

**The Rise of Euroscepticism in a
New Member State of the European Union:
The Case of Bulgaria**

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Abstract

The object of this thesis is to analyze the dynamics of Euroscepticism in Bulgaria. Firstly, the structure and levels of support and opposition towards the European Union on the level of public opinion are examined. The mass public of Bulgaria appears to be rather positive towards the country's "European future," despite the postponed membership of the country. Following, the party-based Euroscepticism is examined. Essentially, the findings of the study point to a rather interesting results. On the one hand there seems to be high level of Euroscepticism among the political parties in Bulgaria. On the other hand, the way the European issue is used is in line with strategic, rather than ideological considerations. Importantly, however, the mismatch between public-level and elite-level Euroscepticism appears to be present, as in the case of most of the EU member states.

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Introduction

On 1st January 2007 Bulgaria, together with Romania, joined the European Union (EU) as one of the last two countries to enter as part of the eastern enlargement. While integrating in the European structures was of historic importance for the Balkan state, symbolizing the long hoped-for “return to Europe,” as in the case with the other countries from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), the path to membership was riddled with setbacks, criticism difficult reforms. Not only that Bulgaria’s, and Romania’s, accession was separated from that of the other CEE states which joined in May 2004. The Commission also undertook a much harsher role in monitoring the preparations Bulgaria was making to meet the requirements for membership and to fully implement the *acquis*. To that end, the European institution was issuing reports on the reform progress (or lack of it) every six months, ensuring wide media coverage not only in Bulgaria, but in the rest of Europe as well.

The Comprehensive Monitoring Report from 25 October 2005 is of particular importance in this respect. While in it the Commission did express a general commitment to Bulgaria’s accession to the EU, recognizing that it will help to “secure democracy, stability and economic development in Europe,” (European Commission 2005: 4) the overall tone of the report was rather negative and highly critical. Essentially, the Commission not only scolded the Bulgarian government for the lack of progress in vital policy areas, like the fight against corruption and organized crime or the crucial reform in the judicial system, but also threatened the country with delaying membership for 2008 if urgent action in the sensitive areas was not immediately taken.

If there is clear evidence that the state of preparations for adoption and implementation of the legal order in Bulgaria is such that there is a serious risk of Bulgaria being manifestly

unprepared to meet the requirements for membership in a number of important areas, then accession of Bulgaria may be postponed by one year.

(European Commission 2005: 4)

Interestingly, the areas that needed urgent progress were given “red cards,” while the ones demanding only general improvement were given “yellow cards.”¹ The report was highly embarrassing for the government and for the political elite in general, who had been involved in bringing the country in the European Union. At the same time, the Commission report received high media attention, which made sure that the general public in the country, and abroad, was aware of the areas where the country was lagging behind.

The tumult characterizing the two years preceding Bulgaria’s accession to the EU, well exemplified by the aforementioned monitoring report, is of particular importance for the way the European integration was perceived in the acceding country. On the one hand, the constant uncertainty of membership was undermining the credibility of the process, since people and politicians alike started asking themselves whether the efforts they were making would ever be recognized.² On the other hand, the elite consensus on the indisputable European trajectory of Bulgaria started to wear out, with anti-EU parties being elected into the national parliament for first time in the new history of the country. However, while the skepticism on the elite level was on the rise, the public support for the EU membership remained significantly high. Hence, an interesting paradox emerges: on the one hand, there was increasing level of party based skepticism towards the European integration, while on the other, there was a high level of public support for it, despite the overly critical and harsh Commission reports.

¹ The association of “red” and “yellow” cards is taken from the terminology of soccer, where a player receives a yellow card the first time he makes a serious fault, while he receives a red card either for a second yellow card or for a very grave misconduct. Essentially, the red card sends the player out of the game. In the context of European enlargement, the Commission has used this association only in the cases of Bulgaria and Romania.

² For a discussion of the role of EU membership as “external incentives” for pressing for domestic reforms, see Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier (2004).

In view of this paradox, a few questions arise. What explains the rise of Euroscepticism among the political parties in Bulgaria? Was it provoked by ideological considerations and opposition to the European project, or was it rather an expression of purely strategic aims for gaining electoral support? Also, why did the public remain highly supportive given the increased awareness of the problems and difficulties the country was experiencing due to efforts to meet the requirements for membership? What are the implications of the mismatch between elite-level and public level Euroscepticism?

Emerging from a difficult process of post-communist transition and struggling with the consolidation of democracy and economic stability, the rise of party-based Euroscepticism is an alarming signal for Bulgaria. An early dissatisfaction with the country's role in Europe can potentially halt the advancement of crucial reforms that are still needed for the better functioning of democracy and the rule of law. The EU membership has been one of the main stimuli for reforms in Bulgaria. Now that the goal has finally been achieved and done so at the high price of difficult reforms and decreased government credibility, the newly emerging populist and anti-establishment parties are using the Eurosceptic sentiments to gain momentum and challenge the established order. Therefore, examining the development of party-based Euroscepticism in Bulgaria and analyzing the structure of public orientations towards Europe, promises to shed more light on the role of Eurosceptic parties in Bulgaria and to illuminate the potential explanations for the mismatch between party-based and public-based Euroscepticism. The study will also show whether the developments taking place in Bulgaria are similar to those that have taken place in other post-communist new member states. If they are, then the trend found in the country would not be surprising and the reasons for the rise of Euroscepticism would be rooted

in historical and contextual factors common to post-communist countries. If they are not, then Bulgaria's case would be explained by particularities of its domestic political system.

Essentially, this thesis will examine the dynamics of Euroscepticism in Bulgaria. The main hypothesis is that the high level of Euroscepticism among the political parties in Bulgaria is due to the parties' strategic aims for gaining more votes, rather than ideological considerations, and as such is not rooted in opposition to the European project. At the same time, the trends existing in Bulgaria are expected to be similar to those experienced by the CEECs, and as such should be considered as a "normal events."

For the purpose of the thesis I will use the comparative method. Using the method of difference, where cases with similar general conditions and different outcomes are compared (Van Evera 1997: 57), the case of Bulgaria will be compared to the experience of the new member states from Central and Eastern Europe. The aim is to show whether similar starting conditions of post-communist transition, new democracies, and fluid party systems and different length of candidate status explain the difference in levels of public support for the European project. The thesis will also use the method of agreement, where cases with different starting conditions but similar results are compared (Van Evera 1997), to test for variables explaining similar levels of public opinion support for the EU. On the other hand, the method of difference will be used to explain the level of party-based Euroscepticism. Employing the Bulgarian case, the thesis will also test hypotheses for party-based Euroscepticism which were developed for classifying Eurosceptic parties in western and Scandinavian member states (Taggart 1998; Sitter 2001) and in Central and East European member states (Kopecky and Mudde 2002; Taggart and Szczerbiak 2002, 2004;). The relevant hypotheses are presented in the beginning of chapter III.

For the purpose of analyzing public orientations towards the European Union, the thesis will rely on quantitative methods of data analysis. In particular, information will be collected from polling data and public opinion polls conducted by a number of national polling agencies and by Eurobarometer. For the purpose of analyzing party-based Euroscepticism, qualitative methods of data analysis will be used. In particular, a combination of party manifestoes, speeches and interviews of party leaders and candidates for the EP elections together with press coverage of party campaigns will serve as sources of data. The reason of using data from more than one source is for the benefit of triangulation of the data.

In the first chapter, the main theories relevant for analyzing the role of Europe in domestic politics will be reviewed. Particular attention will be paid to the literature on Euroscepticism and the studies on the emergence or not of a European cleavage in national political systems. The second chapter will then be devoted on the attitudes and orientations towards European integration and the EU of the general public in Bulgaria. This section will point to the particularities of the public's evaluations of the European integration process, measuring the level of Euroscepticism of the citizens. The third chapter will discuss the orientations of political parties towards the EU. Essentially, it will attempt to classify the political parties in Bulgaria in terms of support or opposition to Europe, aiming also to show the underlying logics behind parties' Eurosceptic positions. The last part of the thesis will conclude with a summary of the main findings of the study and will point to potential areas for further research.

Chapter II – Theoretical Framework

The phenomenon of Euroscepticism is inextricably linked to the democratic principles of representation, legitimacy and accountability. As such, it can be located in the broader literature on the democratic quality of the European Union. Major works in the area focus on the extent to which the Union is a democratically legitimate organization, looking at policy in-puts (see for example Follesdal and Hix 2006; Moravcsik 2002; Schmitt and Thomassen 1999; Schmitter 2000) and policy out-puts (see for example Majone 1994, 1998). Being manifested predominantly on times of national and European elections as well as referendums, Euroscepticism fits perfectly in the latter field. In essence, opposition to a particular policy or project at any level of political organization in Europe is truly necessary from a normative democratic theory's perspective since it enriches the deliberative quality of the political discourse. None the less, the rise of Eurosceptic tendencies in the EU's old and new member states has particular implications for the quality of legitimacy and representation in the Union. The lack of fit between the party based and public based levels of skepticism, on the one hand, and the mismatch between the underlying ideas and reasons for the respective skepticisms unquestionably undermine the democratic quality of representation in the European polity. Given the value-laden nature of the phenomenon of Euroscepticism, therefore, the thesis will employ a normative frame of democratic representation and legitimacy in the European Union so as to provide a qualitative evaluation of it.

In this respect, Schmitt and Thomassen's volume on the presence or lack of agreement between the European publics and their respective national elites and the general European elite (1999) is a valuable work, which will be used as a reference point for the normative implications

of the Euroscepticism in Bulgaria. The authors define political representation as “the concept of representative democracy, including both the institutions of responsible government and the process of political representation, i.e. the political process by which the making of government policy is related to the wants, needs, and demands of the public.” (Schmitt and Thomassen 1999: 4) In other words, a lack of fit between public and elite level of Euroscepticism in Bulgaria will point to a lack of or insufficient democratic representation. Furthermore, the authors define legitimacy as “the belief that the existing political order is right.” (Schmitt and Thomassen 1999: 4) Hence, if people in Bulgaria think that their representatives at the European level do not meet the needs of the citizens, then the system will appear illegitimate in their eyes. In this sense, Euroscepticism will be used a measurement of democratic representation and legitimacy in a new EU member state, with possible implications for the rest of the states as well.

At the same time, Euroscepticism is a phenomenon manifested predominantly in political and social ways in the domestic arenas. Since in practice it embodies an expression of a qualified position on or attitude towards the European Union and is triggered by the impact of European integration process on the national level politics and policies, it is inescapably related to the more general theory of Europeanization. On the one hand, it can be regarded as a mechanism or an instrument of Europeanization of domestic parties and party systems, while, on the other, it can be a result of the process of Europeanization itself. Therefore, aiming to present an encompassing framework for the study of Euroscepticism and the conditions for its emergence, this chapter will also be devoted to the general theory of Europeanization and to the more specific literature on the emergence of a European dimension or cleavage and the role of the European issue in structuring party competition. The latter part will inform the thesis on potential explanations of party-based Euroscepticism and its relevance for the party system. At the same

time, Euroscepticism itself is by no means a unitary concept. There have been several attempts to define and classify it (Kopecky and Mudde 2002; Sitter 2001; Taggart 1998; Taggart and Szczerbiak 2001, 2002, 2004). Hence, the chapter will also present the main attempts for classifications of the phenomenon with reference to the gap and limitations in the literature.

