists, or Robert Shuman Foundation, close to the centrists (France), the Westminster Foundation of the conservatives (Great Britain), Liberal Academy for Development (Portugal), and others. An active influence, mainly on the constitution of non-communist parties, is also exerted by non-party international foundations, such as the Open Society Fund (supported by George Soros).

The influence of those organizations with respect to party differentiation is felt mostly through their efforts at consolidation of the respective party-and-political sector. To a large extent, the orientation of UDF towards christian democracy, the collaborative efforts of the left-wing parties on a social-democratic basis, the attempts at consolidation of liberal parties around the figure of Zhelju Zhelev, are all the result of the activity and influence of the international party foundations and institutes. In this connection, even the very model of transition adopted in Bulgaria is under the influence of the activity of international foundations and non-governmental organizations - not by directly imposing a pre-designated path of development, but in terms of the success of the efforts to consolidate a particular segment of the political spectrum in Bulgaria.

### **3.2 The internal logic of political differentiation creates structures close to EU.**

The process of party-political differentiation is a historical one. The palette of political parties unfolds after a European model, which is superimposed on Bulgarian political life as a legitimate explanatory scheme and which encompasses, explains, interprets and subjects internal differentiation processes. Though in the beginning of the transition to democracy the creation of new political parties appeared chaotic (until recently court registries comprised more than 200 political parties), they gradually started taking up the roles they were supposed to play. The legitimacy of these roles is determined by their correspondence to the roles played by parties in the EU. The role assumption runs parallel to the choice of party label. The choice of a christian-democratic label implies increased concern with matters of faith and Christian values, which are immediately reflected in the respective party programs and messages. The choice of a social-democratic label automatically leads to the adoption of the party slogans of the Socialist International and its motto for freedom, justice, and solidarity. The choice of a liberal label inevitably brings out freedom and individualism as fundamental elements of the party message. Even the far-right parties in Bulgaria borrow ideas and slogans from their European counterparts though they may sometimes sound utterly exotic in this country.

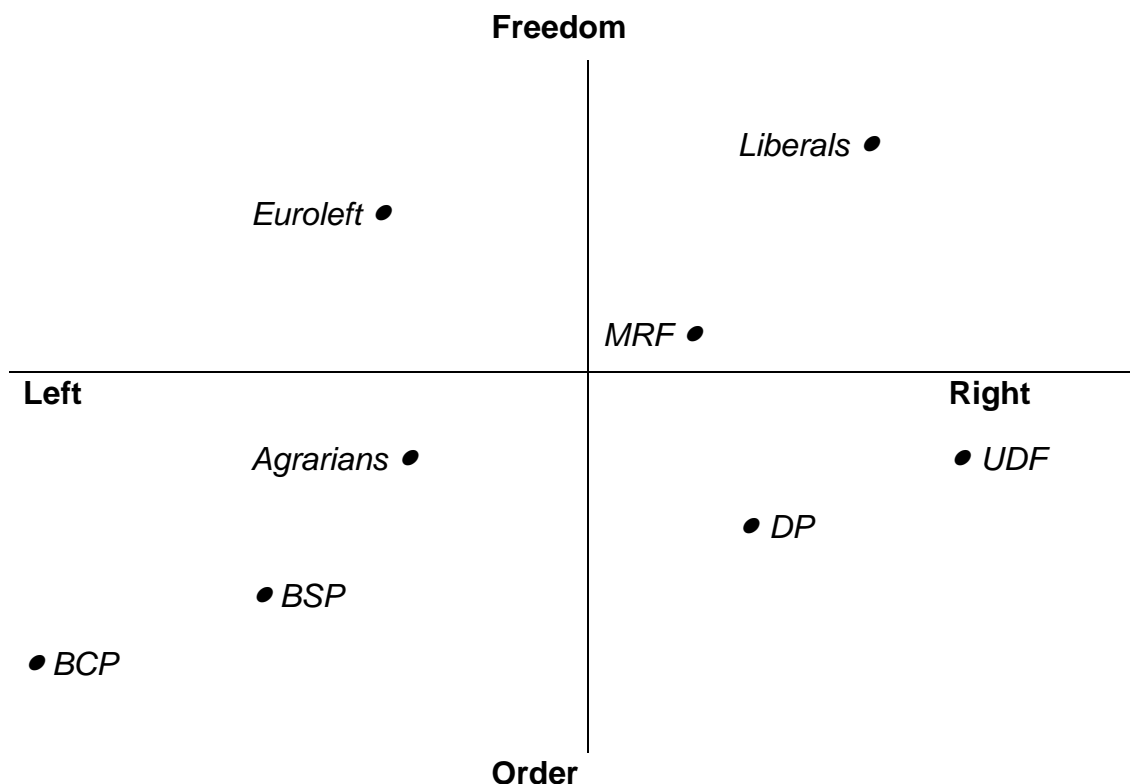
Thus Bulgarian party structure essentially begins to correspond to a widespread matrix of party differentiation applicable to all countries of East Europe and proposed by Herbert Kitschelt<sup>6</sup> as a minimal model of the lines of political division (cleavages) in the post-

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<sup>6</sup> Herbert Kitschelt, *Party Systems in East Central Europe. Consolidation or Fluidity?* - Glasgow, 1995, p. 70

socialist countries. This matrix typically involves two scales: left/right, and authoritarian/libertarian, with the first scale synthetically differentiating parties according to economic and political values, and the second one referring to cultural and social values, including ethnic tolerance.

Figure 1



The presentation is schematic and summarizes numerous analyses of party differentiation in terms of the values characterizing the mass party electorate and shared by the party elite.

Naturally, this differentiation of the roles and the choice of label are not arbitrary. Underlying the process are deeper tendencies of social differentiation which create a new, different from that of “real socialism”, network of social interests striving after political expression. More specifically, this new network corresponds to the various social interests which emerged upon the dismantling of the communist system. In Bulgaria those processes were analogical to developments in the other East-European countries. Most notably, the differentiation of interests in any case has a single legitimate interpretation - the Western one - and it provides the grounds for the new party roles and labels.

Along with the representation of these new interests, party differentiation is affected by two other factors: the institutional structure and international entourage.<sup>7</sup> The latter, as already noted, exerts complex influence through a multitude of channels, one of which, and perhaps in this case the most notable one, is through international legitimization of the political roles and the respective political parties.

