

**IDEOLOGICAL LINKS BETWEEN INTERWAR
NATIONALISTIC ORGANIZATIONS IN BULGARIA AND
THEIR MODERN-DAY COUNTERPARTS**

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Abstract

The recent electoral success of Eurosceptic parties in many European countries has compelled scholars to examine these parties' ideology, rhetoric, and mobilization strategies. Nationalistic movements during the Interwar period may partially explain the rise and success of their modern counterparts, yet the continuities and discontinuities between Interwar and modern political actors remain understudied. This thesis uses critical discourse analysis to analyze contemporary nationalistic organizations in Bulgaria and to compare their ideology and rhetoric with their Interwar counterparts. It suggests that there are certain ideological links and continuities between the two phenomena on both discursive and rhetorical levels which are manifested mainly through commemorations and performative actions. Despite unfolding during a different socio-political context, both movements benefit from certain structural similarities that characterize both periods, such as the perceptions of a societal crisis and of a threatened national identity.

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Introduction

The recent electoral success of Eurosceptic parties in many Central and Eastern European countries in both local and European Parliament elections has marked the worrisome return of right-wing nationalism to the continent. Parties and organizations on the far right of the political spectrum¹ have found a growing support base by building campaigns around issues such as challenges to European integration, national identity and security amidst the current migrant crisis, treatment of national minorities, economic disparities on the national and European levels, and nationalist versus multiculturalist interpretations of culture. One such party is Bulgaria's far-right ATAKA (Attack). Led by the Führer-esque Volen Siderov, it rose to prominence, consolidated the nationalist vote, and became a key player in the country's politics over the past decade. In doing so, it legitimized the radical right's extremist discourse to the point where some of its tropes can now be heard from all sides of the political spectrum.

¹ The literature employs many definitions (e.g. right-wing, far right, neofascist, extreme right, right radicals, right-wing populist, etc.) of the phenomenon examined here. Including Interwar organizations adds further complications, as the latter have also been defined by different terms, such as authoritarian, nationalistic, fascist, etc. For heuristic purposes, this thesis borrows from Michael Minkenberg's definition of right-wing radicalism as a

political ideology, the core element of which is a myth of a homogenous nation, a romantic and populist ultranationalism which challenges the concepts and reality of liberal and pluralistic democracy and its underlying principles of individualism and universalism.

Minkenberg's definition, in Minkenberg, "Profiles, patterns, process: Studying the East European radical right in its political environment," in *Transforming the Transformation? The East European Radical Right in the Political Process*, ed. Michael Minkenberg (London & New York: Routledge, 2015), 28, seems most applicable as it encompasses ideological themes related to both historical periods and creates a common overarching concept – the nation – at the core of such political formations regardless when and how they have operated. Therefore, whenever the abovementioned terms such as nationalistic, far right, etc. are mentioned, Minkenberg's definition carries the intended meaning.

The nationalistic parties that have mushroomed across Europe often invoke earlier instances of political extremism. They have often resorted to “historical legacies and contextual idiosyncrasies”² to frame their ideology, which has led to theoretical debates about their structural and ideological roots. Scholars such as Michael Minkenberg and Andrea L. P. Pirro perceive the contemporary populist radical right in Eastern Europe as a *sui generis* phenomenon and attempt to locate its roots in various historical periods, usually focusing on the post-1989 socio-political context.³ This thesis engages with the debate and reintroduces the Interwar period as a potential repository of contemporary radical ideas and rhetoric, as well as a context reminiscent of the current status quo.

Two main aspects of the rise of the modern nationalistic organizations are treated here as indicative of a certain level of continuity with similar Interwar organizations in Bulgaria. The first aspect is related to the real and perceived structural conditions for their recent success. Both then and now, Bulgarian far right organizations have emerged in a period of perceived societal crisis and contestations to the national identity. The loss of the national ideal and gradual depolitization of Bulgarian society during the Interwar period, combined with the inability of successive Bulgarian governments to address the adverse effects of the Great Depression and the challenges of the powerful ideological systems of fascism and communism, set the scene for the emergence of the Interwar far right. Structurally, the contemporary far right organizations appear to benefit from similar challenges to the political system – the political, social and economic

² Andrea L. P. Pirro, “Populist Radical Right Parties in Central and Eastern Europe: The Different Context and Issues of the Prophets of the Patria,” *Government and Opposition* 49, no.4 (October 2014): 600, accessed May 10, 2016, doi:10.1017/gov.2013.32.

³ Pirro, 600-629; Minkenberg, “Leninist beneficiaries? Pre-1989 legacies and the radical right in post-1989 Central and Eastern Europe: Some introductory observations,” in *Historical Legacies and the Radical Right in Post-Cold War Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Minkenberg (Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 2010), 11-28.

disturbances after the collapse of communism, which left a power vacuum, as well as the identity questions that emerged amidst the difficult integration into the EU in the 2000s. In both cases, how these structural conditions were perceived enabled the far right to (re)appear, albeit in a much different form and context.

The second point of convergence between the Interwar and the modern nationalistic organizations concerns discourse and rhetoric. In their core and concomitant themes, both movements rely on similar discursive and rhetorical strategies to express several common key ideological themes – organic nationalism or nativism as a response to a changing international political order, modernism and globalization; boundary-setting between “us” and “them”; and the economic ramifications of such an exclusionist project – economic nationalism and welfare chauvinism. These aspects of the ideological profile of the Interwar and modern far right comprise the bulk of their populist discourse and invite comparisons of the organizations’ linguistic and symbolic realizations of these common themes.