2.1 Europeanization

The literature on Europeanization is part of the broader theoretical work on the European Union's impact on the *politics*, *policies* and *polities* of the member states and of the countries waiting in line for accession. While the studies on European integration are in themselves ontological, focused predominantly on how the EU came about and what were the main driving logics and actors behind the project, the studies on Europeanization take a post-ontological perspective, focusing on explaining how, if it did, the process of European integration has a bearing upon the institutions and the processes taking place at the domestic level. In particular, Risse, Green Cowles and Caporoso define Europeanization as “the emergence and the development at the European level of distinct structures of governance,” which in turn have an impact on the domestic structures of the member states (2001: 3). In line of the latter account, in order for Europeanization to take place, there should be a degree of misfit between the European and domestic institutions or processes as well as high adaptation pressure for change (Risse, Green Cowles and Caporoso 2001). Also, the existence or lack of mediating factors that hinder or facilitate the process of Europeanization is also crucial. The authors identify five such factors: multiple veto points; mediating formal institutions; types of political and organizational cultures; differential empowerment of actors; and a learning process (Risse, Green Cowles and Caporoso 2001). Essentially, the latter approach considers Europeanization as an institutionalization of a

new political system at a European or another supranational level and its interaction with domestic institutions (Mair 2004). However, while the approach illuminates on how different policy fields or political styles and cultures have been Europeanized, it is not helpful to analyze the impact of Europe on the politics of the member states. Importantly, “Europeanization needs to be linked to polity, policy and *politics* if we can really talk about it as a process of profound change.” (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2002: 24)

Another important contribution to the theorization of Europeanization has been the work of Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier. According to them, Europeanization is a “process in which states adopt EU rules” (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2005: 7), where the rules can be both formal and informal, while ‘rule adoption’ brings about domestic change or transformation. Moreover, Europeanization can be driven either by the EU or by the domestic actors and it can have different logics, i.e. “logic of consequences” or “logic of appropriateness.” (as first defined by March and Olsen 1989) The process, therefore, can take place either according to an “external incentives model,” “social learning,” and “lesson-drawing.” (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2005) While the latter approach accounts more accurately for the possible interaction between the European and the domestic level, it also misses out the impact of Europeanization on the domestic politics and party systems.

A more differentiated definition of the process of Europeanization is provided by Radaelli (2000) who conceptualizes it as “[p]rocesses of (a) construction, (b) diffusion, and (c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, ‘ways of doing things’ and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the making of EU decisions and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures, and public policies.” (Radaelli 2000: 4) The advantage of the latter definition

is the emphasis on change, mostly in the form of adaptation, learning and policy change, without necessarily identifying the direction or the shape of that change. Hence, according to Radaelli's definition Europeanization does not automatically lead to convergence, harmonization or integration (Radaelli 2000). Moreover, this definition presupposes variable responses to the penetration of EU inputs even within one country (Ladrech 2002), providing for an incremental rather than rapid process. At the same time, Radaelli's concept is also useful since it takes into account the role of beliefs and norms, which can "travel" from the European to the domestic level. Hence, Euroscepticism can in this sense be associated with the transposition of European issues in the national political spheres of the member states. For the purpose of defining the phenomenon of Euroscepticism in terms of the broader theoretical background of Europeanization, therefore, the thesis will rely on the latter conceptualization of Europeanization. However, for the purpose of identifying the contextual experiences of central and East European states during their preparations for accession, the thesis will rely mostly on the first two definitions interchangeably. Essentially, by examining the Euroscepticism in Bulgaria, the thesis will fill the gap of research on the Europeanization of party politics as well as on the influence the EU has had in Bulgaria, which has largely been ignored or at least missed out of the literature on Europeanization.

2.2 Dimensions and cleavages of political contestation in the EU

One way of analyzing Euroscepticism through the Europeanization framework is to look at nature of political contestation in EU's member states. In this respect, the literature on political cleavages (in the context of European integration), dealing with the emergence or not of a European dimension of political contestation, is of particular importance. In particular, the literature looks at the extent to which new political cleavages structuring party competition have

emerged as a result of the advance of European integration (Hix 1999; Hix and Goetz 2001; Hooghe, Marks and Wilson 2002; Marks and Wilson 1999; Steenbergen and Marks 2004). In essence, the latter group examines the grounds for party contestation on national levels and whether the EU has been contested on the basis of the classical Left/Right continuum or has generated a new dimension for contestation of its own.

Steenbergen and Marks distinguish between four different models of contestation on European issue. In the *international relations model*, competition on the European integration takes place independently from the Left/Right dimension, and as such is structured on the anti-integration vs. pro-integration continuum (Steenbergen and Marks 2004). The second one, the *Hix-Lord model*, in contrast, considers not only that the Left/Right dimension exists and structures contestation, but also that there is an orthogonal dimension of “more integration” vs. “less integration” that is equally important (Steenbergen and Marks 2004, see also Hix 1999). According to Hix and Lord, the two dimensions cannot be collapsed into one because they mobilize cross-cutting political coalitions: while the Left/Right cleavage refers to the allocation of resources and values among functional groups, the national sovereignty one involves the distribution of resources and values among territorial groups (Hix and Lord 1999 as quoted in Steenbergen and Marks 2004, see also Hix 1999).

The third model is another one-dimensional structure; however one where the cleavage that solely structures competition on the European integration is the Left/Right continuum. In the *regulation model*, European contestation is said to be an expression of the conflict between more or less regulation, which in effect is subsumed in the Left/Right dimension (Steenbergen and Marks 2004). In essence, the primacy of the Left/Right cleavage over all other derives from the fact that national political parties use the already established structures of competition on

national level to compete on European issues and as such employ the ideological distinction of the political Left and Right to frame the European integration issues. Finally, the forth model of political contestation on European issues is the *Hooghe-Marks model of “regulated capitalism” vs. “neoliberalism,”* where the Left/Right and integration/national sovereignty dimensions are neither fused together nor orthogonal to each other (Steenbergen and Marks 2004). According to the authors of the model, the centre-left would be more supportive of the integration in the view that it is moving in the direction of more regulated capitalism, as compared to market-making, while the center-right will be opposed to integration if they see that it is not fulfilling the neo-liberal project, which essentially rejects supranational authority and argues for regulatory competition among governments to stimulate market-making (Hooghe and Marks and quoted in Steenbergen and Marks 2004).

In addition, Hooghe, Marks and Wilson provide another alternative to the nature of party contestation on the issue of European integration, which in essence adds up to the fourth model presented above. According to them the party position on issue related to the European integration are well determined by their Left/Right position, but even more strongly by their position on the “new politics” dimension ranging from Green/alternative/liberal (GAL) to Tradition/authoritarian/nationalist (TAN) (Hooghe, Marks and Wilson 2002). With respect to the strength of the classical Left/Right dimension, the authors contend that political parties, both mainstream and extremist, strategically assimilate the European issue into the Left/Right dimension in order not to rock the boat of their successful existence in the present domestic structures, while other parties employ ideological logic and reject the EU project because their ideological position is in principle contrast with the European ideas and values (Hooghe, Marks and Wilson 2002). On the other hand, the GAL/TAN dimension relates even more closely to the

European integration project, since many of the policies and issues that cannot be placed on the Left/Right continuum, like asylum policy and environmental policy, fit perfectly on the new dimension. On this continuum, however, the issue of national sovereignty plays most important role in determining the contestation of parties on the European integration issues due to the strength of the TAN pole, which encompasses extreme-right parties opposed to European integration in general (Hooghe, Marks and Wilson 2002). Given that any loss of national sovereignty in any policy area is of high salience to any national government, the parties that capitalize on this issue have stable ground for contestation, which in turn explains the strength of the TAN pole.

Importantly, the literature on party contestation and the Europe's role in it is of particular importance for the thesis, since it will inform the research on potential manners in which Euroscepticism can manifest itself on the systemic level. The literature, however, suffers from particular limitations. On the one hand, the focus of research is solely on West European member states and as such does not provide an encompassing theoretical analysis of the enlarged EU. One exception here is Marks *et al*'s study, which examines party competition and the European question by comparing old and new member states (2006). In particular, they find that parties in post-communist countries compete on a ninety-degree angle of difference to the parties in advanced western countries, which inevitably confirms the claim that the understanding of left and right in the two groups of countries is qualitatively different. At the same time, however, the authors also find that the positions taken on the European issue share a single underlying logic (Marks et al 2006). Writing on Bulgaria and the role of Euroscepticism in structuring party competition in one of the newest member states, therefore, the thesis will fill in the gap of

research on the role of the European dimension in the new member states from Central and Eastern Europe.

2.3 Euroscepticism

The phenomenon of Euroscepticism itself has been under more close investigation and theorization only in the post-Maastricht era. As such the theory inescapably has a west European focus, both conceptual and empirical. Only recently have there been some attempts to classify parties from Central and Eastern Europe in terms of their pro- or anti-EU stances. In essence, the literature on Euroscepticism looks at the party based opposition and support for the European Union and highlights the effects of European issues on party positioning in their respective party systems (Kopecky and Mudde 2002; Sitter 2001; Taggart 1998; Taggart and Szczerbiak 2001, 2002, 2004). In particular, according to Taggart, Euroscepticism, understood as “the idea of contingent or qualified opposition to the process of European integration” (1998: 366) is largely observed in the parties that are situated on the periphery of their party systems. The latter employ ‘opposition to Europe’ mostly strategically, aiming to differentiate themselves from the established parties, which, on the other hand, would express Euroscepticism only spuriously and solely through factions.

A similar approach to classifying political parties’ Euroscepticism as an expression of their position in the party system was also developed by Sitter (2001). In particular, Euroscepticism in Sitter’s view is inextricably linked to dissent and to “the opposition to the government policy on European integration” and as such is mostly used strategically tactically and only rarely ideologically (Sitter 2001: 24). Testing the hypothesis on the Scandinavian countries, the author finds that, indeed, party-based Euroscepticism is politics of opposition because it is used strategically by opposition parties to differentiate themselves from the

governing coalition and due to the parties' "pursuit of survival, votes, policy and office." (Sitter 2001: 36) As such, Euroscepticism appears as a hindrance to the pursuit of office.

Taggart and Szczerbiak provide a more differentiated classification of Euroscepticism. According to them, Euroscepticism can be "hard" and "soft." The former captures a party's "principled opposition to the EU and European integration" and a party's belief that "their countries should withdraw from membership," while the latter represents parties that hold "concerns on one (or a number of) policy areas [which] lead to the expression of qualified opposition to the EU" or parties which see "that 'national interest' is currently at odds with the EU's trajectory." (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2002: 7) Essentially, in order to classify particular party as hard or soft Eurosceptic, it has to employ rhetoric of either outright opposition to the European integration or qualified skepticism of the EU's current development. An interesting point the authors make in an updated version of their classification is the fact that "soft" Euroscepticism can be divided into policy-based and national-interest-based (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2004). While the former captures the opposition to policies and steps taken towards deepening the integration process or extending the competencies of the Union and is mainly a time and country-specific occurrence, the latter refers to parties using the discourse of "defending the national interest" when discussing European matters or running for European Parliament elections (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2004). The national-interest rhetoric, in this case, is mostly used strategically by political parties aiming to appeal to a broader electoral public and gain more votes on elections time.

Another categorization of Euroscepticism is developed by Kopecky and Mudde, who propose a four-fold matrix for classifying political parties with relation to their position on the European integration issue (Figure 1). In particular, they first distinguish between *diffuse* and

specific support for European integration, where the former means “support for the general ideas of European integration that underlie the EU,” while the latter refers to “support for the general practice of European integration...the EU as it is and as it is developing.” (Kopecky and Mudde 2002: 300) Following from this distinction, parties can be, on the one hand, Europhiles or Europhobes, depending on their position on the ideas of the European project, and EU-optimists or EU-pessimists, depending on whether they see the current EU as going in the right direction or not. Interrelating these two dimensions, the four ideal types of party positioning on the European issue are Euroenthusiasts, Europragmatists, Eurosceptics and Eurorejects (Kopecky and Mudde 2002). Compared to the previous two-fold classification of Taggart and Szczerbiak, the latter one allows for more differentiated categorization of parties, the most interesting type of which is the Europragmatists, who do not support or oppose the underlying ideas of European integration but support the EU out of strategic considerations only (Kopecky and Mudde 2002).

While the literature on Euroscepticism provides a diverse set of classifications and analysis of how political parties can be located in terms of their position on the European integration question, it also suffers from important limitations. On the one hand, very few studies have been done on the new member states from Central and Eastern Europe. Taggart and Szczerbiak (2002, 2004) and Kopecky and Mudde (2002) do test their hypothesis on parties from new member states, however their initial typologies were developed to classify parties from old member states and as such bear significant bias towards political systems of advanced western countries. On the other hand, the studies either do not cover the case of Bulgaria, or if they do, there were no Eurosceptic parties at that time in the countries. The political situation in the countries with regard its European trajectory has changed significantly since then, with important considerations for the party level Euroscepticism. Therefore, the thesis will fill substantial gaps

in the literature on Euroscepticism by testing the existing hypothesis with the case of Bulgaria. At the same time, the findings will have more general implications for the quality of political representation and legitimacy in the European political system, bringing in important normative considerations.