In Bulgaria parties have gradually been filling the space from left to right, taking up almost every “niche” and thus adopting a European standard. It is West-European much more

<sup>7</sup> See the model proposed by Andreas Stadler, quoted by M. Waller in: M.Waller, *Parties, Trade Unions and Society in East-Central Europe*.- Ilford, Essex, 1994, p.30).

than American, where the same terms do not carry the meaning they have in Europe. Here is how the political parties were situated in mass consciousness along the left-right scale in 1991:<sup>8</sup>

Figure 2

<i>BSP</i>	<i>USD</i>	<i>BSDP</i>	<i>BANU</i>	<i>Liberals</i>	<i>UDF</i>
2.0	2.4	2.9	3.0	3.4	4.0
<b>2</b>			<b>3</b>		<b>4</b>
<b>Left</b>					<b>Right</b>

The picture did not change substantially over the next years, which means that despite the numerous changes of party labels, despite the changes of the parties and coalitions themselves in the period since 1991, the principal roles have remained and only the specific actors have been changing. What has changed, though, is the electoral correlation between the components of Bulgarian political space which is constituting itself after a European model.

The left and right are European labels which, owing to the receptiveness of Bulgarian political life to foreign models, were introduced in this country as early as the beginning of the century. The logic of the left and right division typically refers to some “philosophical” question permanently dividing mass opinions, views, ideas in two. In Europe, as well as in Bulgaria, the left and right in political life are associated with a specific historical event, which by its significance leads to a value-related and psychological schism in society. Subsequently this schism, which deeply traumatizes mass consciousness, is passed down from one generation to another as the total political experience of the nation, as its political culture. In peripheral cultures, such as ours, foreign political models and foreign political labels are superimposed over this fundamental event. This social schism keeps recurring in Bulgarian history, always sustaining political Manichaeism and the lack of lasting political consensus.

Even before the Liberation in 1878 the patriotic Bulgarian political society was divided on a fundamental issue - the path to national independence. The “revolutionaries” relied on a self-liberating act by the people itself and took to educating and preparing the population to revolt. They formed the “party of the young”, which remained particularly sensitive to the “national issue”. The more moderate intelligentsia, many of whom had obtained a good education abroad, relied on foreign assistance for the national liberation or the reformation of the Ottoman Empire. They formed the “party of the old”.

During the Constituent Assembly in 1879 the parties of the “young” and the “old” adopted the European labels of liberals and conservatives. In fact that is when they begin turning into proper parties. Because “young” and “old” are public roles which are taken up by various political forces in the course of history. The “young” assume the role of the so-called “hashove”: non-acceptance of the status quo, reliance on the Bulgarian people’s own forces, sensitivity to the “national issue” (independence, self-reliance, “own way”). The “old” assume the role of the “Brotherhood of Virtue”: “wisdom”, “moderation”, seeking foreign support and compromises with the Turkish government. The “old” are cosmopolites, open to Europe and the “tried and tested” foreign models, traditional russophiles (sensitiv-

<sup>8</sup> The data are from a survey by the Center for the Study of Democracy of August, 1991, quoted in: *Dahrendorf's Pendulum* - Sofia, 1995, p.41.

ity to the historical Bulgarian virtues but likewise receptiveness to the order of established and sustained social hierarchies).

This division of Bulgarian society between “young” and “old” on the eve of the Liberation structures the political process in modern Bulgaria and has to this day been passed down the generations as the total political experience of the nation. The politically “left” and right” in Bulgaria are the successors to the “young” and “old”. But with some typically Bulgarian characteristics.

A traditional conservative right wing has never been able to set deep roots in Bulgaria. Most notably, because of the absence of a hereditary aristocracy, and respectively, a carrier of elitist values. Right-wing parties traditionally draw their votes from the same social strata - the wealthier and better educated. And that was their chief social and political problem in a country which remained relatively “equal in its poverty”, where the elite was separated from the rest by one generation at most. Thus in Bulgarian political life the classical right wing soon turned into a populist right, always striving to rely on mass political passivity, yet, when necessary, to win the support of the swamp, the demos.

After 1944 the right ostensibly disappeared from political life. Yet the “old” did not. Their role was taken up by the new communist government. In the beginning communism in Bulgaria assumed the role of a modernizing public project - the country actually became an industrial one in the 50s and 60s. On the other hand, the Communist Party ideologically synthesized a key contradiction in Bulgarian politics - the openness to foreign models (the soviet model was the one of the time) supported by the traditional russophilia of the “old”, and the receptiveness of mass consciousness to egalitarian ideas. Communists managed to achieve an actual synthesis between the “right” and “left” political tradition. At the same time, the new regime, which also owed its coming to power to the greatly increased politicization, gradually started parasitizing on the traditional apolitical attitudes, all while encouraging them. In power the Communist Party turned into a “party of order and social hierarchies”. And the crisis of the communist regime began with the mass realization of the falsehood of the officially proclaimed fundamental characteristic of socialist society - equality.

In Bulgaria social differentiation never advanced as far as to produce a sufficiently numerous industrial proletariat, or in more recent times, a sufficiently homogeneous class of hired labor. Therefore the social basis of the parties challenging the social status quo and social order has always been all too amorphous, diffusive, and unstable.

The successors to the “young” from the former Liberal Party initiated most political parties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The political history of the “young” demonstrates a Bulgarian phenomenon - the shift to the right of each newly created or newly seceded party once it comes to power. The role of the “young” has been assumed successively by different political formations, with the “former young” typically becoming the “new old”.

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> c. the “young” were personified by Petko Karavelov’s democrats: republicans, though moderate; opposed to economic liberalism, yet not socialists; turned towards the people, not the elite. By the turn of the century the democrats had already assumed the role of the “old” - the radicals (whom Karavelov himself called “socialists”) seceded. At the same time, the liberal parties were becoming ever more nationalist and populist, and also shifted towards the right. Meanwhile there appeared political parties unfamiliar in the political tradition up to then - the socialists and the agrarians. The latter long played the role of the “young” in political life - up to 1944, when they came to power and with that, “got old”.

Many of the parties created after 1989 claimed to succeed political formations from the time up to 1945 and on a “role” level, actually were their successors (for instance, BANU,

the Democratic Party). What is more specific about the situation is the “revolutionary” aspect of the process in which the “young”, the forces of change, initially assumed generally “rightist” positions (private business, free market, priority to individual freedom, anti-collectivism) as a reaction to the Communist Party which had turned into a conservative force.<sup>9</sup> Yet on the other hand, the new opposition remained particularly sensitive to “social justice”, trampled by the “old regime”, and to solidarity.