Research Question, Hypothesis and Thesis Outline

This aim of the thesis is to problematize the common structural and ideological features between the Interwar and the contemporary nationalistic organizations in a comparative framework, suggesting new ways for their evaluation. It analyzes the far right political discourse of ATAKA and other less influential contemporary nationalistic formations in Bulgaria and the extent to which aspects of their rhetoric establish ideological links and continuity with their counterparts from the Interwar period. To this question it proposes the following hypothesis: *The*

modern nationalistic organizations are indirectly influenced by their Interwar counterparts in the sense that they use similar rhetorical devices to express related ideas about the pure organic Bulgarian nation. However, ideological links are rarely conceptualized as such, remain on a discursive level, and are mainly manifested through commemorations and performative actions. They are realized in a different socio-political context but benefit from some perceived structural similarities between the two periods, the most important of which are the general sense of crisis and the perceived threat to national identity.

The thesis uses critical discourse analysis of thematic cores and discursive events as a methodological tool. The apparent contextual differences in which these movements operate necessitate going beyond simply focusing on ideological postulates and unveiling the common discursive and linguistic devices. For the Interwar period, the analysis focuses on the key ideological themes of nationalism, anti-modernism, antisemitism, and economic nationalism. The modern period offers a slight shift in rhetoric, which replaces the Interwar antisemitism with more general hate speech to include anti-Roma, anti-Turkish, anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant and homophobic rhetoric, while the anti-modernistic rhetoric has evolved into anti-globalism, focusing especially on anti-Americanism and Euroscepticism. Several key events, such as the commemorative Lukov March are identified as crucial in combining various discursive themes.

In terms of structure, Chapter 1 deals with the theoretical framework, the literature overview and methodological aspects of the study. Chapter 2 is divided into four thematic cores – nationalism, anti-modernism, antisemitism and economic nationalism – comprising the main ideological and discursive mixture for the “authoritarian cocktail” of the Bulgarian Interwar period. Chapter 3 covers the four corresponding concepts for the contemporary far right, namely nationalism, anti-globalization, hate speech, and economic nationalism and welfare chauvinism.

Both Chapters 2 and 3 begin with a short historical context overview. Chapter 4 analyzes the particular aspects in which the two movements meet and communicate. Special attention is given to Lukov March – a symbolic event establishing the most direct connection between the two phenomena. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the thesis' findings and identifies further research avenues.

Chapter 1: Theory, Literature and Methodology

1.1. Theoretical framework and literature review

The study engages with the theoretical debate concerning the question of continuity and discontinuity between political formations. Ever since right radicalism appeared on the European post-World War II political map, the core topic for academic inquiry has been the “historical analogies and the role of legacies”.⁴ Michael Minkenberg demonstrates that the three research paths that treat the post-1989 radical right in the CEE region are rooted either in “pre-socialist, ultranationalist or even fascist past – ‘the return of history’,” or catching up with similar developments in Western Europe – ‘the return to Europe’, or in its own experience during state socialism, therefore constituting a *sui generis* phenomenon.⁵ Most authors in Minkenberg’s edited volume tend to favor the *sui generis* hypothesis but they all acknowledge the role of “histories of state socialism and of pre-socialist (non-democratic) experiences [...] as major factors in shaping both the contents and the opportunities of the radical right.”⁶ Minkenberg also outlines two ways in which any one of these three historical legacies can be understood – on one hand, as contextual factors for the appearance of right radical parties, and, on the other hand, as textual factors which provide the “ideological baggage of the past which is revived – and reinterpreted – by the radical right.”⁷ This thesis follows a similar path in analyzing both modern

⁴ Minkenberg, “Leninist beneficiaries,” 11.

⁵ Ibid., 12-13.

⁶ Ibid., 16-17.

⁷ Ibid. 22.

and Interwar nationalistic formations – it compares and contrasts their ideology and discourse but also offers historical-institutional context.

Andrea L. P. Pirro also recognizes the existence of multilayered contexts from which contemporary right radicals draw their ideology. Among pre-communist issues with influence on modern-day nationalists, Pirro pinpoints clericalism and irredentism as the most important ones for Central and Eastern Europe.⁸ However, while they affect post-1989 Bulgarian nationalists, neither clericalism nor irredentism occupy such a central place in Bulgarian nationalistic ideology as they do in the ex-Yugoslav countries, Slovakia or Hungary.⁹ Furthermore, Bulgarian nationalists' interpretations of the two ideologies differ significantly from the Interwar ones.

Particularly relevant for the purpose of this research is the textual approach by James Frusetta and Anca Glont who conduct a comparative analysis of the Interwar legacies of the Bulgarian far right party ATAKA and the Romanian *Partidul România Mare* (Greater Romania Party). The authors argue that, “there are ideological divisions that defined the historical phenomenon of fascism from other contemporary elements of the right” and point out the difference between being influenced by the *legacy* of the Interwar period – its social, cultural, and ideological structures – and using the *heritage* of the Interwar period, namely the symbols and discourses of Interwar fascism.¹⁰ They conclude that the socialist period provided the real legacy for modern right radical movements. Communism demonized the Interwar far right, but when communism itself became demonized after 1989, that allowed some political actors to

⁸ Pirro, 606-607.

⁹ Clericalism has been gaining ground in Bulgaria too recently in relation to the ongoing issues of security and national culture in the aftermath of the refugee and terrorism crises.