Chapter III – Public Opinion on the European integration

While the previous chapter reviewed the existing literature relevant for the study of Euroscepticism and pointed to some gaps in it, this chapter will be devoted to analyzing the development of Euroscepticism in Bulgaria among the mass population. The importance of the citizens and their participation in the European project has only recently been recognized in the literature on European integration studies. Initially, the integration project was said to be largely dependent upon a “permissive consensus” (Lindberg and Scheingold 1970) and unquestioned support by their publics. In particular, national political leaders and policy-makers were relatively unconstrained in their ability to advance the integration project without the need for outright public support or despite public opposition (Lindberg and Scheingold 1970: 41-42). One reason for this was the post-war context, when the societies were in desperate need for peace, stability and reconstruction in their attempt to overcome the destructions of the two world wars. Hence, the elites were (self) entrusted with the role of leading their societies towards a better and more prosperous future for Europe and for the wider world. At the same time, the European project was envisaged to serve exactly that same purpose: “to establish peace among the European countries.” Even Jean Monnet, the founding father of the initiative for integration among key states in Europe with the aim to obviate potential military conflict between them in the future, envisaged the process to be elite-driven. Similarly, the major theories of integration at that time, neo-functionalism (Haas 1958; Haas and Schmitter 1964; Schmitter 1971) and intergovernmentalism (Hoffman 1966), put the elites at the heart of the process (Sinnott 1995). Hence, the European integration project was introduced as an elite project.

However, with the widening and deepening of the integration process, whereby new countries became member states and new policy areas competences were increasingly transferred at the European level, the “permissive consensus” proved to be insufficient for the integration project. After two-decade of *Eurosclerosis* in the 1960s and 1970s and with the emergence of strong political leaders like Margaret Thatcher in UK, Francois Mitterrand in France, and Helmut Kohl in Germany who invigorated the political debate desiring to lead their country in a new direction, the public also became more engaged in deciding on European matters. Since the 1980s, European referenda have increasingly been used to provide the citizens of EU member states with opportunities to voice their preference on major treaties, which, in turn, determine to a great extent the future direction of the integration. Twice the Irish said “no” in referenda on treaties of the EU. The Danes also expressed a negative position in 1992 on the Maastricht treaty, while the French were very close to negating it. At the same time, the introduction in 1979 of direct elections to the European Parliament was another step forward in improving citizens’ participation in European matters. The latter was essentially aimed at increasing the political legitimacy of the EC by providing a channel for direct input in the decision-making processes in Europe. As such, the introduction of direct elections was an attempt to reduce the “democratic deficit” found to exist in the European Community at that time.

Reflecting on these developments, more and more literature has been devoted to examining and analyzing the role of public opinion in the integration project. Importantly from a normative democratic theory perspective, it is the people who provide the ultimate source of legitimacy of any governing institution, regime or political authority (Dahl 1998). Therefore, examining the development of opposition towards the European integration among the citizens is

important for evaluating the quality of democracy in the European political system, especially with respect to its legitimacy and representation.

3.1 Conceptual tools

There have been a number of studies analyzing trends in public opinion in the EU. While some have analyzed it with respect of the broader framework of political representation and legitimacy (see Schmitt and Thomassen 1999), others have looked at it in terms of dimensions and sources of mass attitudes towards broader systems or ‘regimes’ of internationalized governance (see Niedermayer and Sinnott 1995). In addition, some studies have specifically focused on analyzing the dynamics of public opinion through the Eurobarometer results, focusing on links to particular institutions, or policy areas, or in particular member and non-member states (Reif and Ingelhart 1991). Essentially, what these studies show is that in Europe there are different national public opinions rather than one single public opinion. The findings also show that national contexts and historical experiences determine to a great extent the peculiarities of the trends in different states or groups of states, while the processes of mass socialization, learning and experiencing membership can potentially lead to increased support for the European project.

The literature identifies several ways in which public attitudes towards European integration can be analyzed. On the one hand, mass orientations can be studied in terms of the object towards which they are directed, while on the other hand, they can be examined in terms of the mode of orientation itself (Almond and Verba 1963, 1980; Easton 1965, 1975 in Niedermayer and Westle 1995; see also Norris 1999). In the context of international and European governance, therefore, the object of orientation can be “the political collectivity, the political order, the political authority, and policies.” (Niedermayer and Westle 1995: 41) Concomitantly, the modes of orientation can be classified as *diffuse* and *specific* (Easton 1965,

1975); as utilitarian or affective (Lindberg and Scheingold 1970); as cognition, affect or evaluation (Almond and Verba 1963, 1980); or as psychological involvement, evaluation, and behavioral intentions (Niedermayer and Westle 1995).

The most often used and most relevant distinction from the aforementioned ones is Easton's *diffuse* and *specific* modes. In particular, *diffuse* support captures a more general orientation, "an evaluation of what an object is or represents—to the general meaning it has to a person—not of what it does." (Easton 1975 in Niedermayer and Westle 1995: 36) The latter concept captures mainly feelings of identity, loyalty and ideological and value-oriented beliefs about the institutional system. *Specific* support, on the other hand, is an orientation directed towards the output of the system and is related to the "satisfactions that members of a system feel they obtained from the perceived outputs and performance of the political authorities." (Easton 1975 in Niedermayer and Westle 1995: 36) The latter type of support can in reality capture instrumental and utilitarian evaluations of policies and their impacts as well as evaluations of individual competences. Essentially, the hierarchical order of specific and diffuse support in Easton's model ensures some distribution of orientations towards the political authorities and as such is particularly useful for analyzing democratic systems. This is possible because "diffuse support serves as a barrier against the overflow to the higher levels of the political system of short term dissatisfaction with outputs from the system." (Niedermayer and Westle 1995: 49-50) Therefore, for the purpose of analyzing mass attitudes towards the European Union in Bulgaria, the thesis will employ the latter classifications to give a deeper and more diversified understanding of public opinion trends.

Mass orientations towards the European Union can also be classified in terms of four independent variables: European unification, European membership, European dissolution, and

European benefits,³ where the first three variables measure diffuse support, while the latter captures specific support (Niedermayer 1995; Schmitt and Thomassen 1999). Essentially, the indicator for European membership and benefits from joining are expected to be most pronounced in the new EU member states, due to the fact that membership was a contested issue not long ago, while the benefits of joining the Union have been on the table of discussions and media attention ever since the results of the negotiations were made public. In contrast, the trend is potentially different in old member states, where people are also strongly attached to the ideas of European unification due to the simple variable *passage of time*. As Bosch and Newton argue, “familiarity breeds content” among the national publics, who by experiencing the European integration over a long period of time and getting accustomed to it maintain higher support (1995: 102). At the same time, the mass orientations in old member states are an expression of diffuse support, rather than instrumental or specific one, which essentially ensures deeper attachment to the European project. However, while the hypothesis that economic interests prevail over political ones is not confirmed for old member states (Bosch and Newton 1995), it is more likely to be confirmed in the new member states, including Bulgaria. One potential reason for this would be the fact that the national public in Bulgaria sees the integration of the country as equal to the successful transition of the economy from the state-ruled to free market one and the country’s (re) integration into the European and world markets. The next sections of the chapter, therefore, will test the latter hypothesis for Bulgaria and will demonstrate the underlying

³ The *European unification* indicator reflects the answers to the question “In general, are you for or against efforts being made to unify Western Europe?” The *European membership* indicator reflects the answers to the question “Generally speaking, do you think that (your country’s) membership in the European Union is a good, a bad thing, or neither good nor bad?” The *European dissolution* indicator reflects the answers to the question “If you were told tomorrow that the European Union had been scrapped, would you be very sorry about it, indifferent or relieved?” The *European benefits* indicator captures the answer to the question “Taking everything into consideration, would you say that (your country) has on balance benefited or not from being a member of the European Union?” (Niedermayer 1995: 53-54)

logic of mass support or opposition to the European integration in one of the two newest EU member states.

3.2 Public Attitudes towards the EU in Bulgaria – General Orientations

By and large, the Bulgarian citizens have been largely supportive of their country's membership in the European Union ever since the transition from communism started in 1990. In 1991 46% of the population had a positive view of the EU (Central and Eastern Eurobarometer No 7 quoted in Grabbe and Hughes 1999). Compared to the other Central and East Europeans at that time, Bulgarians were one of the most supportive publics, third only to Romanians, 55% of which had positive views of the EU, and Poles, 49% of which viewed the Union in positive way (Grabbe and Hughes 1999). Comparing these results with the results from the latest Eurobarometer, the support of Bulgarian citizens towards the EU has in some respect almost doubled for the last 17 years. In 2006 the percentage of people having a positive view of the European Union is 63%, while the ones with negative view were 10% (Eurobarometer 66 fall 2006). Hence, there has been an obvious increase in the number of people that have a positive opinion about the EU in general of about 17 percentage points, unlike other CEE which experienced increasing opposition and skepticism. With its 63% of support, Bulgaria is the third country in the EU 27 with highest level of people that view the union in a positive way; the only two countries that have higher levels of support are Ireland with 73% and Romania with 65% (Figure A in the Appendix) (Eurobarometer 66 fall 2006). Hence, looking at the overall numbers, it is obvious that by and large the majority of people in Bulgaria had a positive opinion about the Union on the eve of the country's accession, despite the two years of delay from the rest of the Central and East European states that joined in 2004. Hence one conclusion can be that the two-year difference

did not affect people's perception of the Union, at the face of the negative repercussions it was expected to have.

At the same time, Bulgaria's membership in the European Union was embraced by 85% of the population, whereas only 4% were against. Moreover, 55% of the people thought that the country's membership in the EU is "something good." The percentage of people on the opinion that membership is "something bad" was just 9%, while, interestingly, 27% thought that it is "neither good, nor bad" and the rest 9% do not have an opinion (Eurobarometer 66 fall 2006). Compared to the rest of the EU member states, the figures for Bulgaria are rather optimistic. Bulgarians have one percentage point lower support than the average citizens of the new member states, while they have two percentage points higher support than the average citizens in the EU 25 (Eurobarometer 66 fall 2006). At the same time, the number of people who see that membership of the country is a "bad thing" appears as among the lowest in the EU 25, equal to those is Spain and Luxemburg (Eurobarometer 66 fall 2006). Hence, the Bulgarians turn out to be among the nations with lowest skepticism towards their country's membership in the EU and with relatively high level of optimism.

While the contextual pre-accession euphoria and the excitement that the country is finally joining the EU can be a potent explanation of the "optimistic" results, looking at a longer time-span shows that these levels have moved within a small margin for quite a long period of time. From 2004 to 2006, the percentage of people seeing Bulgaria's membership as a good thing has been between 50% (in fall 2005), being the lowest, and 59% (in fall 2004), being the highest (Eurobarometer 2006 fall 2006). Hence, one can make the tentative conclusion that despite the problems the country was experiencing at that time regarding the pressure by the European Commission for further reforms regarding corruption and organized crime and for implementing

the *acquis* in particularly sensitive areas and for meeting the requirements for membership, mostly in the area of justice and home affairs, the attitude of the citizens towards the EU is surprisingly positive. On the other hand, it is similar to the levels in the EU 25. While the latter conclusion can be due to a simple spurious correlation, it might potentially have deeper explanations. Hence, a closer look at the type of attitudes people have towards specific issues and policy areas of the EU would shed more light on the orientations of the mass public in Bulgaria.