The haziness of the features of the major political parties characterizes the transition as a whole. This has several implications with immediate bearing on the international legitimization of Bulgarian political parties, which on the whole lagged behind as compared to other Central-European countries:

- the large parties, such as BSP and UDF claimed to represent the entire society, the whole palette of political values and strategies;
- the bi-party confrontation for a long time proceeded along manichean lines, as exclusion of the other, rather than relative sharing of the political space;
- the indeterminacy (ideological, political, social) of the political parties all too often reduced the ideological and political differences to personal and moral ones, which impeded enduring inter-party associations and ultimately, the consolidation of the party system.

It is only recently that the process of differentiation and stabilization of the political space in this country started unfolding according to the “classical” scheme. Only recently did such political powers emerge which, rather than play a merely symbolic role (“new” and “old”), self-identify themselves as representing specific group interests. This process is ongoing and its visible results can be found both in the ideological refining of the major political actors, as well as in the emergence of political actors who typically define themselves as the “center” and reproduce a “classical” political palette from the green left and social democracy to centrist liberalism and moderate conservatism.

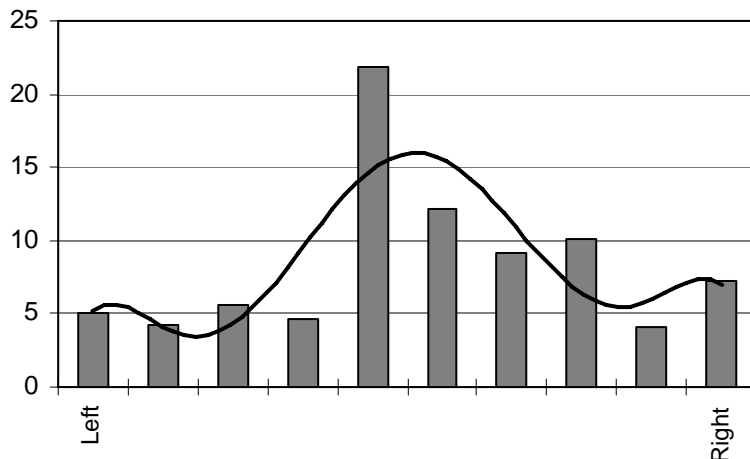
In this respect the voters themselves do not differ substantially from those in EU countries. Here is how they self-positioned themselves along the left-right scale in January 1998:<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Asked with which political party they associated the social change, in August 1991 15.2% answered “with the left”, while 20.6% answered “with the right”. See: *Dahrendorf's Pendulum...*, p.40.

<sup>10</sup> The data are from an International Survey of Values conducted in Bulgaria by the Institute on Social Values and Structures jointly with BBSS Gallup International in January 1998.

Figure 3



Voters typically assume their positions along this line of political identification following the party messages. It is not so much the parties that follow voters' self-identification than voters adopting party self-positioning on the left/right scale. The self-identification of parties in the left-right dimension in Bulgaria very closely follows the logic of the Western interpretation, according to which communists are the "far left", socialists, "left", agrarians and liberals, "centrists", and democrats and christian democrats, "right-wing". These self-identifications to the left, right and center, which have been borrowed from the European political tradition, frequently give rise to incongruities typical for Bulgaria and Eastern Europe in general: the left-wing BSP has an electorate conservative by its values; the right-wing UDF employs essentially revolutionary political mobilization techniques. Moreover, all too often the parties in power, regardless of their self-identification, by necessity conduct a "rightist" policy (privatization, free market development), while the parties in opposition frequently resort to leftist methods of political struggle (occupations, boycotts, street protests).

In Bulgaria party self-determination is based on a classical mode of organization of political space adopted in Europe (though presently the content of the terms "left" and "right" is not invariable in the different countries), and the voters accept this mode as their own. This is one of the ways of bringing political orientations closer to the European model. And it should here be noted that the approximation is much more with the European model, rather than the American one, since in the U.S. the self-positioning of parties and politicians between the "left" and "right" is irrelevant.

### 3.3 "The European consensus".

On the other hand, the insufficient ideological differentiation of parties sustains a "European consensus". It is a fundamental consensus - there is not a single more or less influential political power in Bulgaria (with the rare exceptions of a few, highly marginal parties without any influence whatsoever in the political debate), which does not stress that Bulgaria's accession to EU is a matter of unquestionable first-order priority. For the reasons already mentioned, every Bulgarian party struggling to gain influence in society emphasizes its adherence to the "Europe idea" and never fails to underline the successful steps it has undertaken when in government in order to bring Bulgaria closer to EU. Even in legislative debates, when arguing against some governmental draft law, the opposition all too often stresses the need for "European expertise" with a view to the approximation of the legislation, or frequently support their negative position with the argument that the draft law is contrary to European norms.

So far parties have contributed to the fact that public opinion is almost unanimous about the European choice of Bulgaria. It is a different matter that at present this is no longer enough. The issue of the accession calls for specific decisions in specific areas, and public awareness is still inadequate with respect to several basic problems:

- exactly how can Bulgaria contribute to the common policies of the EU and the common role of the Union in the world;
- in what respects does Bulgaria fall short of EU criteria;
- what is the optimal correlation between adherence to the ever more complex EU membership criteria and the implementation of an independent national development strategy.

Political parties will now have to address this new, specific aspect of the EU debate in Bulgaria. And if by now they can rely on international legitimization of their political role and place in the national political palette, then they will be able to act as intermediaries in “transferring” the European debate into Bulgaria in its entire complexity and immanent pluralism. And conversely, political parties in Bulgaria will be able to carry over to a European level the palette of views in Bulgaria on the development and functioning of EU.

The role of parties for the adoption of European models has so far been of an “objective” nature - by their roles, functions, and identification, parties are generally doing it unconsciously. In fact, deliberate action towards closer relations with European partners, lobbying in specific countries, building up lasting bilateral party relations, is generally uncommon. Parties have left things up to individual experts, with weak involvement of party leadership and official bodies. On the other hand, parties prefer to work mostly with EU institutions in Brussels, with the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, and to some extent, with Euro-parties. But contacts on a bilateral party level are far weaker. It is the activity of various party foundations that predominates in this respect and relations are thus mediated.