¹⁰ James Frusetta and Anca Glont, “Interwar fascism and the post-1989 radical right: Ideology, opportunism and historical legacy in Bulgaria and Romania”, in *Historical Legacies*, ed. Minkenberg, 159.

reintroduce radical nationalism as a potent and unifying anti-communist symbol. Thus, Interwar movements became a repository, a symbolic “heritage” that contemporary far right movements could utilize to substantiate their aggressive and populist programs. Frusetta and Glont point this thesis in the direction of locating continuities on a discursive, rhetoric and symbolic level. However, their analysis overgeneralizes the ideological and contextual aspects of the two periods and remains inconclusive on the palingenetic nature of the ideology of the Bulgarian Interwar and modern far right. More importantly, their preference for an ideological comparison obscures the perception of societal crisis and challenges to the national identity that unite both phenomena and suggest continuities.

The theoretical debate on historical continuities and discontinuities of the far right, which originally dominated the comparative literature, has recently receded in importance, however. On one hand, such formations are more commonly perceived as *sui generis* phenomena contingent on the latest political and economic developments on the national and global scale. On the other hand, since these formations and their ideas have already proven their influence and salience, research has shifted towards their political programs, methods of mobilization and constituencies. Thus, referencing modern-day nationalistic parties’ historical background or legacies has become a mandatory footnote but research on their potential Interwar roots has seen little progress.

Nevertheless, several key works provide the methodological, theoretical and conceptual backbone of this thesis as they aptly capture (albeit with only occasional cross-temporal references) two of the main topics of concern to this study – the ideology and discourse of nationalistic organizations. The first one is Ruth Wodak, et al.’s edited collection of interdisciplinary essays on right-wing populism in Europe. The volume is essential for understanding the development, discourse, rhetoric, and populist nature of modern right-wing

parties in Europe. Ruth Wodak and Majid KhosraviNik introduce populism as a defining feature of the modern far right by pointing out its lack of coherent ideology, substituted by “a mixed bag of beliefs, stereotypes, attitudes and related programmes which aim to address and mobilize a range of equally contradictory segments of the electorate.”¹¹ Anton Pelinka elaborates that right-wing radicals use an anti-elitist and anti-cosmopolitan populism, a “leftist rhetoric, always suspiciously missing one element of traditional socialism: the international dimension,” and ethnically exclusive, “directed against the enemy who is considered to be foreign – ethnically, culturally and religiously foreign.”¹² Several other essays illuminate various aspects of the far-right discourse in Europe but rarely reference the pre-World War II Eastern Europe. Aristotle Kallis’s analysis on the ‘mainstreaming’ of extreme ideas in European societies, particularly regarding anti-Muslim sentiments, and Hans-Georg Betz’s discussion of the populist right’s anti-Islamic campaign provide insights into one of the hottest issues for contemporary nationalists. András Kovács’s chapter on the Hungarian extreme right party *Jobbik* brings the Eastern European perspective into a book predominantly focused on Western Europe.

Ruth Wodak features in this thesis with another important edited book examining the explicitly fascist nuances of Europe’s far-right discourse which “frequently draw in fascist and national-socialist ideologies, themes, arguments, topoi and lexical items as well as idioms.”¹³ Acknowledging the changed political landscape of the post-World War II period, the authors

¹¹ Ruth Wodak and Majid KhosraviNik, “Dynamics of Discourse and Politics in Right-wing Populism in Europe and Beyond: An Introduction,” in *Right-Wing Populism in Europe: Politics and Discourse*, ed. Wodak et al. (London, New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), xvii.

¹² Anton Pelinka, “Right-Wing Populism: Concepts and Typology,” in *Right-Wing Populism*, ed. Wodak et al., 7-8.

¹³ Ruth Wodak and John E. Richardson, “European Fascism in Talk and Text – Introduction,” in *Analysing Fascist Discourse: European Fascism in Talk and Text*, ed. Ruth Wodak and John E. Richardson (New York: Routledge, 2013), 1.

pinpoint two main recurring strategies that modern-day exponents of fascist-like ideas adopt – “*dissociating* themselves from fascism and *rehabilitating* it.”¹⁴ Such “rebranding” strategies make the search for continuities and discontinuities particularly difficult but demonstrate the fluid nature of extreme right discourse and invite a thorough investigation of its numerous manifestations and strategies for realization. This thesis is methodologically indebted to Wodak’s volume which serves as an example on how to conduct critical discourse analysis covering a vast array of oral, visual, written and audio sources. The two introductory chapters by Wodak and Richardson, and Daniel Woodley, are most helpful theoretically and methodologically but the chapters on France, Romania and Hungary also deal with continuities and discontinuities in discourse and ideologies between political formations from both periods.

Two anthologies on fascism by Constantin Iordachi and Aristotle Kallis are less concerned with linking the modern with the Interwar far right but nevertheless steer the thesis’ theoretical conceptualization of the ideology and themes of the far right.¹⁵ Iordachi overviews modern theories on fascism by leading experts such as Rogers Griffin, Stanley Payne, George Mosse, Emilio Gentile, Robert Paxton, and Zeev Sternhell. He pinpoints the theoretical limitations of the Marxist interpretations of Interwar history – problems which have also deterred Bulgarian scholars during the communist period from adopting an objective view of Interwar fascism. The two volumes discuss definitions of fascism, the concept of generic fascism, and theoretical debates on fascism from a comparative perspective, offering a conceptual and theoretical framework that can be borrowed to discuss Interwar far right movements in Bulgaria as well.