One variable that taps into more differentiated evaluation of a country's membership in the EU is the view of the citizens of whether the country benefits or loses from being part of the Union. The latter variable captures not only a current evaluation of the EU, but hints also for attitudes and expectations from the future and for the direction into which it is developing. In other words, the orientation inescapably captures a prospective, forward looking evaluation of the Union and the country's role in it. In Bulgaria, a majority of the people (58%) think that the country will benefit from its accession, while 16% think it will lose (Eurobarometer 2006 fall). Hence, on the eve of accession, two thirds of the Bulgarians are optimistically oriented towards the benefit of being part of the Union, rather than being outside. On the one hand the results point to a process of mobilization in favor of the Union (Niedelmayer 1995) since the increase in support has come at the face of decrease of opposition (Eurobarometer 66 fall 2006). On the other hand, there are still 27% of the people who cannot make a qualitative judgment whether their country will benefit or lose from joining the EU. Hence, around one third of the population does not have a clear understanding of how accession will influence the situation in the country. On the same variable, the percentage of people in the new member states seeing their countries benefiting from membership is slightly higher (67%), while in the EU 25 these levels are 54%

(Eurobarometer 2006 fall). Hence, Bulgarians stand somewhere in between the relative optimism of the Central and East Europeans and of the more moderate view of the West Europeans.

Overall, the public's attitudes towards the European Union, expressed through the positive or negative image of the EU, support or opposition of membership, and expectations that membership will be a good or a bad thing or whether it will bring benefits or not, are all examples of *diffuse* support or opposition (Easton 1965 in Niedelmayer 1995). Given that on all variables there is a clear majority of people in support of the integration or at least positively oriented towards it, while at the same time the negative orientations are significantly low, therefore, it is apparent that there is high level of diffuse support among the Bulgarian citizens towards the EU and their country's membership in it. At the same time, Bulgarians rank close to the average Europeans, who have longer experiences of integration and are said to have higher levels of acceptance and support of the European project. Essentially, while the party-level Euroscepticism is relatively high, the diffuse attitudes of the general public in Bulgaria towards Europe tend to be very positive.

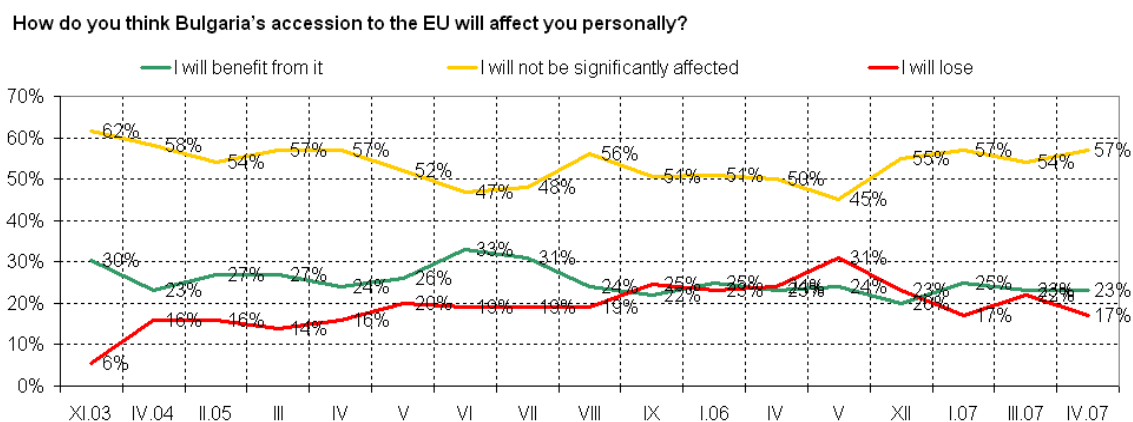
3.3 Public Attitudes towards the EU in Bulgaria – Specific Orientations

While the *diffuse* orientations discussed above show that there is high support among the Bulgarians for the European integration overall, the *specific* orientations will point to the level of support or opposition towards particular European policies, issues and institutions. The latter are expected to be important variables, given that the membership of Bulgaria, as was the case with the rest of the Central and East European Countries, was presented in the last stages of pre-accession period as economic integration rather than political (Henderson forthcoming). Hence, I expect that there will be more differentiated *specific* attitudes towards the EU.

3.3.1 National Level

The results of the latest Standard Eurobarometer show that there is slightly higher skepticism towards the economic benefits of the Bulgaria's membership in the EU than towards the Union in general. While 69% of people interviewed are of the opinion that accession will have a positive impact on the economy in Bulgaria, 17% are of the opposing view. At the same time 14% do not know what the impact on the economy will be. Compared to the EU 25, where 56% of the people have positive expectations of the economic impact, the Bulgarians appear rather optimistic. However, compared to the *diffuse* orientations, the *specific* skepticism is higher, with sometime doubling or even quadrupling the levels of negative views. The only case in which the negative attitudes almost coincide is in terms of the extent to which the country will benefit or lose from membership, where 16% express skepticism. Hence, a potential explanation for this coincidence can be the fact that people see Bulgaria benefiting or losing from accession mainly through the perspective of the economy. Hence, *specific* orientations are potentially stronger determinants of attitudes than *diffuse*, and would expect this to be the case even more so on the individual level.

Figure 1: Bulgaria's accession in the EU and individual situation



Source: Alpha Research 2007, http://www.aresearch.org/userfiles/image/Asseccion_En.GIF

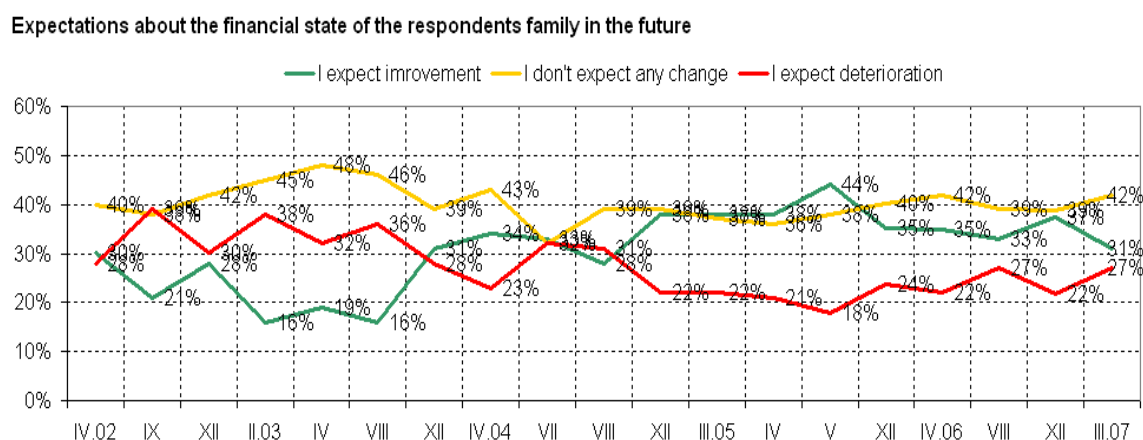
3.3.2 Individual level

The results of a Bulgarian polling agency measuring public attitudes towards the EU in the country show a peculiar trend of people's perception of their individual situation. In particular, the research demonstrates that in April 2007, only three months after accession, only 17% of the respondents were of the opinion that they personally will benefit from the country's accession in the EU (Alpha Research 2007a). At the same time 23% were expecting to lose from it, while the rest, 57%, did not see the membership as having any effect on their personal situation (Figure 1). An interesting finding from the polling points that the pessimistic view prevailed over the optimistic one only after Bulgaria joined the EU. In the year right before accession the two views were more or less equal, while in the preceding years there was an obvious dominance of the optimistic over the pessimistic view. At the same time, the number of people thinking that membership will not affect them in any way remained the highest and within the margins of 17%. Hence, this finding by itself can disprove the hypothesis that familiarity breeds content (Bosch and Newton 1995), at least in the case of acceding or new member states, since the closer Bulgaria got towards joining the EU, the more familiar the public became with the accession conditions and the results of the negotiations, and, hence, the less supportive it grew. On the other hand, the relatively high number of people thinking that membership will not affect them personally, points to either lack of understanding or lack of knowledge of Bulgaria's integration in the EU.

When measuring individual future expectations of their family's financial status, which is inevitably linked to Bulgaria enjoying full member of the European Union and as such is connected to expectations from this membership, the agency finds that three months after accession 27% of the interviewees were expecting that their family's financial status will

deteriorate, 31% expected it to improve, while the rest, 42% thought that it will not change (Figure 2) (Alpha Research 2007b).

Figure 2: Future expectations about the financial situation of the respondents' family



Source: Alpha Research 2007,

http://www.aresearch.org/userfiles/image/Domakinstvo_promqna_En.GIF

Hence, in terms of the expectations of economic impact of EU membership, a major part of citizens in Bulgarian do not see the Union as having a particular economic impact on their well being. While the latter figure points to slightly more optimistic expectations in terms of the economic situation of the individuals, the majority of people still do not have a clear understanding of how membership will affect them. As such, they are prone to following the lead/opinion of the better educated and more familiar with the integration process political elite in Bulgaria about the European Union.

3.4 Public Attitudes towards the EU in Bulgaria – Orientations towards Levels of Competence

Attitudes towards the appropriate levels of competence in different policy areas have been identified as another important indicator of popular orientations towards the European Union (de Winter and Swyngedouw 1999; Niedermayer 1995). Essentially, while the EU has recognized

the need to take policy-making decisions as close to the people as possible (Article 5 TEU), the citizens themselves have a different understanding of the appropriate division of powers between the European, national and regional level in terms of policy-making and decision-making. According to de Winter and Swyngedouw, “European citizens would like to grant much more broader competencies to the EU institutions than what they perceive to be the current case...They also prefer a smaller role for the national governments” in a number of important policy areas (1999: 54). Hence, higher levels of expectation and preferences for European level competences would be indicative for high specific support for the EU.

The main problems facing Bulgaria identified by the citizens are the economic situation (40%), unemployment (38%), inflation (27%), crime (25%), health care (15%), and pensions (15%) ranking the highest (Figure B in the Appendix) (Eurobarometer 2006 fall). At the same time, 69% of the respondents agree that the European Union has a positive impact on their economy, 17% see it having a negative impact. Similarly, 60% of the respondents agree that the country’s EU membership will have positive effects on the unemployment, 19% think it will have negative effects, while 21% remain without opinion on the matter. All in all, 63% expect the Union to have a positive impact on the standard of living in the country. Comparing these results shows that on the two most important policy areas for the people in Bulgaria, the EU is expected to play a positive role. Hence, it appears that there is a relatively large reservoir for *specific* support among the public in Bulgaria towards the European integration.

At the same time, there is a clear differentiation between the policies in which the national government is expected to take decisions together with the EU and those in which it is expected to act independently; a distinction following the dividing line of endogenous vs. exogenous problem matters as identified by de Winter and Swyngedouw (1999). Accordingly,

the areas in which the Bulgarian government should act together with the EU are the fight against terrorism (81%); the scientific and technological research (73%); support for economically underdeveloped regions (69%); defense and foreign affairs (63%); immigration (61%); fight against crime (52%); competition (52%); environment (49%); and energy policy (48%) (Eurobarometer 66 fall 2006). Similarly, the policy areas which should be left strictly to the national government for decision-making are taxes (72%); education (71%); health care and social security (66%); pensions (65%); unemployment (59%); consumer protection (53%); and agriculture and fisheries (52%) (Eurobarometer 66 fall 2006). Essentially, the distribution of preferences for policy expectations with respect to the level of decision-making clearly shows that Bulgarian citizens prefer the EU to engage in decisions in strictly hard security policy areas, which are also under the intergovernmental second and third pillars, and in those conducive to economic development, while leaving the national government to deal alone with financial and welfare issues, which are predominantly under the first pillar of Community policies in the EU. Surprisingly, while almost half of the respondents would like to see the EU having greater role in the energy sector, the issue has been quite contentious in Bulgaria, which is attributed to the fact that the public was largely negatively oriented towards the closing down of the two nuclear power plant reactors at Kozloduy; a provision part of the Accession Treaty.

3.5 Public Attitudes towards EU in Bulgaria – the Institutions of the European Union

Another indicator of support and opposition toward the European Union is the orientations towards its main institutions. Essentially, it is intuitively to expect a linear relationship between the independent and dependent variables: the higher the trust the EU institutional bodies, the higher the level of support for the integration in general.