In the ten years of transition there have also emerged different types of party approaches to the practical organization of the process of Bulgaria’s accession to EU. Two parties have tried out more specific governmental practices in this respect: BSP (1994-96) and UDF (after 1997). As the ruling party, BSP created a model of EU integration based on the existence of an inter-institutional committee under the management of a deputy minister on foreign affairs coordinating the activity of the ministries and under the control of Parliament (the Permanent Committee on Foreign Policy and European Integration). This model is centered on the sphere of general political decisions, and the legislature is the active side. As a ruling party, UDF established a slightly different model. The responsibility for coordinating Bulgaria’s EU accession here falls primarily on the Ministry of Justice and Eurointegration, with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs acting as national coordinator under PHARE. Parliament has a more general coordinating function. The accent is on technical measures for adopting European legislation, and the executive is the active factor. These differences stem from the political differences between the two parties, as well as from the evolution of the very process of Bulgaria’s EU integration.

#### **4 The roads to Europe of the political parties.**

The foreign-political priorities of parties in Bulgaria generally overlap with the national priorities such as they can be defined within the existing political consensus: EU integration, friendship with the U.S., partnership with Russia, good neighborly relations in the Balkans. Each of the political parties has made its contribution to this consensus, especially regarding EU membership. In fact, foreign political differences concern membership in NATO,



and not in EU. The debate still proceeds on an all too general level and this impedes the detailed discussion of the connection between EU and NATO in the sphere of security policy. Yet, regardless of these substantial differences, the consensus on foreign policy is even broader than would appear at first glance.

#### ***4.1 BSP and the road to the European social democracy.***

The social-democratic international legitimacy is probably of greatest importance to BSP. BSP proclaimed itself the successor to the social democracy of 1891, but likewise, to the Communist Party of 1919. Since it changed its name in April 1990, it has been seeking its legitimacy primarily as a party of the social democrats in Bulgaria. Clearly, BSP - the inheritor of the former communists - can legitimize itself as a new democratic party which has broken with the past mainly by enlisting the support of international social democracy.

In its quest for international legitimacy BSP is facing numerous obstacles. Most notably, the Socialist International already has a Bulgarian member - BSDP. Thus, through all the years of transition BSP has constantly been striving to produce evidence of its social-democratic nature and to cooperate with BSDP, after the main part of it left UDF in 1991. The second challenge on BSP's road to social democracy is the newly created Bulgarian Euroleft. Arising as a result of the severe political crisis of January 1997, upon its very appearance the Euroleft declared its aspirations to legitimize itself as the Bulgarian social democracy. This was a hard blow for BSP, related, among other things, to the passing over to the new formation of a number of its leaders who had up to then been involved in maintaining the party's international contacts with the Socialist International and the Party of European Socialists (PES).

In 1992 BSP filed an official application for SI membership and the process gained speed over the next two years, when a series of visits took place upon the invitation of influential social-democratic parties (Germany, Belgium, France, Greece). In December 1994 BSP received a "standing invitation" to the SI. After the crisis of 1996-97 relations were frozen as a result of the disappointment of international social democracy at the failure of BSP's government. There have recently been new steps to activate relations with BSP's international social-democratic partners (its last congress in May 1998 was attended by the newly elected Secretary of PES).

BSP maintains closest contacts with social democrats in Greece (PASOK), Austria, and Germany. More irregular and reserved are the relations with Britain's Labour Party, the Swedish social democracy, and the Spanish Socialist Worker's Party (PSOE). There appears to be a certain geopolitical specificity which is often also related to the personal contacts of BSP leaders.

Even though BSP is facing the competition of BSDP and the Euroleft, it still holds important trump cards in the eyes of European social democracy. What matters to PES at this stage is whether the respective national social-democratic party can be a real government alternative, including whether it is capable of winning parliamentary elections in the foreseeable future. So far, within the Bulgarian left, BSP is the only one standing any chances of winning elections, though not so soon. Separately, BSDP and the Euroleft are still far weaker. BSP will probably bank on this when stressing its own advantages as a legitimate partner of PES in Bulgaria (there is as yet no Bulgarian representative in PES). BSP relies on the fact that international social democracy finds itself in the difficult situation of having to choose between a "true" social democratic party in Bulgaria and a "strong" social democratic party in Bulgaria, and that it is more likely to choose a strong party to be "social-democratized", rather than a weak, if undoubtedly social democratic party. On the other

hand, BSP also counts on the reservations which PES had about BSDP on account of its coalition in 1997-98 with UDF, considered a conservative party.

BSP is also implementing an active policy through the "party foundations". It has already established good working relations with the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity (a foundation close to PES), actively cooperates with Friedrich Ebert Foundation (of the GSDF), the Institute for International Relations, close to PASOK. Equally active in this respect are certain foundations associated with BSP, such as "A Society of Solidarity" or "European Social Values", which have international contacts of their own. In a number of cases, however, BSP-related foundations are more often an instrument of internal party struggle, rather than a means of strengthening the party's international relations.

The second direction of seeking social-democratic legitimacy are contacts and close relations with analogous parties from Eastern Europe - successors to the former communist parties which are also in quest of international social-democratic legitimization. More specifically, those are the Hungarian Socialist Party, the Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland, social democrats from Slovenia, as well as the social-democratic parties of Ukraine and Russia. The point of such a priority is in "mutual legitimization", especially with respect to East-European associate parties in PES (the Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland, the Hungarian Socialist Party, the Party of the Democratic Left of Slovakia, and the Integrated List of Slovenian Social Democrats).

With most of the other social-democratic parties BSP maintains contacts through its deputies to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) and other assemblies of international organizations of which Bulgaria is member.

The third area of international activity of BSP is related to its international legitimacy as a left-wing party. For a long time BSP used to call itself a "modern left party" as if to highlight its identification between traditional social democracy and reformed communism, a synthesis which is essentially open to the left. This accounts for BSP's membership in the Black Sea Assembly of Left-Centrist Parties (created in December 1996), in which the Euroleft is the other member from Bulgaria. This Assembly does not include a single party from each country, and its initiator was the Georgian Social-Democratic Party. At this stage the Assembly is but a beginning of closer cooperation between similar leftist and left-centrist parties from the Black Sea region<sup>11</sup>.