¹⁴ Ibid., 3.

¹⁵ Constantin Iordachi (ed.), *Comparative Fascist Studies: New Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2009); Aristotle A. Kallis (ed.), *The Fascism Reader* (London & New York: Routledge, 2003).

Notably, most of the authors represented in these two anthologies concur on the primary role of the nation and its rebirth, or palingenesis, in fascist ideology. Ultranationalism, a key ideological feature in modern-day far ideology,¹⁶ links them to their Interwar counterparts.

1.1.1. Literature on the Interwar Period

Research on the Bulgarian Interwar nationalistic organizations is surprisingly sparse, despite the enormous outpourings of general literature on the period. Historian Nikolai Poppetrov is rare in discussing the topic of Interwar Bulgarian nationalism and its political manifestations.¹⁷ Poppetrov traces the development of Bulgarian fascism in terms of ideology, propaganda, organization and proponents with the caveat that the “fascist” label should be used cautiously when applied to organizations which differed greatly in their espousal of fascist symbols and ideology. The book borrows from Ernst Nolte’s classification of Interwar fascist movements and offers a useful periodization and typology of Bulgarian Interwar fascism with clearly discernible stages of development and movements.¹⁸ It steers this thesis in dealing with Interwar nationalistic organizations’ ideology and also tackles the question of these organizations’ authenticity. Poppetrov also compiled a valuable anthology containing programs and organizational documents and publications of key Bulgarian authoritarian formations.¹⁹

¹⁶ See again Michael Minkenberg’s definition of right wing radicalism in the beginning of the thesis.

¹⁷ Nikolai Poppetrov, *Fashizmăt v Bălgariia: Razvitie i proiavi* [Fascism in Bulgaria: Development and Manifestations] (Sofia: Kama, 2008).

¹⁸ Ibid., 9.

¹⁹ Nikolai Poppetrov, *Sotsialno – naliavo, natsionalizmăt – napred. Programni i organizatsionni dokumenti na bălgarski avtoritaristki natsionalisticheski formatsii* [Left to the left, nationalism –

A chapter by the historian Maria Todorova in Peter Sugar's edited volume *Eastern European Nationalism in the Twentieth Century* expands Poppetrov's periodization to include Bulgarian nationalist movements from the establishment of independent Bulgaria in 1878 until the first years of the post-communist period. She discusses the continuity of nationalistic discourse by analyzing four texts, one from each of the four periods that she identifies as distinct. Her insights on the 1918-1944 period, labelled "nationalism in crisis: revisionism," suggest that Bulgarian nationalism then "lost its almost unanimous voice and was being articulated in different pitches and with varying degrees of intensity."²⁰ This emerging gap between the proponents of the "extreme type of exclusive Bulgarian nationalism" and the vast majority of Bulgarians explains the former's limited popular support but does not mean that nationalism has ever lost its significance for Bulgarians, as Todorova reveals in her subsequent treatment of nationalism under communism.²¹ Rejecting the popular myth about nationalism being "frozen" under communism and "resurfacing" after 1989, Todorova claims that while "the greatest discontinuity of Bulgarian nationalism is in the realm of political aims," it "has demonstrated a remarkable continuity of ideas and feelings," most importantly in the language of discourses.²² Furthermore, Todorova aptly predicts that post-1989 Bulgarian nationalism will evolve to "adapt the language of the hegemonic discourse of democracy to the needs of the national ideology."²³

march forward! Programs and organizational documents of Bulgarian authoritarian nationalism formations] (Sofia: Gutenberg, 2009).

²⁰ Maria Todorova, "The Courses and Discourses of Bulgarian Nationalism", in *Eastern European Nationalism in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Peter Sugar, (Washington D.C.: American University Press, 1995), 84.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 84-85.

²² *Ibid.*, 101.

²³ *Ibid.*, 102

The current thesis picks up where Todorova stopped and argues that the period after 1989 has seen certain shifts in the nationalist discourse but its core remains unchallenged.

Apart from Todorova's chapter and Poppetrov's general overview, discourse analysis is yet to make up ground in Bulgaria and to cover the Interwar period. In fact, historical accounts have often omitted the political development and manifestations of nationalistic organizations. Both Bulgarian and foreign scholarship "owe" the local radicals in terms of attention. Scholars of Balkan and Eastern European history, such as Richard Crampton, Joseph Held, Stevan Pavlowitch, Barbara Jelavic and Joseph Rothschild, have barely scratched the surface in their accounts of the Interwar period with sections on Interwar Bulgaria.²⁴ In their books, the topic of right radicalism/nationalism is treated country by country and in a purely descriptive matter – without a serious discussion of common roots, development and ideologies. With the exception of Crampton's book, the comparative literature focus disproportionately on the Iron Guard and the Ustaša regime, with their Bulgarian counterparts mentioned only in passing. Still, the chapters present non-Bulgarian historians' neutral perspective on Interwar nationalism in the country and contrast it with the official historical narrative of Bulgarian historians during communism.²⁵

²⁴ Richard Crampton, *Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century – and after* (London: Routledge, 2000, c1997); Crampton, *A Short History of Modern Bulgaria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, c1987); Joseph Held (ed.), *The Columbia History of Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992); Stevan K. Pavlowitch, *A History of the Balkans 1804-1945* (London: Longman, 1999); Barbara Jelavich, *History of the Balkans, Vol. II: Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Joseph Rothschild, *East Central Europe between the Two World Wars* (New York: University of Washington Press, 1983).