Overall, 56% of the citizens in Bulgaria say they trust the European Union, while 23% express distrust and 21% do not have an opinion (Eurobarometer 66 fall 2006). These results are slightly more optimistic than the results for the EU 25, where the trust in the EU is expressed by 45%, while 40% say they do not trust it and 10% do not have a position. Looking at the levels of trust in the different institutions, the Bulgarians appear to trust the European Commission and the European Parliament slightly more than the average Europeans. Accordingly, 51% of the respondents in Bulgaria say they can trust the Commission, whereas the average for the EU 25 is 48% (Eurobarometer 66 EU fall 2006). Similarly, 55% of the Bulgarian citizens trust the European Parliament, while the average for the EU 25 is 52%. Looking at the overall numbers, it appears that a majority of the population in Bulgaria trusts the main supranational EU institutions.

When compared to the level of support Bulgarians have for the national institutions, the aforementioned figures appear quite positive. With respect to the national parliament, only 14% say they can trust it, while 76% express distrust (Eurobarometer 66 fall 2006). The figures for the level of trust for the national government appear slightly more positive, where 21% say they trust it, with 69% being distrustful. The lowest levels of support, however, are towards the national political parties. Only 10% of the respondents say they can trust the parties, while 82% say they do not trust them. Interestingly, the Bulgarian public has much lower trust in its national institutions than in the institutions of the European Union. Hence, the relatively high support for the European Commission and the European Parliament can explain the high positive orientations of Bulgarians towards the European Union. Coupled with the fact that 72% of the citizens support the future development of a European Political Union, with 54% average for the EU 25, it appears that the level of diffuse support towards the political authorities is quite higher

than the one found in the European Union. As a result, the Union can rely on public support of the future, as long as it sticks to political integration. A tendency quite at odds with the orientations in the old member states, who would prefer to see limited political integration and more advanced economic integration.

In sum, the chapter has analyzed the orientations towards the European Union found among the Bulgarian public. While the figures point to very high overall level of support for the country's membership, it appears to be based mainly upon diffuse support, expressed in positive evaluations of the political integration, while accompanied by lower levels of specific support and the economic aspects of integration. In addition, the significantly high number of people who cannot express a position on the expected impact of the integration for the country speaks of lack of understanding of how the integration, of the role of Bulgaria in it and of the European Union as a whole. Hence, there appears to be a large reservoir for political leadership with respect of the issues related to the European integration. The next chapter, discussing the party-based Euroscepticism will attempt to shed more light on the role parties and political figures play in the process.

Chapter IV –Euro scepticism and the Political Parties in Bulgaria

Euro scepticism is a phenomenon observed on at least two levels: the level of the general public and the level of political parties in a given member or candidate state of the European Union. Hence, while the previous chapter discussed the particularities and elements of the public attitudes towards the European integration, the present one will be devoted to analyzing the emergence of Euro scepticism on the level of political parties in Bulgaria. Essentially, a number of hypotheses, developed to classify Euro scepticism of political parties in East and West will be tested using the Bulgarian case. The aim is, on the one hand, to provide a better understanding of the party-based dynamics of support and opposition towards the EU in Bulgaria, and, on the other hand, to show whether the hypothesis existing in the literature are applicable across the board or there are particular contextual or other factors that may account for differentiated outcomes.

As already discussed in Chapter I, there are several hypotheses that exist in the literature on Euro scepticism regarding the party-level dynamics of the phenomenon. Firstly, Euro scepticism has been identified as “politics of opposition” (Sitter 2001). Several hypotheses can be derived from this study: *(1) Principled Euro scepticism should not be found in catch-all or cartel parties, which are positioned on the main Left-Right dimension; (2) Ideological and populist anti-establishment positions and the ‘touchstone of dissent’ strategy links the new politics and new populist parties to Euro scepticism, while at the same time (3) Euro sceptic parties should be expected to modify or avoid Euro scepticism to the extent that they aspire to or*

actually participate in governing coalitions (Sitter 2001: 26-27).⁴ Sitter emphasizes that in his dynamic model, “changes in party-based Euroscepticism develop as strategies of opposition and coalition-building evolve” (Sitter 2001: 27). Another group of hypotheses worth testing is developed by Taggart and Szczerbiak, which capture a more differentiated positioning on the European question (2002, 2004). The hypotheses derived from their study are: (1) *Euroscepticism would be expressed from parties on both sides of the political spectrum*; (2) *hard Euroscepticism would be less pronounced than soft one*; (3) *hard Eurosceptic parties would be found on the periphery of the party system, while soft Eurosceptic parties would be more widely spread, both on the periphery and in the center of the party system*; and (4) *the closer a country gets towards accession, the stronger the party-based Euroscepticism* (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2004: 5-6). Finally, a hypothesis capturing the interrelation between the position on the European issue and the position on the Left-Right dimension will be tested using Marks *et al*’s study. The simple assumption is that (5) *Euroscepticism in the East is unipolar and concentrated in the Left/Tan angle* (Marks *et al* 2006). Importantly, the confirmation of the above mentioned hypotheses will highlight that strategy is the main determinant of party position on the European issue, since all of the assumptions relate to the positions of the political parties in the national party system. At the same time, a rejection of the hypotheses might show that ideology, among other things, is the factor better explaining the position of one party on the question of European integration.⁵

⁴ The second hypothesis developed in the study of Sitter, namely that “interest- or value-based parties propensity towards Euroscepticism should be driven by the extent to which they perceive the state as their ally or a threat” (2001: 27) in the sense that Euroscepticism would be driven by territorial, cultural or economic opposition, is not going to be tested because in the Bulgarian party system, the territorial or cultural cleavage is less expressed and is not a significant factor in determining voting behavior. Hence, the hypothesis is not relevant for the Bulgarian case.

⁵ For a clear distinction between strategy and ideology in terms of party positions on the European issue, see “Conceptual and theoretical issues” in Kopecky and Mudde (2002) and Batory (2002)

In the following sections of the chapter there will be a brief discussion of the development of party-based Euroscepticism, which will give an understanding of the political situation in Bulgaria. Then, each of the hypotheses will be applied. The result of this section will demonstrate the type of Euroscepticism that is found among the political parties in Bulgaria and the applicability of models developed to test Euroscepticism in Western EU member states to the realities of Central and East European Member States. Finally, the exercise will also contribute to the more general discussion of the Europeanization of party systems since all of the hypotheses have implications for indicating change as a result of impact of the European Union on domestic party politics.

4.1 Bulgaria and the role of the European issue in party politics

Euroscepticism has been a relatively new phenomenon on the Bulgarian political scene. While during the early 1990s the yet unreformed Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) sporadically expressed opposition to the European integration project, it was during its term in office that the application for Bulgaria's membership in the EU was filed. Hence, ever since the mid 1990s, there has been a wide elite consensus on the European trajectory of the country's future, as has been the case with all the other post-communist states. The 2001 elections for national parliament are a good example of this. The issue of European membership was hardly discussed during the electoral campaign, let alone used by any of the parties in their platforms. While the party system in Bulgaria underwent significant modification with the breakdown of the bi-polar model after the 2001 elections and the emergence of a new centrist party led by the former Bulgarian king Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, who returned from exile and won one seat short of

parliamentary majority (Karasimeonov 2006; Savkova 2005), the role of the European issue was close to non existent.

A more qualified position on the question of European membership emerged for first time in the run-ups to the 2005 elections for national parliament. The European issue was taken up in a two-fold manner. On the one hand, the newly emerged nationalist party Attack, while being a clear anti-establishment and protest party, positioned itself also against the membership of the country in the European Union and in any other international organizations (Attack 2005). Therefore Attack was the first anti-EU party in Bulgaria at that time. The party won 8.14% of the vote and secured 21 seats in the national parliament (Savkova 2005). Hence, if the vote for Attack can be used to represent the vote of the people opposing European integration, then the Eurosceptic vote on the 2001 elections amounted to 8.14% or 296, 848 voters (Table 1).

Table 1: Results from the EP elections May 2007
and parliamentary elections June 2005 in Bulgaria

Parties	EP election % Votes	MEP(s)	# of votes	Elections '05 % votes	Elections '05 # votes	Difference in # votes
GERB (Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria)	21.69	5	419,464	0	0	419,464
BSP (Bulgarian Socialist Party)	21.41	5	414,050	30.95	1,129,126	-715,076
MRF (Movement for Rights and Freedoms)	20.26	4	391,711	12.81	467,400	-75,689
Attack	15.22	3	275,001	8.14	296,848	-21847
NDSS (National Movement Simeon Second)	6.26	1	120,945	19.88	725,314	-604369
UDF (Union of Democratic Forces)	4.7	0	90894	7.68	280323	-189429
DSB (Democrats for Stronger Bulgaria)	4.3	0	83158	6.44	234788	-151630
	100	18	1933909			

Sources: <http://www.dnevnik.bg/show/?storyid=342021>, accessed on 21/05/2007 (for the results of the EP election) and *Bulletin with the results of the elections for national parliament of 25 June 2005*, Central Electoral Committee 2005 (for the results of the elections for national parliament)

On the other hand, after several months of discussions and inability to agree on who to be the head of the government, the three parties that won most votes—the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), the National Movement Simeon Second (NMSS) and the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF) formed a government coalition with the single aim “to lead Bulgaria into the European Union.” In this respect, the European issue was also a unifying factor. In the words of ex-prime minister and ex-king Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, “The governing coalition is our business card for Brussels” (*Dnevnik* 25/10/2005).

However, leaving these two developments aside, the European question was still largely ignored. In particular, “the topic of Europe rarely came in the debates and when it was thrown at the party candidates, they often failed to exploit it to their benefit by differentiating their position from other competitors” (Savkova 2005: 11). Although at that time, the question of the exact date for Bulgaria accession in the EU was still uncertain given the possibility of the Commission to postpone accession for 2008, the parties did not find it necessary to use prospective EU membership as a point of contention or competition. The only association made with a European dimension of a national issue was the question of renegotiating the closure of the nuclear power plant reactors at Kozloduy, which was mainly taken up by the newcomer Attack (Savkova 2005). Even though the general public in Bulgaria did not support the decision for closing down the reactors, the idea of re-opening the chapter of the Accession Treaty devoted to energy policy seemed unreasonable since this was seen as threatening or at least delaying the upcoming membership.

While in 2005 nascent anti-EU party positions appeared in the face of Attack, by May 2007, when for first time Bulgarians were called to vote for national representatives to the European Parliament, the Eurosceptic positions gained more force. Even though the two

elections might be regarded by some as being of different importance to the voters since the former were first-order national elections while the latter were, in theory, second-order elections (Schmitt 2004), and as such their results being incomparable, in the case of Bulgaria this might not be the case. One reason for the comparability of the results can be the fact that the EP elections were of historical importance for Bulgarians, since for first time the national public was offered the opportunity to express its position on matters of European importance. Another reason is that there were newly emerging parties, e.g. GERB, that were expected to stir the populace and generate more discussion and turnout.

4.2 The 20 May 2007 elections to the European Parliament in Bulgaria

While the contestation of the European question was diminished to a minimum on the last election for national parliament, the issue inevitably gained heed in the campaign for the first in the Bulgarian history election for the European Parliament. However, despite the more intense contestation, people were not enthusiastic about voting in these elections. Even though the turnout in Bulgaria of 28.6%, or around 1.9 million voters, was the fifth highest among the Central and East European countries; it was the lowest turnout in the history of Bulgarian elections. A survey done a few months before the start of the campaign showed that at that time the percentage of people that were thinking to cast their vote (38%) was even higher than the real turnout, which can potentially demonstrate that even the electoral campaign did not manage to stir the interest and to encourage people to vote.