Though not a member, BSP also participates in some initiatives of the Forum of the New European Left, including left-wing parties such as the United Left of Spain, the Citizens' Movement of Chevenement in France, the Party of Democratic Socialism in Germany, and others. BSP is clearly striving to be legitimized as a social-democratic party and therefore only takes part in some of the initiatives of this Forum. It is essentially an association of reforming communist parties from Europe, but likewise of left-wing formations which have no communist genealogy but are positioned further "to the left" of social democracy.

With respect to the Balkans, BSP is striving to maintain contacts on an equal footing with all influential political parties in the Balkan states, without displaying any particular priorities. This should be understood as a professed aspiration to conduct a national policy in the region, to build up the image of a national party (rather than just social-democratic and left-wing one). Most active are its contacts with Greek political parties (with PASOK, as well as with the Coalition of Left-Wing Parties, the Greek Communist Party, New Democ-

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<sup>11</sup> The Assembly includes PASOK from Greece, the Social Democrats from Turkey, two left-wing parties from Ukraine (socialists and social democrats), two left-wing parties from Romania (those of Petre Roma and Ion Iliesku), two parties from Russia (Social-Democratic Union and the party of Ivan Ribkin), one party from Moldova.

racy). Active contacts with almost all parties are also maintained in Macedonia. In Yugoslavia, Romania, and Albania contacts are kept up mostly with social-democratic and socialist parties.

Thus in its international policy we see BSP molding its political physiognomy around two pillars: a Bulgarian-grown social-democratic party and a nationally responsible political power. At the same time, it also has a rather clearly defined policy of a left-wing party in general, not wishing to confront the various components of the international left. BSP, as clearly stated in the political resolution from its last congress, strives after "opening up to the left-wing movement in Europe and the world".<sup>12</sup>

BSP is still seeking its clear ideological profile. It strives to be legitimized as social democracy of a European type but does not have a "Western identity" acceptable to its West-European partners. It unconditionally supports Bulgaria's accession to EU, but has reservations regarding NATO membership. "The strategic choice of Bulgaria is EU membership" states the Political Report before the 43<sup>rd</sup> Party Congress (May 1998), but goes on to add that BSP is for "a consistent policy of non-involvement in military unions". The latter can be related to a conspicuous characteristic of BSP's political image - its aspiration to act the part of the party highly concerned with maintaining friendly relations with Russia. The "anti-NATO" stand of BSP reveals reminiscences of the past, as well as the "Russian" aspect of its international identity.

It should not be forgotten that within the BSP itself there exist tendencies which differ substantially on the matter of the party's social-democratic identity. It is still not possible to speak of a definitive consolidation of the party on the basis of the principles of European social democracy. There are quite influential circles within it which advocate the idea of a broad-based left-wing party, integrating socialism, social democracy, and neo-communism. This duality of the international identity of BSP impedes its "recognition" by the Western social democracy as a whole. That is also why BSP is trying to achieve such acknowledgement through partial steps, through the mediation of individual influential parties from the SI and PES.

#### ***4.2 UDF: from political ambivalence to a christian-democratic profile.***

UDF arose as a coalition of non-communist parties and organizations. By origin UDF is defined as an anti-communist party. Already at the dawn of the new political pluralism in Bulgaria, UDF self-defined itself ideologically and politically as the antipode to the communist party, to BSP. The central slogan of the coalition during the first elections in 1990-1992, "Totalitarianism or Democracy", indicated UDF's aspiration to represent the entire political palette of the emulated Western democracy, which excluded any remnants of communism, even the reforming Communist Party.

On the other hand, in the beginning UDF was a broad coalition of parties and organizations of different ideological orientation. The coalition was initially characterized by the co-existence of left-wing and left-centrist parties (social democrats, agrarians), right-wing and conservative parties (democrats and monarchists), liberal parties, Greens, ecologists, etc. Owing to this ideological indeterminacy of UDF, for years its international contacts were left up to the individual parties. The larger parties in the coalition turned towards their own European analogues, including the respective international associations.

By 1992-1993, through its various components, UDF was member of several different international party associations, thus demonstrating a whole palette of political tendencies,

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<sup>12</sup> Political resolution of the 43<sup>rd</sup> Congress of BSP; Newsletter of the High Council of BSP, May 9, 1998, p. 4.

some of which were contradictory. Seen as a whole, in the early period of its existence UDF was a conglomerate of social democrats, liberals, and conservatives, united by anti-communism and their shared aspiration to build up a pluralistic democracy. But in the course of time the correlation between these basic components of the coalition changed, thus also changing the general image of UDF as a whole.

The first one to achieve international legitimacy was BSDP, which had its full membership in the Socialist International renewed upon its restoration owing to the personal international reputation of its leader, Petar Dertliev. In May 1991 it split up on the occasion of the adoption of the new constitution and the attitude towards the group of 39 UDF deputies who had declared a hunger strike against the passing of the constitution. The social democrats (headed by Petar Dertliev) who left UDF retained their SI membership, while the newly created Social-Democratic Party within UDF maintained relations with the International, but not as a member. With the withdrawal of Petar Dertliev, the social-democratic component in UDF was considerably reduced, not only by share, but likewise by relative political weight. At the same time UDF was left by an influential group from Ekoglasnost, who could ideologically be assigned to the left-wing ecologists, close to social democracy.

The withdrawal from UDF of BANU "Nikola Petkov" (with Milan Drenchev) in 1991 also weakened the positions of the left-wing and left-centrist parties in the coalition. The agrarians remaining in the Union defined themselves as right center. On the whole, after the first wave of splits and party differentiation in 1991-1992, UDF found itself shifting rightwards, towards the liberal axis. Which at first seemed perfectly logical, since UDF identified itself as the antipode to the leftist BSP.

In the beginning it seemed that most parties from UDF were seeking membership in the Liberal International, i.e., a liberal identity. This was also related to the liberal self-identification of a number of intellectuals who used to occupy leading positions in UDF in the early years. Observer status was initially granted to the National Clubs for Democracy and the Radical-Democratic Party (RDP). Subsequently, with the strengthening of the positions of RDP, it was affiliated as a full member of the Liberal International. A significant role for the liberal self-identification of many organizations in UDF was also played by the Friedrich Naumann Foundation of the German Free Democratic Party, which sponsored initiatives for the dissemination of liberal values. Liberals remained the most influential wing in UDF up to 1993, all the more that then President Zheliu Zhelev was an individual member of the Liberal International.