²⁵ Richard Crampton points out the fascist character of the Interwar nationalistic organizations, at least in terms of paraphernalia, but underlines their lack of followers, attributing it to the maneuvering potential of the Bulgarian Tsar Boris III and to the fact that "the histrionic posturings of fascism did not suit the down to earth and somewhat phlegmatic character of the Bulgarians." (Crampton, *Eastern Europe*, 110); Pavlowitch claims that fascism "fed on fear and hatred – of socialism, of communism, of capitalism, of parliamentarism, of reason, of 'foreigners'"

Roumen Daskalov introduces the debate on the nature of Bulgarian Interwar political development.²⁶ He also tackles the topic of Bulgarian Interwar authoritarianism and fascism in his monograph *Bălgarskoto obshtestvo 1878-1939* (Bulgarian Society 1878-1939)²⁷ where he agrees with Poppetrov on a gradual fusion and symbiosis between fascism and authoritarianism in this context.²⁸ Daskalov focuses not only on political developments but also on the ideological and intellectual basis of the authoritarian and fascist tendencies in Interwar Bulgaria.

Two books address the topic of Bulgarian Interwar intellectuals and their relation to the political dynamics during the period – crucial for uncovering the Interwar discourses on modernism, crisis and identity. Ivan Elenkov traces the development of the Bulgarian right and dedicates significant attention to intellectuals who debated the need for reimagining the Bulgarian

within a without.” He concludes that the amorphous pell-mell group of Bulgarian fascists never managed to expand significantly and reach the political class or the peasantry and had limited support and role in the Interwar period because it was the monarch who appeared as “the ultimate constitutional factor,” who could “safeguard the status quo” and “satisfied the need for leadership.” (Pavlowitch, 272); Barbara Jelavich is also laconic in her treatment of Bulgarian Interwar nationalistic organizations. Sparing only a sentence to both General Hristo Lukov’s legions and Alexander Tsankov’s movement, she summarizes the years of most intense nationalistic propaganda with a similar statement that Tsar Boris “remained the center of political life...necessary to hold the system together.” (Jelavich, 258); Joseph Held’s edited volume on Eastern Europe in the twentieth century features a chapter on Bulgaria by historian Marin Pundeff and an introductory chapter on Eastern Europe by Stephan Fischer-Galati which essentially repeat the abovementioned conclusions. (Marin Pundeff, “Bulgaria” and Stephan Fischer-Galati, “Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century :“Old Wine in New Bottles” in *The Columbia History*, ed. Joseph Held, 65-118; 1-18) Pundeff contributes more thoroughly to the topic of Bulgarian nationalism with his chapter in Ivo Lederer and Peter Sugar’s edited book *Nationalism in Eastern Europe*. There Pundeff offers a political history supplement to the previously mentioned intellectual approach to the topic of Bulgarian nationalism by Maria Todorova. (Pundeff, “Bulgarian Nationalism,” in *Nationalism in Eastern Europe*, ed. Peter Sugar and Ivo Lederer, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1969) 93-195.).

²⁶ Roumen Daskalov, *Debating the Past: Modern Bulgarian History: from Stambolov to Zhivkov* (Budapest, New York: Central European University Press, 2011), 145-222.

²⁷ Roumen Daskalov, *Bălgarskoto obshtestvo 1878-1939* t.1-2 [Bulgarian Society 1878-1939 vol.1-2] (Sofia: IK Gutenberg, 2005).

²⁸ Ibid., vol. 1, 225.

self within the context of the changing political and intellectual climate of the *Interbellum*.²⁹ Thinkers such as Spiridon Kazandzhiev, Yanko Yanev, and Nayden Sheytanov, are also examined in Nina Dimitrova's book on Bulgarian intelligentsia in the Bulgarian Interwar media. She reconstructs the intellectual discourse(s) and the role of intellectuals in Interwar Bulgaria by analyzing their utterances in contemporary periodicals. She concludes that "neglecting the intelligentsia as a social force is typical for both the far left and the far right" but it prevents us from conceptualizing the modern intellectual debates in Bulgaria.³⁰

Balazs Trencsényi's book on Interwar East European thought embarks on a similar task – to unpack the intellectual discourses of the period.³¹ It provides an extensive study of the political and intellectual discourses about the nation in Interwar Bulgaria with particular attention to radical intellectual projects and their complex relationship to modernism. Trencsényi analyzes primary texts by Interwar Bulgarian intellectuals and traces the crucial debate on racial and ethnic categories. The latter differed from those in Germany or other European countries, as it was "one of the few examples of an open debate between advocates of racism and anti-racists of which both fractions occupied important positions in academia in their country."³² The debate served as

²⁹ Ivan Elenkov, *Rodno i diasno. Prinós kăm istoriata na nesbădnatiia "desen proekt" v Bulgaria ot vremeto mezhdu dvete svetovni voini* [Native and Right: Contribution to the History on the Unrealized "Right Project" in Bulgaria during the Period between the Two World Wars] (Sofia: Lik, 1998).

³⁰ Nina Dimitrova, *Chasăt na bălgarskata inteligentsiia. Bălgarskata inteligentsiia v mezhduvoenniiia periodichen pechat* [The Time of Bulgarian Intelligentsia: Bulgarian Intelligentsia in the Interwar Periodicals] (Sofia:Paradigma, 2010), 173

³¹ Balazs Trencsényi, *The Politics of "National Character": A Study in Interwar East European Thought* (London & New York: Routledge, 2012).