However, the turnout was not as surprising as the results of the elections (Table 1). The parties from the governing coalition all managed to send one or more representatives to the EP. BSP won 21.41% of the vote, ranking second, and is sending five people to represent it. The

party of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria, MRF, ranked third with 20.26% of the vote and will have four MEPs. The third party from the governing coalition, NMSS, ranked worst of the three getting only 6.26% of the vote and sending only one person in the EP. However, the “king’s party” fared better than expected, in view of the crisis it is experiencing in the last year and given that the surveys done before the elections were showing that it was more likely the party not to have even one MEP. Essentially, these three parties also capture the pro-European vote since all the three of them expressed support for Bulgaria’s membership in the EU and for particular European issues and policies.

The more interesting results come from the other two parties that managed to secure enough votes to send their representatives in the EP. In the first place, the party of the current mayor of Sofia and former general-secretary of the police Boyko Borissov, who is the unofficial leader of the party, but the main person behind it—GERB—won the majority of the votes (21.69%), albeit with only a small advantage to the second—BSP. While the party’s unofficial leader has previously run on two elections, as a leader of a party list of NMSS on the 2005 parliamentary elections and as an independent candidate on the last elections for a mayor in the capital Sofia, this was the first time the party was competing on nation-wide elections. Even though the polling agencies were making some prognosis that GERB was running second after BSP in terms of support, no one predicted that it will win most of the votes. Due to the good performance, the party will have five MEPs, its first ever representatives in a parliament, being it the European one.

In the second place, the performance of the nationalist party Attack was also counterintuitive, given that according to the second-order election theory) opposition parties perform even better than on previous national elections (Schmitt 2004). At the same time, in

view of the emergence of another populist party running on nationalist sentiments and anti-government rhetoric, its performance is not as surprising. With its 14.22%, the party ranked fourth and will have three representatives in the EP. Attack got almost as many votes as on the last elections, which demonstrates that the party has preserved its core electorate despite the moderation of the rhetoric since it first emerged in 2005. Compared to the other parties, Attack's performance is the closest to its previous one with a difference of only 22 000 votes (*Dnevnik* 21/05/2007). On the other hand, the two main right-wing parties, the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) and Democrats for Stronger Bulgaria (DSB), fared worst out of all the parties that have parliamentary representation. The UDF won just 4.7% of the votes, while the DSB won even less, just 4.3%. Hence, none of them managed to pass the 5.56% threshold and to send representatives to the EP. Even the populist/nationalist "Order, law and fairness," which gained wide media coverage due to its controversial attempt to register the five medical nurses currently imprisoned in Libya as part of their list and in this way "save them" from the trial by making them MEPs, eventually denounced by the Central Electoral Committee as being against the electoral law, did not manage to get enough votes to send the only candidate left in its list.

Essentially, the results of the EP elections demonstrate a number of important features of the Bulgarian party system. Firstly, there is high electoral volatility from one election to another, which leaves ample space for populist and catch-all parties to win more votes. Secondly, the political system is still highly fluid, with new parties emerging before every major elections and gaining significant levels of support. While the contradicting logics of European enlargement and democratic transition might be one factor behind the emergence of a system that facilitates populists and demagogues (Grzymala-Busse and Innes 2003), the relative short life of the political system the main variable that explains its fluidity, as is the case with most of the

countries which have experienced post-communist transition (Lewis 2005; Linden and Pohlman 2003). In other words, ‘given the relative newness of democratic competition in the East, party competition is less structured there’ (Marks et al 2006: 158). Thirdly, the crisis of the established right-wing parties, UDF and DSB, has left space for newcomers to capitalize on conservative and right-wing sentiments and to use the issues as part of their party platforms. And lastly, political leaders and charismatic individuals determine to a great extent people’s choice. Both GERB and Attack are founded around the personalities of their leaders—Boyko Borissov and Volen Siderov respectively—who express particular authoritative tendencies coupled with “anti-politics” and “anti-government” rhetoric. Essentially, these two parties capitalized on the potential Eurosceptic electorate, linking their opposition to the government with the skepticism of the Bulgarian role in Europe. The last points will be taken up in the following section.

4.3 Euroscepticism and the political parties in Bulgaria⁶

The first obvious candidate for being classified as a Eurosceptic party is Attack. Comparing the party’s position on the question of EU membership for Bulgaria, an obvious shift from “hard” to relatively “soft” version of Euroscepticism is observed. In its platform for the 2005 parliamentary elections, the party advocated for no integration of the country in international organizations and for preservation of Bulgaria’s “indisputable sovereignty.” (Attack 2005) However, the party dropped its outright opposition and moderated its tone, albeit only in the last months before the EP elections, presenting a more differentiated position on the European issue. The motto of the party was: “Let’s send in the EU Bulgarians who can say ‘No’” (Attack Party Manifesto 2007). According to Taggart and Szczerbiak’s distinction, in its latter form Attack

⁶ For a general understanding of the party system in Bulgaria and the positioning of the political parties on the main dimensions of competition, please refer to Figure C in the Appendix.

expresses “Soft Euroscepticism,” both policy-based and national-interest-based. In particular, the party’s position *against* Turkey’s accession in the EU, the European Constitution and “the formation of a European super-state” (Attack party manifesto 2007) is a clear expression of “Policy Euroscepticism,” founded in opposition to processes of deepening the integration process or extension of EU competences (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2004). In the same line, its criticism of the overly bureaucratic EU and opposition to a federalist structure for the EU also fall in this category. “The European Union exists as such, but should not turn into a federal state or a state of the type of the US. The loss of national identity of individual member states should not be allowed” (Stoyanov 2007). Moreover, Attack presented itself in defense of the national interests and *for* the incorporation of Christian values as basic values of the European civilization and *for* trade free of directives that impose corporate interests (Attack party manifesto 2007), employing the rhetoric of “National Interest Euroscepticism” aiming to increase its support (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2004).

Interrelating Attack’s position on the European issue with its position on the main dimensions of party competition is not an easy task. While there is continuous discussion where to situate the party in terms of its position in the national political system, it is unquestionable that the party appeared and still exists as an anti-system or a protest party as well as a single issue party (Karasimeonov 2006). On the one hand, it has a clear xenophobic and nationalist rhetoric; yet, on the other, it promotes the idea of nationalization of the economy and of the advancement of social capitalism (Karasimeonov 2006). In terms of partners and coalitions, Attack joined the newly created anti-EU group in the European Parliament “Identity, tradition and sovereignty,” while it is a close ally of the French nationalist Jean-Mary le Pen’s Nationalist Front. On the basis of these elements, Attack can be classified as expressing “Soft

Euroscepticism” determined by the position on the “new-politics cleavage” of libertarianism vs. traditionalism/nationalism⁷ and using opposition of the EU not only as a strategic tool, but also one based at least partially on ideological considerations. The opposition to Turkey’s membership supports this claim, since the party uses openly a rhetoric targeted against the Turkish and the Roma minorities in Bulgaria. Importantly, the party can afford to express a harsher Eurosceptic position since it is not a mainstream party and does not aspire to gain power in the government.

Besides Attack, two other parties from the right of the political spectrum have expressed Eurosceptic positions in the last election for EP. The Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) and the Democrats for Stronger Bulgaria (DSB) are both examples of “Soft Euroscepticism.” The UDF supports the Lisbon Agenda and advocates *for* regulatory competition and *against* harmonization of direct taxes in the EU, arguing for preservation of the fiscal policy to the national level (UDF “18 Aims” 2007). Paradoxically, the party expresses support for the introduction of the Euro in Bulgaria and for a European Constitution – clear elements of supranationalism and even federalism, and at the same time it wants to see Europe as a “community of nation states and a union of citizens;” and is against the introduction of any sort of restrictions in the internal market – ideas based on intergovernmental integration (UDF “18 Aims” 2007). Hence, it is not clear whether the party prefers more or less integration, and whether the integration should lead towards federal Europe or towards more intergovernmental Europe.

Importantly, UDF’s “Soft Euroscepticism” is rooted in its ideological position. The party’s position in the national political system is centre-right (Figure 1) (Karasimeonov 2006). Hence its opposition to fiscal harmonization on the European level and support for “Europe of the nation states” is a clear expression of right-wing criticism towards the EU, voiced primarily

⁷ For a discussion of the relevance of the “new politics” cleavage in Eastern Europe, see Marks et al 2006.

by the British Conservatives. Not surprisingly, two months before the EP elections, the UDF joined the newly created Movement for European Reforms of the British and Czech Conservatives, while threatening to terminate its membership in the European People's Party – European Democrats (EPP-ED). While this has been identified by some as a strategic move to differentiate itself from the mainstream parties in Bulgaria by adopting clear Eurosceptic positions, the results of the elections show that the public “did not buy it” and the party did not manage to secure enough votes to send at least one representative to the EP. Even though the party is not in government at the moment, it is unquestionably an established mainstream party in the Bulgarian party system. Hence, in this case “Soft Euroscepticism” is combined with established political party.

The same is true for the DSB, the party of the former prime minister Ivan Kostov, who was head of the government right after the 1997 crisis and who is associated with the introduction of important economic reforms, leading the country on its way towards Euro-Atlantic integration. The party's motto for the EP elections “For stronger Bulgaria in Europe” was aimed at appealing to the voters through the rhetoric of “National Interest Euroscepticism.” Following a similar logic, the party claimed to work for creating conditions for increasing the market price of the country's land if elected to the EP (DSB 2007), tapping into fears of many Bulgarians that after accession the foreigners will buy out their land. A more distinct Eurosceptic position was its opposition to Turkey's accession to the EU, founded in the party's desire to “terminate Turkey's involvement in the Bulgarian politics through the party of Turkish minorities MRF,” which is currently part of the governing coalition (DSB 2007). At the same time, the party was claiming to work for decreasing the excessive bureaucracy in Europe and for more restricted spending of the money of the European taxpayers, which also puts them on the

skeptical side of the European question since they oppose the way the EU is functioning today and want to see it change for the future. DSB's skepticism was hence founded in the right-wing ideas expressed by other West and East European Eurosceptic parties from the conservative family. While the aforementioned positions point to moderate national interest-biased Euroscepticism, the party had particular pro-EU positions as well. It expressed support for effective common European security and foreign policy, with particular focus on the Southeast Europe and the Black sea region (DSB 2007). Essentially, the party's bid for stronger EU, working for the protection of peace, freedom and human rights points to its support for the main underlying values of the integration project as such. However, DSB's claim to oppose any foreign interference in the country's domestic policy essentially puts in on the more skeptical side of the European question. Here again the skepticism is "National Interest Euroscepticism" based, with vague "Policy Euroscepticism." Here again, as in the case of the UDF, a mainstream party represented in the national parliament with serious aspirations for government power uses "soft" Eurosceptic rhetoric. The party has also based its relative criticism of the EU in terms of its ideological position, and while emphasizing less on strategy. However its mixed message coupled with the inability of the party to mobilize its electorate prevented it from gaining enough votes to send at least one representative to the EP. As a result the poor performance, the leadership of the party resigned.

Another interesting case worth discussing in this section is the newly emerged party of current mayor of Sofia and ex secretary-general of the police, Boyko Borissov, GERB. The name of the party, which is an abbreviation for "Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria" and at the same time stands for "coat of arms," is as ambiguous as its party manifesto, published for first time right before the EP elections. While the party claims to occupy a center-right position

in the party system (Vladimirova 2006), it is essentially a catch-all party, using anti-establishment rhetoric. With respect to the European question, the party uses overly pro-EU statements with ideas of “National Interest Euroscepticism.” In particular, the party identifies the basic values of freedom, democracy, human rights, solidarity and dignity as foundational of its political position, recognizing that they can only be realized through European cooperation and integration (GERB 2007). It is in favor of decentralization and the upholding of the principle of subsidiarity in Bulgaria and in the EU. At the same time, however, GERB are against the harmonization of indirect taxes in Europe through directives and regulations (GERB 2007). More importantly, the party prefers the creation of “Europe of the nation states,” so as to preserve the Bulgarian national identity in Europe (GERB 2007). Hence the party’s aspirations for defending the Bulgarian interest in the European structures speaks of soft skepticism towards the EU and fear that the country will lose power and sovereignty once it has become a member. The combination of support for the main European values that lie at the heart of the EU and the opposition to a more interfering Union illustrates that the party sees the Union as a community of values with democratic mission, than anything else. At the same time, even though GERB is a newly emerged populist anti-establishment party, it has expressed strong aspirations for gaining power and being elected into the government. After gaining most of the votes on the EP elections just a few weeks ago, the party’s unofficial leader Boyko Borissov called for interim elections for the national parliament. Hence, GERB can be classified as a catch-all party with somewhat concealed soft Eurosceptic rhetoric.