The wave of conflicts between then President Zheliu Zhelev and UDF, and the subsequent new splits in the Union in 1992-1993 weakened the positions of liberals in the coalition.<sup>13</sup> Practically, by 1995-1996 very few of the initial liberal formations remained in UDF, which once again shifted the Union ideologically and politically to the right, towards the axis of the christian-democrats and the conservatives.

Already within the frames of UDF, the Democratic Party (DP) and the United Christian-Democratic Center (UCDC) turned towards partners from the European right. In 1992 they were affiliated as associate members of the European Christian-Democratic Union (ECDU). In 1995, DP, together with its new partner in the People's Union - BANU, were granted full member status in ECDU, which in October 1996 decided to merge with the European Popular Party, initially a parliamentary fraction of the Christian Democrats in the

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<sup>13</sup> RDP also split up, part of it leaving UDF and retaining the status of member of the Liberal International. Two fractions from the National Clubs for Democracy which had left UDF in 1992 - the Bulgarian Party Liberals and the "New Choice" Union (both parties regarded as being close to former president Zheliu Zhelev), also had observer status in the Liberal International.

European Parliament.<sup>14</sup> By 1995-1996, for a number of reasons, and especially after the Democrats left UDF, UCDC had gained decisive influence and political weight. This practically coincided with, and was possibly one of the reasons for, the definitive adoption of a Christian Democratic profile by UDF.

This situation, in which UDF as a whole was not affiliated with any international party association, but specific parties from the Union were members of European unions, continued up to 1996 when the new leadership undertook steps to turn it into an integrated political party. At that time the tendencies of party differentiation, splits and alliances had led to a reduction of the share of left-wing and left-centrist political parties and organizations in the composition of UDF. So it seemed a quite logical development when in 1997-1998 UDF, already as a unified party, became affiliated with the European People's Party. The general process of establishment of the party structure in Bulgaria gradually shifted UDF rightwards, though it initially included influential left-wing parties. This ideological and political crystallization allowed European parties to "recognize" UDF as part of the right-wing and right-centrist powers.

UDF relies on particular support from the German Christian Democrats in its efforts to achieve favorable conditions for Bulgaria in its relations with EU. UDF also finds support for a number of its initiatives from influential foundations associated with the conservatives or christian democrats in Europe - the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (of the German CDU), Robert Shuman Foundation (close to the French Union for French Democracy), the Westminster Foundation, close to the British conservatives.

On the other hand, the political genealogy of UDF relates it to influential American political parties and institutes in Bulgaria. With its emergence, UDF was defined in mass consciousness as the "Western party" legitimizing itself with the project of making Bulgaria part of the Western world, as opposed to "Eastern communism". From the very start the coalition received serious political, ideological, and material support from various foundations and associations from the U.S. (mainly through programs of USAID, the National Democratic Institute, the National Republican Institute for International Relations). Within UDF there have therefore always coexisted two parallel, and sometimes competing, lines of international legitimization - the European, and the American one.

There is hardly any real "tension" between these two sources of international identification of UDF. Yet it is possible to speak of two competing strategies which sometimes divide the Union on matters on which EU and the U.S. take different stands. But with the inclusion in the structures of European parties, UDF has definitely come to adopt a more European strategy, without in any way distancing itself from American support.

The foundations close to UDF are also internationally active. On the one hand, those are organizations established a long time ago and aimed at supporting the development of UDF, such as Democracy Foundation. On the other hand, those are likewise new foundations (such as "Victory 2"), the activity of which is largely centered around elections and internal party activities. And thirdly, those are the foundations established after 1997, with the coming of UDF to power - the foundations "Future for Bulgaria" or "Values". All of these organizations are engaged in broad international activity and to some extent have divided their spheres of activity, without competing among each other. They also constitute in-

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<sup>14</sup> Member of ECDU since 1991 is also the BANU-wing which, after a series of splits, continues to cooperate with UDF without being member of the coalition. The coalition People's Union (DP and BANU) does not compete with UDF in the EPP; on the contrary, there seems to be a certain "distribution of tasks". While UDF, through its Democracy Foundation, keeps up priority contacts with Konrad Adenauer Foundation (of the German CDU), the People's Union maintain relations mainly with Hanns Seidel Foundation (of the German CSU).

struments for the maintenance of the international contacts of UDF and, lately in particular, for extending the range of foreign parties with which UDF is in contact.

#### **4.3 The Euroleft in quest of legitimacy.**

The Euroleft is a new party but has its own history. It arose on the basis of the Civic Association for the Republic (CAR), established in 1993, and as a result of the crisis in BSP, which also caused the leaving of several of its leaders in 1997. Upon its very emergence the new formation clearly stated its aspiration to legitimize itself as a Bulgarian social democracy of a European type.

As early as 1990 its leader Alexander Tomov headed one of the ideological movements in the Communist Party of the time - the Movement for Democratic Socialism, which embraced fundamental concepts of European social democracy. The separation from BSP and the creation of CAR in 1993, which also attracted liberals disappointed with UDF, called simultaneously for two opposite strategies:

- liberal distancing from the socialism of BSP (turn right);
- liberal distancing from the conservatism of UDF (turn left).

At first CAR was more of a centrist formation, professing liberal ideas and most notably, republicanism. But party structure dynamics in Bulgaria moved the organization to the left. There were several reasons for this. Above all, CAR arose in a period of electoral upswing for BSP and could not rely so much on disappointed socialist voters as on former liberal and leftist voters of UDF, disappointed at the rightward shift of the coalition. Thus in 1994 CAR entered a coalition with BSDP and the Green Party - Democratic Association for the Republic - defined by its own leaders as a social-liberal synthesis.

With the subsequent crisis of BSP the Association got the opportunity to attract disappointed supporters of the socialists. Thus the Euroleft, established on the basis of CAR, naturally took up the space to the left of the center and started claiming social-democratic legitimacy.

Already upon its creation, the Euroleft drew to its high ranks former BSP leaders who had previously been engaged in maintaining the party's international relations. This no doubt facilitated the faster recognition of the new party as a claimant to international social-democratic legitimization. Many observers now believe that the Euroleft currently stands the greatest chances of being affiliated with PES, which would in turn be an important advantage in terms of membership in the Socialist International.

On the other hand, the Euroleft is still politically weak and could hardly hope to win parliamentary elections independently in the near future. This makes it particularly active in seeking various forms of political cooperation and even coalitions with other social-democratic and socialist formations in Bulgaria. It is a fact that so far the Euroleft has been the only one of the left-wing parties in Bulgaria able to attract new organizations (though small) which are integrated within it, as well as new deputies from the dissolved parliamentary group of the Bulgarian Business Bloc (BBB). Yet its electoral presence remains limited, which calls for seeking coalition formulas.