³² Christian Promitzer, "Racism under the Protection of Biology" – A Controversy among Bulgarian Scholars about "Race", "Nation", and "Biology" on the Eve of the Second World War", *Balkanistichen forum* [Balkanistic Forum] 1 (2015): 237, accessed February 20, 2016, <https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=48760>.

the focal point of Interwar discussions on racism and Social Darwinism and links Interwar intellectuals with the politically active recipients of their ideas.

Bulgarian historiography produced during the communist period stands in stark contrast to the abovementioned accounts by Todorova, Daskalov, Trencsényi and Poppetrov. The Bulgarian historians Ilcho Dimitrov and Vladimir Migevev echo the dominant Marxist view (strongly influenced by Georgi Dimitrov) on Interwar nationalistic organizations in Bulgaria, arguing that they were part of the “monarcho-fascist” dictatorship of the Bulgarian tsar and represented “a political manifestation and ideological base of the state-monopoly stage of capitalism” and “the most reactionary elements of financial capitalism.”³³ Dimitrov discusses the attempts to create a large anti-fascist opposition to the Tsarist regime and its fascist proponents, which are however discarded as “insignificantly influential, organizationally and politically disunited, entangled in internal discord and struggle.”³⁴ Vladimir Migevev’s book is much more focused on the ideological aspects of the Bulgarian far right. The two authors, on one hand, demonstrate the ideological limitations of communist historiography and, on the other, give a glimpse of the “fascist character” of the other political forces in Interwar Bulgaria which suggests the spread of far right ideas beyond the pool of their main proponents.

Zhelyazko Kolev’s book on the Union of Bulgarian National Legions (*UBNL*) suffers from the same shortcomings as Migevev and Dimitrov’s accounts – viewing Interwar nationalist

³³ Ilcho Dimitrov, *Bălgarskata demokraticzna obshtestvenost, fashizmăt i vojnata 1934-1939* [The Bulgarian Democratic Society, Fascism and the War 1934-1939] (Sofia: Otechestven front, 1976); Vladimir Migevev, *Utvărzhdavane na monarcho-fashistkata diktatura v Bălgariia 1934-1936* [Establishment of Monarcho-fascist dictatorship in Bulgaria 1934-1936] (Sofia: Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, 1977).

³⁴ Dimitrov, 193

organizations from a strong doctrinal paradigm.³⁵ Kolev follows the Legion's creation, organizational principles and structure, social base, activities, ideology and interaction with the state and the other far right organizations in Interwar Bulgaria. Notwithstanding the book's large primary resource base, Kolev, just like Migevev and Dimitrov, reveals the inherent problems with most Marxist interpretations of Interwar fascist – “marred by ideological presuppositions and a rigid schema of history” which “continued to stress the statist, dictatorial dimension of fascist regime, paying less attention to the nationalist, populist and revolutionary character of the fascist movements on which these regimes were built.”³⁶

A recent study of Interwar fascism in Bulgaria, intended to serve as a counterpoint to the Marxist interpretation, bears a different bias. Nikola Altankov offers a sympathetic, if not outright apologetic, account of the Interwar Bulgarian far right movements who “were called fascists” but in the author's view represented an authentic and genuine attempt of a segment of the Bulgarian population and elite to find a solution to the perceived as inherent problems of modernization, liberalism and democracy.³⁷ Altankov denounces the overuse of the term fascism in Bulgarian communist historiography as an all-encompassing umbrella under which almost all Interwar political formations have been lumped but tries to rehabilitate them even when certain strands of their ideology can be unequivocally considered fascist. He does not only consider these formations “an important factor in the development of the country in that period which cannot be neglected” but also assesses them as “a positive phenomenon in the life of Bulgaria.”³⁸

³⁵ Zhelyazko Kolev, *Săyuz na bălgarskite natsionalni legioni* [Union of the Bulgarian National Legions] (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1976).

³⁶ Constantin Iordachi, “Comparative Fascist Studies: An Introduction” in *Comparative Fascist Studies: New Perspectives*, ed. Constantin Iordachi, (London: Routledge, 2009), 8

³⁷ Nikola Altankov, *Narekoha gi fashisti* [They Were Called Fascists] (Sofia: TanNakra, 2004).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

The far-right Interwar propaganda is another insufficiently analyzed dimension. Gergana Velichkova's main task in her book on the topic is to trace the infiltration and spread of fascist ideas in Bulgaria through the influence of the Italian propaganda, the local nationalistic organizations and the fascist literature published in Bulgaria in the period 1922-1934.³⁹ Her book assesses the influence of the Italian Fascist model on Interwar Bulgarian political formations in the 1920s and early 1930s but stops in 1934, right at the point when the international political context preconditioned the further intensification of extreme right ideas and the mushrooming of new nationalistic organizations which looked for ideological guidance mainly towards Nazi Germany, rather than Fascist Italy. Nevertheless, she researches extensive primary material, and offers unbiased evaluation of the extent to which fascist ideas became a commonplace in the discussed period. Her analysis of the publications of the Union "Bulgarian Fatherland Defense" is particularly valuable since the organization served as the ideological, intellectual and organizational precursor of the two most significant nationalistic organizations of the 1930s, the *UBNL* and the Warriors for the Advancement of Bulgarianness (*Ratniks*).