4.4 Testing the Hypotheses

The analysis of the main political parties in Bulgaria with respect to their positions on the European question provides a good ground for testing the hypotheses outlined in the beginning

of the chapter. On first look, some of them appear to be confirmed, while other to be disproved. With respect to the first hypotheses, principled, or ‘hard’ Euroscepticism is not found in any of the catch-all or cartel parties in Bulgaria. While GERB does express some skepticism, it is a rather “Soft” one. With respect to the second hypothesis, the experience of Bulgaria proves that indeed the “new politics cleavage” links more accurately with Euroscepticism than the traditional left-right one. In particular, Attack and GERB, examples of populist anti-establishment parties both employ Eurosceptic rhetoric. Regarding the third hypothesis taken from Sitter’s study, the case of the two right-wing parties UDF and DSB seem to disprove the hypothesis. While both parties openly express aspirations for government, despite the existential crisis they are currently experiencing, they do employ Eurosceptic discourse.

Applying the next three hypotheses developed by Taggart and Szczerbiak (2004) also generates interesting results. The assumption that Euroscepticism would be expressed by parties from both sides of the political spectrum, meaning left and right, seems not to hold. All of the parties that were using Eurosceptic rhetoric are either from the right side or from the center of the political spectrum. However, the hypothesis that hard Euroscepticism would be less pronounced than soft is confirmed. Even though initially there was only one, hard, Eurosceptic party in Bulgaria, with the achievement of membership the soft skepticism became more widespread, while the hard diminished to almost non-existent. In the same line of thought, the Bulgarian case also confirmed the hypothesis that hard Euroscepticism, if existent, would be on the periphery, while soft Euroscepticism would be spread throughout the system. Essentially, the assumption is supported by UDF and GERB leaning towards the core and Attack and UDF leaning towards the periphery. The seventh hypothesis presented above also seem to hold, given that the most of the parties started employing Eurosceptic rhetoric as part of the preparations for

European Parliament elections. Essentially, only in the last two years were Bulgarian voters offered the opportunity to vote for a Eurosceptic party, be it hard or soft.

Finally, the last assumption, which says that Euroscepticism would be solely restricted to the left/TAN angle of the party system in Eastern Europe, is disproved by the Bulgarian case. As already mentioned, it was predominantly right-wing and populist-antiestablishment parties that capitalized on the Eurosceptic tendencies. Since, the last hypothesis is derived from a comprehensive study comparing Western and Eastern Europe, and the assumption was found to be in reality valid for all the new member states, the Bulgaria seems to be falling outside the trend seen in the rest of CEECs. One reason for this can be found in the nature of party system itself, where the two main right-wing parties are experiencing existential crisis and are increasingly losing support, while the Socialist party has received large electoral support and has established itself as the main political force currently in the country. As a result, the UDF and DSB employed the Eurosceptic rhetoric out of strategic considerations, aiming to appeal to potential moderate Eurosceptic voters, who would otherwise not vote for the populist Attack or GERB. Unfortunately for both parties, the strategy did not work.

4.5 Euroscepticism – a dimension of contestation for the political parties in Bulgaria?

The question of “Europe” has not in itself been taken up as a dividing issue. Rather, parties were using the success or failure of the government to appropriate the EU pre-accession funds and to ensure a significant role for Bulgaria in the European Union. Hence the prevailing approach was more of anti-government/pro-EU rather than anti-government/anti-EU as some authors have suggested (Sitter 2001; Taggart 1998). The latter phenomenon is rooted, on the one hand, in the “elite consensus” on the European trajectory of the Bulgaria, as in the rest of the post-communist countries that joined the Union in 2004, which has existed ever since the country filed its

application for membership in 1995. On the other hand, the grouping of Bulgaria and Romania in a second wave of the eastern enlargement, postponing their membership until the Commission found them ready to join the Union, also contributed to the rise of criticism towards the government and skepticism for its ability to bring the country in the EU. The reports that the Commission was issuing every six months in the two years before accession highlighted areas which needed urgent reforms, illustrating in this way the areas in which the government was not delivering enough to meet the EU criteria for membership. As a result, the opposition parties found a variety of issues on which to ground their criticism of the governing coalition, while at the same time stating that they can do better job in implementing the reforms or in defending the interests of Bulgarians in the EU. Hence, the debate regarding the European integration focused more on which party or party representatives are more competent to represent the national interest in the EP and in Europe in general, rather than what kind of Europe they want to promote or work for.

While the previous chapter demonstrated that in many respects the Bulgarian citizens do not have a clear position about the EU and at the same time expressed general and more or less emotional support for the European future of their country, the current chapter illustrates that the parties also did not provide them with meaningful choice with respect to what role should Bulgaria have in the EU or what the politicians will work for in the European structures. Most of the time the parties had mixed platforms and were sending conflicting signals, confusing the voters and not allow them to choose from a particular set of positions. On the other hand the results of the elections show that the voters were making their choice on the EP elections based on party identification and party leaders, rather than anything else. Hence, the European issue did not serve to divide the electorate of pro- or anti-Europe and in this way did not translate into a

political dimension of party competition, let alone of a social cleavage as such. In this respect, Bulgaria does not fit into the theories about the emergence of social cleavages on European integration as presented by Marks and Wilson (2000; see also Steenbergen and Marks 2004). Even though the Hooghe-Marks model of “regulated capitalism” versus “neo-liberalism” might be confirmed on party platforms level, since the Socialist party expressed unconditioned support for the European integration, while the two mainstream right-wing parties opposed the EU on the grounds of excessive regulation, the voters did not follow these lines when choosing who to vote for in the EP elections. While such a cleavage might be in the early process of formation, it does not have a significant role in determining voting behavior at this point of time in Bulgaria. Given that the country has enjoyed just a few months of membership and the general public is still largely unfamiliar with the ideas underlying the European project and the direction in which it is going, it is still possible for the cleavage to emerge. If the future shows that the electorate actually does start to use this dimension for determining its voting choice, this would potentially point to an elite-driven representation on the European question in Bulgaria. However, the current information shows that no such thing has taken place.

4.6 Europeanization of the party system?

While there has not been a clear role of the European issue in structuring party competition on the last EP elections in Bulgaria, there is still some room to consider the extent to which the party system has in practice been Europeanized. While looking at the direct channels for Europeanization as identified by Mair (2000), it appears that the format and the mechanics of the system have been preserved. There have been no new significant parties particularly based on pro- or anti-EU stance, while the competition between the existing parties has remained similar,

in the sense that no new dimension of contestation has emerged. While one party – GERB – did manage to change the distribution of electoral preferences in Bulgaria, its platform was not in any case rooted solely on the European question. Even *visé versa*, the latter was accommodated into the political platform of the party. However, there is still some room for more indirect impact on the party system, as recognized by Lewis (2005). One such area is policy and program content. However, this has not produced significant modifications of the party or even political system in the country. Essentially, the presence of a large number of Eurosceptic parties, both at the periphery and center of the system, has not led to significant Europeanization of the party system. One reason for this was probably be the relative low salience of Europe for the Bulgarian public. While another, was the still short experience with the European integration project. Whatever the reasons, the rise of party-based Euroscepticism cannot be associated with significant structural changes and as such should not be considered as a threat of any kind.

Conclusion

European membership was unquestionably a long-desired goal for Bulgaria and for all the countries from Central and Eastern Europe, for which it symbolized recognition of the successful transition from communism to liberal democracies with functioning market economies. While preparing for membership was taking place together with the political, economic and social transformations the countries were going through, the logic of European integration was at times conflicting with that of democratic consolidation. More importantly, publics and elites in CEECs alike started getting more skeptical of the potential benefit of being part of the EU. The experience of Bulgaria, however, proved to be a particular case in point. Disentangling the particularities of rising party-based Euroscepticism and low levels of public-based opposition to membership, therefore, illuminated the dynamics of Euroscepticism in the newly acceded member state.

The Analysis of the general public in Bulgaria and its attitudes towards the European Union demonstrated that the highly positive orientations are based on emotional, or diffuse, support rather than utilitarian, or specific, support. In particular, people in Bulgaria are more positively oriented towards the EU overall, towards the idea of membership and of political integration, while their support for the economic and policy-specific one is less pronounced. Another important finding is that a relatively large number of people, up to one third of the respondents, cannot express clear position on the European question, demonstrating that Bulgarians have problems evaluating the importance of their country's membership in the EU and the impact it will have on the country and on them personally. The lack of knowledge on

European matters, however, creates potential grounds for politicians to capitalize on the uncertainty, empowering mainly populists and demagogues (Grzymata-Buse and Innes 2003).

The last point was taken up in the discussion of party-based Euroscepticism. Essentially, the analysis of political parties and their skepticism of the European integration project, or at least some aspects of it, led to a number of interesting findings. Firstly, while there is a rise of Euroscepticism in Bulgaria among the political parties, it is solely “Soft Euroscepticism,” with a more pronounced “National Interest Euroscepticism” and less expressed “Policy Euroscepticism.” Secondly, the parties appear to be making a link between their ideological position and their opposition to the integration process, while at the same time are doing it out of strategic considerations to distance themselves from the other parties and to gain more votes on the EP elections that took place in the country just recently. Thirdly, even though the EP elections provided grounds for increased contestation on the European issue, the parties did not embrace that opportunity openly, while the electorate did not use it as a determinant of its vote. Rather, party identification and personalities were at the heart of the voters’ choice. Hence, a distinct European cleavage as such did not emerge. And finally, while there was no apparent direct impact of the European issue on the party system in Bulgaria, its indirect impact seems to have been more pronounced. The political parties have Europeanized their party platforms and manifestos and have started employing the “Euro speech;” rhetoric still distanced and foreign to the Bulgarian voters.

When comparing the results of the party-based Euroscepticism with the experience of other CEECs, it turns out that Bulgaria is undergoing a process common to most post-communist new EU member states. Essentially, the interconnectedness of transition and European integration has led to higher propensity for Euroscepticism, while the dominant elite consensus

on the EU membership has constrained hard Eurosceptic parties from gaining support and votes. Another commonality is the prevalence of national interest Euroscepticism over the policy one. One reason for this can be found in the fact that the CEECs have recently won back their national independence and are less willing to give in to another “supranational power.” Hence, when running for EP elections, both pro- and anti-EU parties claim to defend the national interest in Europe.

While the findings demonstrate that soft Euroscepticism runs the day in Bulgaria, a more important issue that needs to be further tackled is the obvious mismatch between the low level of public skepticism and the increasing level of party skepticism. The last paradox has two important implications. On the one hand, thriving in a yet unconsolidated democracy, like Bulgaria, the misfit can significantly challenge the general support for the European project. Given the high fluidity of the party system, new populist parties capitalize on Eurosceptic sentiments and win more votes. However, the latter can potentially undermine the credibility of the EU on the domestic level and lead to dissatisfaction and distrust.

On the other hand, the paradox has potential implications for the more general quality of democratic representation and legitimacy in the European political system. Given that the representatives appear to be much more skeptical of the EU than the public, a question of legitimacy arises, adding up to the “democratic deficit” found to exist in Europe. Nevertheless, the electorate in Bulgaria seems to have more trust in the EU and its institutions, than in its national government or the people who represent it. Hence, in times of increasing popular dissatisfaction with the European project observed in old and new member states, the European Union can rely on high public support on behalf of the Bulgarian citizens.