In its quest of international social-democratic legitimacy the Euroleft holds an important trump card. Unlike BSP, it unequivocally adopted a Western identity, declaring itself in support of Bulgarian membership in both the EU, and NATO. "The Congress of the Euroleft, held on February 28 - March 1, 1998, defined the European choice of Bulgaria and its membership in the European Union, Council of Europe, WEU and NATO as a neces-

sary environment for political, economic, and military security, for the successful development of Bulgarian society and accelerated implementation of the reforms.”<sup>15</sup>

The Euroleft keeps up intensive contacts with European social-democratic parties, with left-wing parties from the Black Sea region, with Balkan political powers, and with the international social-democratic foundations. The intensity of these contacts competes with those of BSP and transcends the party's actual share in political life. What is more, the Euroleft is probably the only party which “views its internal political and international activity as a means furthering Bulgaria's overall integration in the European Union”.<sup>16</sup> Several foundations are associated with the Euroleft and they have also been maintaining international contacts, what is more, even since before the party was created. Such a foundation is the Center for Strategic Studies “21<sup>st</sup> Century”, which to a great extent established the international legitimacy of the Euroleft even before it was created. Other foundations also work with the Euroleft, such as “New Left”, sponsoring *Sotsialdemokratsia* magazine. Rather than playing an international role, this foundation is more concerned with maintaining a common forum of Bulgarian left-wing parties of social-democratic orientation (BSDP, the Euroleft, BSP, ULB). It would seem that the collaborative efforts of the social democrats are supported and encouraged by the Party of European Socialists, as well as by individual social-democratic foundations from EU.

#### **4.4 The contribution of other parties.**

Other, smaller parties also have their share in the party diplomacy of Bulgaria for EU integration. At this stage the party system in Bulgaria clearly remains largely bipolar - with two competing parties which leave little room for “centrist parties”. On the other hand, this strong bipolarity further contributed to the blurred identity of political parties and the harder identification on the part of Western political parties of partners and analogues in Bulgaria.

Active international contacts are maintained by BSDP. Following its withdrawal from UDF the party has been seeking its own identity in Bulgarian political space, trying various forms of coalition with political powers considered close in tactical terms: in UDF-center with Ekoglasnost in 1991; in the DAR coalition with CAR, the Greens, and ASU-independent in 1994; in United Democratic Forces with UDF and the People's Union in 1997. Lately, not without encouragement from PES and specific social-democratic partners, BSDP has been demonstrating ever greater readiness for cooperation mainly with left-wing parties professing social-democratic ideas. BSDP's foundation, “Yanko Sakazov”, besides cooperating with analogical foundations of the European social democracy, plays an active role in vindicating this left-wing identity of BSDP.

Most active in terms of their international presence are the liberals and the Greens. This is also related to the fact that both political tendencies have from their very emergence in Bulgarian political reality had international legitimacy and in the beginning used to be influential powers within UDF. The series of splits, their separation from UDF, the difficult financial conditions all pushed the green and liberal parties into the field of active politics. On the other hand, their presence on the political scene is to a considerable degree due to their international legitimacy as well.

The liberal parties and organizations in Bulgaria are still dispersed. Those are above all small parties such as RDP, Bulgarian Party Liberals, “New Choice”, as well as the newly created Liberal Alternative of Zhelju Zhelev. They all enjoy international legitimacy as members or observers in the Liberal International and possess influential international contacts. Apparently under a certain international pressure, but equally as a reaction to the

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<sup>15</sup> 12 Theses on Europe - *Sotsialdemokratsia* magazine, issue 6, June 1998, p. 24.

<sup>16</sup> Ibidem.

actual marginalization of liberals away from the center of political events, lately the creation has been considered of a Liberal Union which is to express the liberal line in Bulgarian political life. This initiative is supported by international liberal organizations. Besides the activation of liberal circles, this will open new prospects before MRF. Established as a party defending primarily the interests of the Turkish community in Bulgaria, the Movement faced the need to determine its position along the fundamental political (European) left / right axis. MRF initially self-identified itself as a right-centrist formation but in 1993 made a "left turn" and actually collaborated with BSP under Lyuben Berov's Government. With the declining importance of ethnic identity in political life (which is a fact, notwithstanding the events in some countries neighboring to Bulgaria), MRF has ever more intensively been seeking adequate political self-determination. One such attempt was the coalition National Salvation Union with liberal, green, and monarchist organizations. However, the Union does not have a clear-cut ideological and political profile. The probable affiliation of MRF with the planned Union is likely to represent a strategic choice for this party, traditionally associated with Bulgarian Turks. This will most probably greatly increase the weight of the liberals, both on the domestic political scene, and on an international level, where they will be able to legitimize themselves not only as classical liberals, but equally as a party of ethnic tolerance.

Zheliu Zhelev's party also works with the Zheliu Zhelev Foundation, which is internationally active and to a great extent enhances the international legitimacy of its patron, who is the only individual member of the Liberal International from Bulgaria.

The Green also possess international legitimacy. They have partners and analogues in almost all European countries, they are affiliated with Green party associations in Europe and the world. The numerous splits in the organizations of Bulgarian ecologists, which started as early as 1990, have been creating difficulties for their West-European partners seeking permanent analogues in Bulgaria. The problem of the green and environmental parties and organizations in Bulgaria is also related to their particularly ambiguous political and ideological positions. They can be liberals, as well as right-wing, libertarian and left-wing, as well as monarchists. In EU the bulk of the green parties may be referred to the libertarian left, who are neither socialists, nor communists or social democrats. In very rare cases the green and environmental organizations have a conservative genealogy. The role and place of the Green in the political palette in Bulgaria, as well as their contribution to Bulgaria's EU integration, have as yet not been thoroughly examined and assessed.

Highly active in its international contacts is the "Vita Terra" Foundation, close to the Green Party. In a sense, this is the principal intermediary between the Party and the outer world. Regardless of the difficulties in defining its political identity under the Bulgarian conditions, the activity of this foundation legitimizes the Bulgarian Green as European ecologists, whose program incorporates the fundamental ideas of its European analogues: sustainable development, quality of life, environment, etc.