1.1.2. Scholarship on the Post-1989 Nationalist Movements

The dynamic development of Bulgarian politics after 1989 reveals an ongoing contestation on the nature of Bulgarian nationalism, its discourses and political implications. Only in the last decade several new political formations have emerged on the far right and have attempted to

³⁹ Gergana Velichkova, *Propaganda na fashizma v Bălgariia 1922-1934* [Fascist Propaganda in Bulgaria 1922-1934] (Sofia: Talia, 2002).

appropriate nationalistic ideas and rhetoric. At the same time more moderate and centrist parties have not stayed idle and demonstrate a growing tendency to jump on the nationalistic bandwagon and espouse its rhetoric on specific issues. This volatile political situation and the temporal proximity of political developments partially accounts for the limited amount of attention given to the modern Bulgarian far right, despite its established position as a factor on the Bulgarian political arena in the past decade. Among the few political scientists who have attempted an analysis of the ideology, discourse and manifestations of contemporary Bulgarian nationalism, even fewer have dug deeper into history to trace whether the Interwar period and its respective nationalistic political formations bear any significance for modern-day nationalists. Nevertheless, scholarship on the contemporary Bulgarian far right has been more concerned with analyzing discourses rather than simply portraying political developments and therefore takes a more critical stance to ideologies than most works on Interwar Bulgarian nationalistic organizations. The studies below unpack various aspects of the rhetoric of the modern Bulgarian far right and contribute towards constructing a thorough picture of its discourse and ideological profile.

A central theme in contemporary far right discourse in Bulgaria is covered in Georgia Efremova's chapter on Bulgarian anti-Roma politics and discourse in Michael Stewart's edited volume, overviewing modern anti-Roma rhetoric in Europe.⁴⁰ Efremova's chapter is a crucial source for analyzing the role of the populist far right movements in spreading integralist ideas of the nation and excluding the Roma from their concept of the nation. Her text contributes to the part of the thesis discussing the anti-Roma rhetoric as the most widespread act of hate speech and a vital component of the modern far right ideology in Bulgaria. Georgia Efremova's chapter is

⁴⁰ Georgia Efremova, "Integralist Narratives and Redemptive Anti-Gypsy Politics in Bulgaria," in *The Gypsy 'Menace': Populism and the New Anti-Gypsy Politics*, ed. Michael Stewart, (London: Hurst & Company, 2012), 43-66.

significant in another aspect – she uses Mabel Berezin’s approach to analyzing far right discourse by focusing on key events and their emotional resonance in changing perceptions of the Bulgarian society and promoting far right integralist redemptive narrative.

Closely related to the rhetoric and the structural basis for the anti-Roma discourse of the Bulgarian far right party ATAKA is Stela Krasteva’s MA thesis. The sociologist traces the conditions and means through which ATAKA has succeeded in manipulating and politicizing the Roma issue in the country. Her thesis demonstrates the dangerous potential of political entrepreneurs who draw from pre-existing stereotypical cultural repertoires regarding Bulgaria’s minorities and frame socio-economic problems and contingent events in racist terms. Recent political developments in Bulgaria since the completion of Krasteva’s thesis in 2007 answer her concluding question whether ATAKA’s quick rise to success can be viewed as a “curious case study of the past or a precedent (and perhaps a source of salient themes) for future politicization of the Roma ethnicity in Bulgaria.”⁴¹

Christo Ivanov and Margarita Ilieva also work on policies and discourses directed against the perceived “others” in Bulgaria. Their book predates the popularity of the most important contemporary nationalistic parties and organizations, but it still portrays a picture of Bulgarian society in which racially-charged violence and discourse, particularly against the Roma minority, is widespread and meets with striking negligence on behalf of Bulgarian authorities and civil

⁴¹ Stela Krasteva, “Structure, Opportunity, Agency and Contingency as Conditions for Politicizing Ethnicity: ATAKA and “The Roma” in Bulgaria,” (Master’s thesis, UCLA, 2007), 48.

society.⁴² Furthermore, Ivanov and Ilieva's study provides a very useful map of the post-1989 extremist groups, overviewing their political views, activities and channels of communication.

Slightly outdated but still extremely important is Alfred Krispin et al.'s study of antisemitic books, published between 1990 and 2003, and various media outlets representing Jews for the period 16.12.2002-31.12.2003. The research aim is to determine whether "antisemitism in Bulgaria represents a growing and potentially dangerous phenomenon, or is only a temporary marginal disturbance, caused by individuals with twisted reasoning, gravitating in the periphery of the political and social spectrum."⁴³ Their results demonstrate an increase in antisemitic discourse which is however limited primarily to several low-profile newspapers and magazines, few local cable TV channels (most notably the "SKAT" TV channel – subsequently the mouthpiece of the nationalist political party ATAKA) and a growing number of Internet forums. The authors conclude that, as of the time of their research, antisemitism in modern-day Bulgaria does not represent a serious danger and is mainly a product of a few marginalized but very loud and outspoken activists whose antisemitism is more of a "demagogical means for attaining political gains or an outlet for complexes, caused by unsatisfied personal ambitions."⁴⁴

Krispin's book briefly touches upon a phenomenon more thoroughly analyzed by Christian Vatchkov, namely the influence of the social networks on the construction of identity and the overall discourse on the "national idea(s)". Vatchkov uses Thomas Eriksen's work *Nations in Cyberspace* (2006) as well as Rogers Brubaker's concept of *groupism* to analyze nationalistic

⁴² Christo Ivanov and Margarita Ilieva, "Bulgaria," in *Racist Extremism in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Cas Mudde (London & New York: Routledge, 2005), 2.