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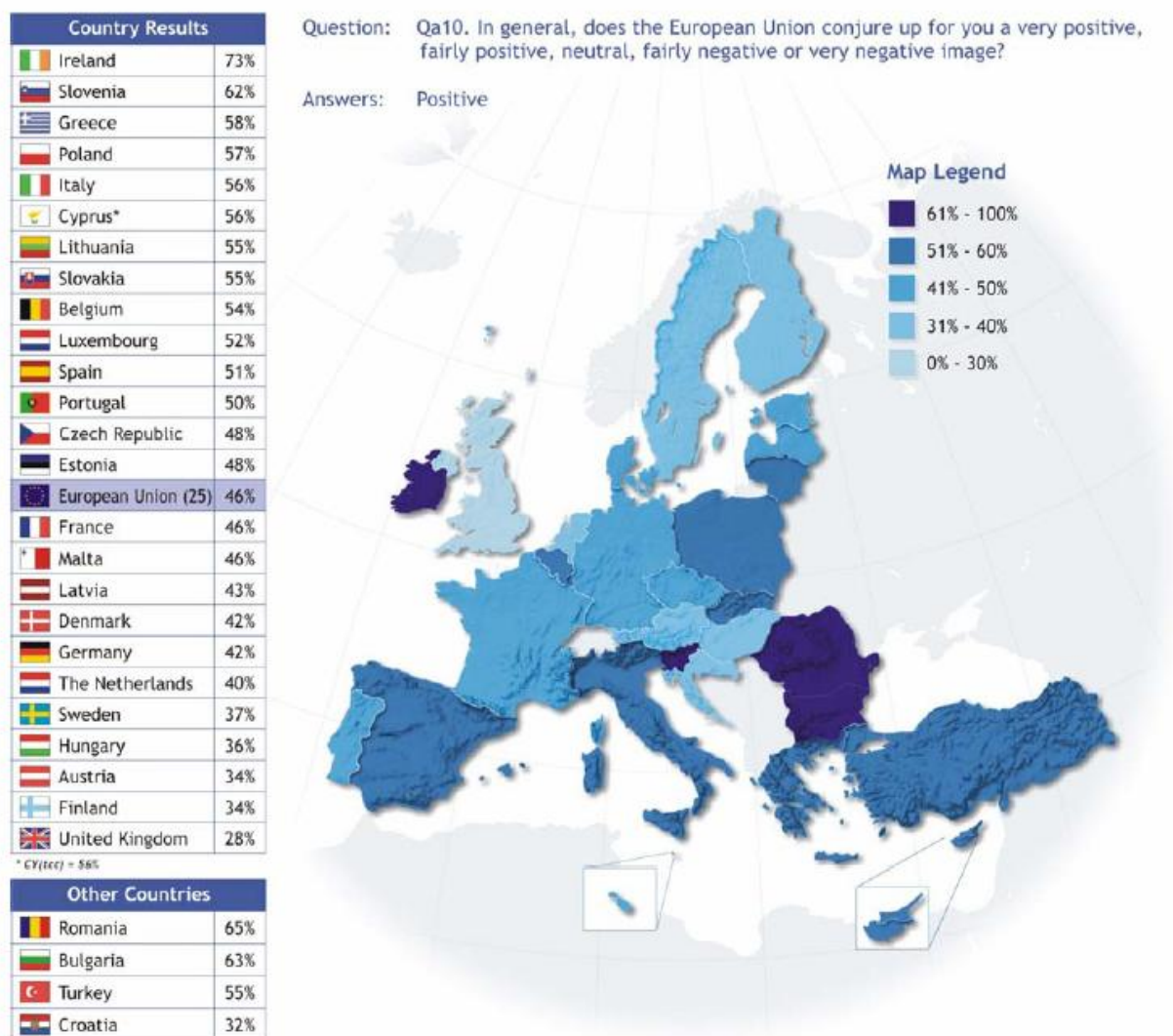
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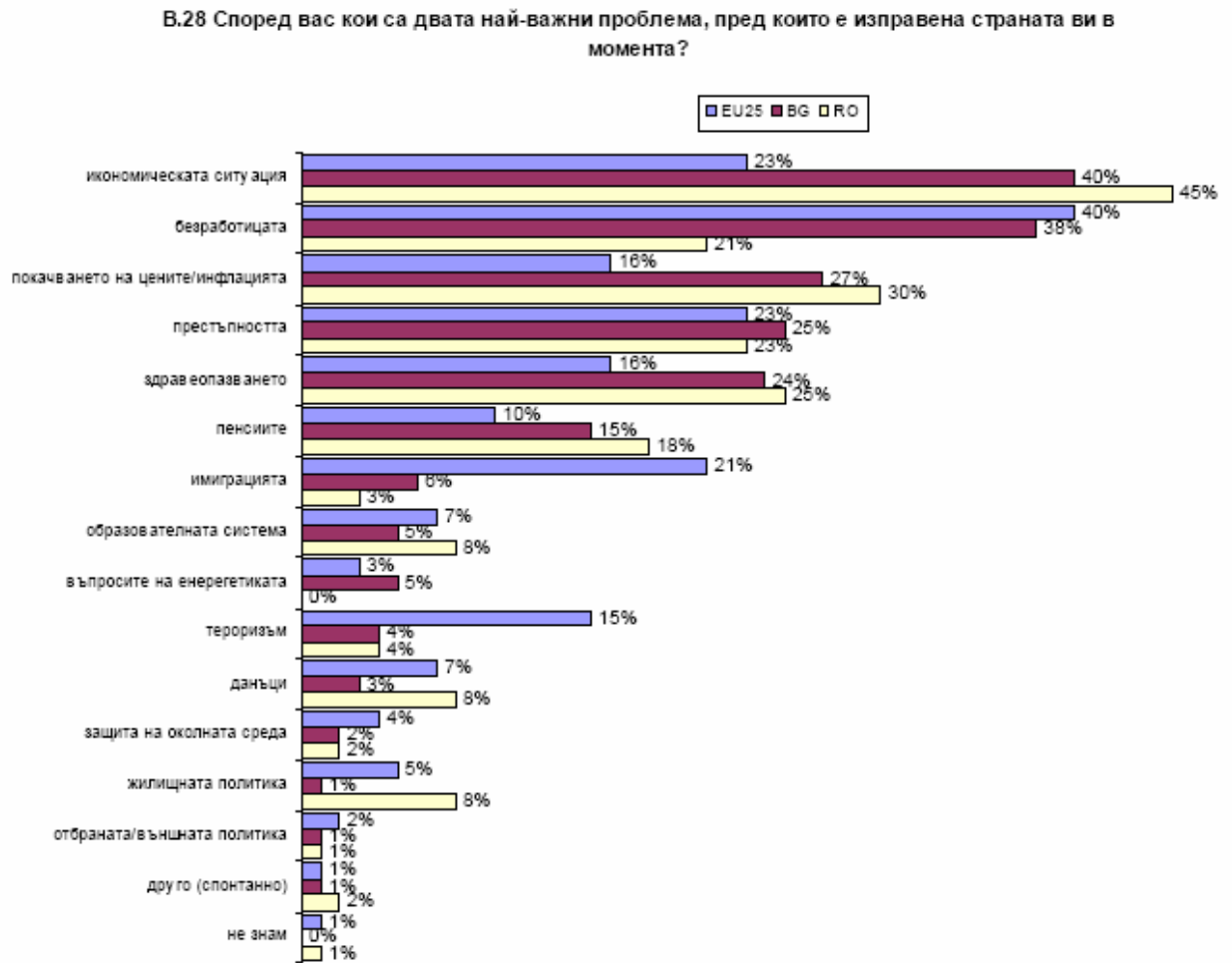
Appendix

Figure A: General image of the European Union



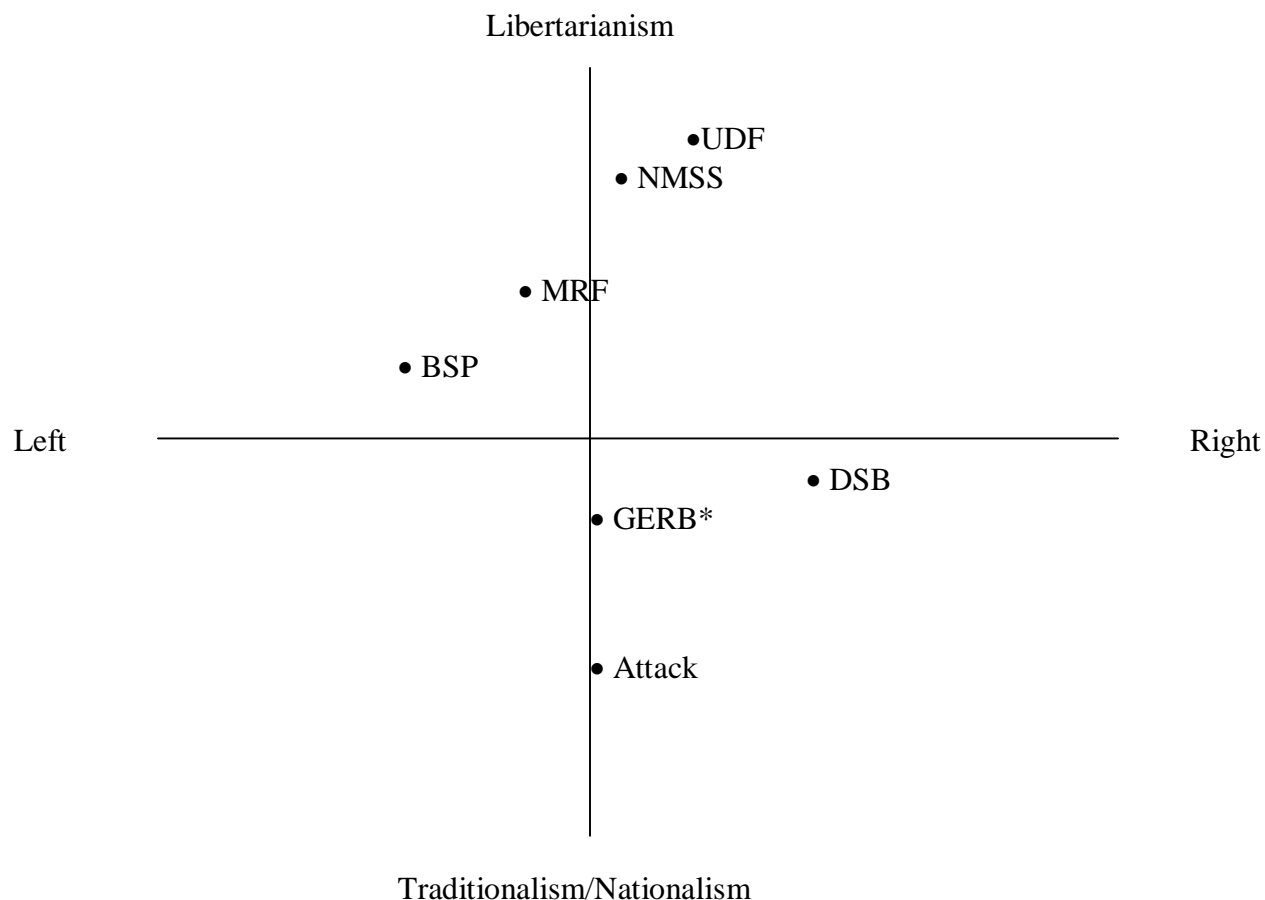
Source: European Commission, *Standard Eurobarometer* No. 66 2006: 13.

Figure B: Citizens' perception of the main problems facing Bulgaria



Source: European Commission, Standard Eurobarometer No 66, fall 2006

Figure C: The party system in Bulgaria 2007



List of Political Parties and their abbreviations:

1. Attack – Coalition Attack (АТАКА)
2. BSP – Bulgarian Socialist Party (БСП - Българска Социалистическа Партия)
3. GERB – “Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria” (ГЕРБ – Граждани за Европейско Развитие на България)
4. DSB – Democrats for Stronger Bulgaria (ДСБ – Демократи за Силна България)
5. MRF – Movement for Rights and Freedoms (ДПС – Движение за Права и Свободи)
6. NMSS – National Movement Simeon Second (НДСВ – Национално Движение „Симеон Втори“)
7. UDF – Union of Democratic Forces (СДС – Съюз на Демократичните Сили)

Source: Karasimeonov, G. (2005) *The Party System in Bulgaria*, p 240

Note: The figure has been updated to include the newly emerged catch-all party GERB.