The remaining political parties in Bulgaria have a relatively weak influence on the processes of EU integration. Though some of them have established good contacts with their analogues from EU, in most cases those are nationalist parties (such as BNRP and LDP) to which EU development is not a priority. The same applies to the assortment of communist and far-left parties, most of which continue to perceive EU as a hostile organization. Nevertheless, in terms of the internal political debate, these parties do enrich the existing positions, and put forth certain points which should not be overlooked if we seriously strive after EU accession, namely:

- what part of its sovereignty is Bulgaria willing to surrender to its supranational authorities;



- how will Bulgaria harmonize its own national identity with the European idea (this is where we should note the political role of an organization such as IMRO or the “Gergyovden” Movement);
- how will EU be changing and how likely it is to turn into a “club of the rich”, etc.

## 5 European standards and national identity

With such an accumulation of borrowings from abroad, and largely from Europe, the question naturally arises whether there is a “Bulgarian political model”. The very posing of the question carries the risk of confinement within the narrow frames of nationalist interpretations, based on the idea of the “indigenous”, the “autochthonous”, the “intrinsically Bulgarian” in political life. It should at once be noted that those political powers and leaders who demonstrate extreme sensitivity to the “national” are typically caught in the trap of some implicit and unacknowledged foreign political model. Paradoxical as it may sound, nationalism is generally anti-national. All the varieties of Bulgarian nationalism ultimately lead up to the idea of “one nation - one state”, which implies a treatment of “aliens” as second-rate people. A familiar model, which is by no means a Bulgarian invention, and which is based on the exclusion of those who are different (whether they are Jews, Protestants, Turks, or Gypsies).

There have lately been ever more frequent attempts to define once and for all the Bulgarian identity, the Bulgarian singularity. It is sought mainly in history (for instance within the Second Bulgarian Kingdom), but equally in culture (inheritors of the ancient Thracian civilization, homeland of the Slav alphabet), in religion (ancient Christian Orthodox people), in the economy (hospitality and tourism). Hence, the attempted synthesis of the national identity on the basis of several superimposed traditions: European antiquity - the Slav community - Orthodoxy. Generally themes underlying the current nationalist discourse in Bulgaria. It is not that these traditions are fictitious, but what is definitely ungrounded is the idea that their very combination is sufficient to define the identity of contemporary Bulgarians. In any case, ethnic tolerance, the ability to adjust and to coexist with different cultures is probably also part, if not the most essential part, of the Bulgarian “national character”. Yet, these are also essentially the “European characteristics” to which we ultimately aspire. And if we must seek “indigenous” Bulgarian political models, they are based much more on the latter, than around the triad “Thracian gold - Cyrillic alphabet - Orthodoxy”.

An examination of current political life in Bulgaria might also reveal an attempt at an original political model. In fact, when political observers speak of a “Bulgarian model” they usually refer to what distinguishes present-day Bulgaria from the remaining post-communist countries. Among the typically highlighted characteristics of the ‘Bulgarian model’ are: the peaceful and generally smooth transition; relative social stability; contained ethnic tensions; unquestionable success of the democratic movement, combined with preservation of the relative influence of the successor to the Communist Party.

At first sight the originality of the current Bulgarian political model lies in finding a certain political consensus, which made it possible to avoid cataclysmic clashes on the road of radical change. And this relative consensus would appear to be unconscious, the result of various interacting strategies and intentions. There is hardly reason to presume the adherence to some common, supra-party political model. In fact, elements of this model can be found in the other post-communist countries, as well. It is the very openness to foreign models which created the particular set of circumstances, the unique combination of political strategies which together outline the shape of the “Bulgarian political model”. And the role of the political parties in this respect has been unquestionable.

Another look back in history would reveal that even the attempts at original Bulgarian political models have been relatively original. They have more or less been based on a singular combination of diverse political principles, seeking to adapt them to the unique social and political reality. The wish to “take the very best” from the world in order to “catch up with, and surpass it” runs through our entire history. But this receptiveness has never remained absolute, has never stayed along a “single azimuth”. Inevitably, even when it seems that the choice of a particular model has been made “once and for all”, the political elite remains on the lookout for other models. It is in this readiness to switch models at the first opportunity that we find what may possibly be the “Bulgarian indigeneness”.

In other words, the adoption of a foreign political model has always been accompanied by the skeptical “yes, but...”. Because along with the openness to foreign projects, Bulgarian society has remained skeptical enough regarding foreign aid. Europe may well be an all-Bulgarian frame of reference for civilization and modernity, but Europe has at the same time often proven alien and hostile.

Today’s political model also appears to be an eclectic mixture of adopted principles and norms. Regardless of the obvious differences between the political solutions proposed, regardless of the advanced differentiation of political space, the wish to come up with an original combination of different principles is present in the activity of nearly all of the current political actors. One thing remains common - the proclaimed modernity, the “quest for modernity”. But this ever-present aspiration in Bulgarian political life seems to be both an admission of failed modernization, and decline to accept the standardizing principle of modern politics. It is the very eclecticism of political projects, the diversity of ideas and models, as an immanent characteristic of Europe and of EU, which makes up the content of the Bulgarian political model.

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What can we expect from the political parties with a view to Bulgaria’s speedier progression towards full EU membership? Can the parties increase their impact on the process, despite the fact that some of them are certain to try and gain political dividends from that?

- The legislation ought to facilitate the consolidation of political parties in order to make them less dependent on random sponsors and more sustainable in the longer term. In this connection, parties ought to be made more dependent on public financing in Bulgaria, rather than external aid, including along the channels of European political parties.
- Political parties have unexploited influence potential with respect to bringing Bulgaria closer to EU and more notably, could make fuller use of bilateral contacts. For a number of reasons, sometimes of a financial nature, parties are not always in a position to maintain full-fledged bilateral relations.
- Political parties could focus more on collaboration with their partners in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe or in the European Parliament, rather than just the European institutions. Owing to the blurred identity of parties in Bulgaria, so far most of them have been eager to take any opportunity to cooperate with European parties. The present situation encourages concentration on fewer partners, but with more intensive contacts.
- Political parties could take on international missions in support of state institutions, regardless of whether they are in opposition or in government. A certain level of cooperation between parties in the area of European policy is achievable without presuming that some will necessarily gain political dividends at the expense of the others. The practice for the parties represented in parliament to inform each other about forthcoming international missions could be incorporated in parliamentary procedures.