⁴³ Alfred Krispin, "Ima li antisemitizăm v Bălgariia dnes," [Is there antisemitism in Bulgaria today] in *Antisemitizăm v Bălgariia dnes* [Antisemitism in Bulgaria Today], ed. Alfred Krispin (Sofia: Colibri, 2004), 12.

⁴⁴ Krispin., 26-28

websites, Roma and Turkish forums and Facebook pages which all serve as disseminators of *groupism* by uniting users around an ethnically constructed stance.⁴⁵ His findings demonstrate that the online space presents a fertile ground for the spread and communication of far right ideas.

Grappling with the issue of ideology of the most popular Bulgarian nationalistic formation – ATAKA, Kristen Ghodsee analyzes how ATAKA plays up ethnic and religious intolerance to garner support for its political project. She claims that the party targets far-right support but ultimately pushes forward a far-left political agenda. Her article examines the populism of ATAKA and its leader, Volen Siderov, by analyzing their rhetoric through speeches, newspaper articles as well as Siderov’s books. Ghodsee concludes that ATAKA’s change of political orientation towards Russia is paradoxical given its initial rhetoric but might as well turn out to be a winning strategy as long as the party maintains its “nationalistic xenophobia and hysteria about the ‘Gypsy terror,’” and argues in favor of the “return and redistribution of illegally gotten wealth.”⁴⁶

Three additional studies concentrating solely on ATAKA by Yannis Sygkelos, Antoniy Todorov and Nadege Ragaru also feature in the set of secondary literature on modern-day nationalist discourse. Sygkelos offers an interesting analysis of one of the main tenants of the ideology of ATAKA – its Euroscepticism and opposition to the process of European integration. Sygkelos argues that the nationalism that ATAKA propagates is “incompatible with the economic and political internationalization that the project of European integration and

⁴⁵ Christian Vatchkov, “Etnicheski sblāsātsi v bālgarskoto virtualno prostranstvo: edin nevāzmozhen stsenarii” [“Ethnic conflicts in the Bulgarian virtual space: An infeasible scenario”], *Kritika i humanizām* [Critique and Humanism Journal] 39 (2012): 304, accessed November 28, 2015, <https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=252362>.

⁴⁶ Kristen Ghodsee, “Left Wing, Right Wing, Everything: Xenophobia, Neo-Totalitarianism and Populist Politics in Bulgaria,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 55, no. 3 (May/June 2008): 37, accessed February 22, 2016, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2753/PPC1075-8216550303>.

unification generates.”⁴⁷ Todorov discusses the ideological profile, activities and electoral performance of ATAKA. His study also describes the activities of the far right and briefly outlines several events which have proved crucial for rallying the far right supporters – the “Katunitza” case (in relation to Roma), the case of the Sofia City Mosque (against Muslims), the 2011 Gay Parade (in relation to democracy, European identity, LGBT activism, etc.) and the Lukov March.⁴⁸ Todorov’s analysis provides a valuable example of a methodological approach to similar events as turning points for fomenting nationalist fervor. Last but not least, Ragaru’s article researches the voting behavior and social background of ATAKA’s supporters. Ragaru argues that despite recent mishaps which compromised ATAKA’s electoral performance and popularity, its ideas and rhetoric have become banalized and widespread among the so-called “normal” parties.⁴⁹ The paper’s argument (also articulated in Efremova’s previously mentioned chapter) is in line with the current thesis’s position that the far right discourse in Bulgaria has been transformed into mainstream language of the majority of the Bulgarian political elite.

Recent scholarship on the Bulgarian far right has already started moving beyond ATAKA. Kiril Avramov problematizes the interplay between the “generic” and “right radical” versions of the populist right in Bulgaria (instead of the “soft” and “hard” designations), represented respectively by the leading center-right party GERB (Citizens for European Development of

⁴⁷ Yannis Sygkelos, “Nationalism versus European Integration: The Case of ATAKA”, *East European Quarterly*, 43, no. 2-3 (June-September 2015): 163, accessed 20 March, 2016, <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2706052>.

⁴⁸ Antoniy Todorov, “The Extreme Right Wing in Bulgaria,” *International Policy Analysis* (January 2013): 5-7, accessed February 2, 2016, <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/sofia/09690.pdf>.

⁴⁹ Nadege Ragaru, “Votāt za politicheska partiia Ataka. Prenachertavane na simvolnite granitsi sled sotsializma,” [Voting for Party “Ataka” in Bulgaria. Reshaping the Symbolic Boundaries after Socialism] *Kritika i humanizām* [Critique and Humanism] 41 (2013): 243, accessed November 28, 2015, <https://www.cceol.com/search/article-detail?id=168649>.

Bulgaria) and the populist radical right party ATAKA.⁵⁰ Avramov's analysis of the political developments in the country until the 2013 parliamentary elections reveal two potentially threatening results of the recent mainstreaming of ATAKA and the general far right discourse. On one hand, the process has "created a demand and made space for new entrants ready to supply even 'harder' versions of populism," while on the other, it has led to mainstream political actors such as GERB adopting "some of the most abrasive standards, resulting in a growth of hate speech and intolerance in public life."⁵¹ Avramov further notes the annual commemoration of the death of the Interwar far right leader General Hristo Lukov as an event not only increasing the public visibility of modern far right organizations but also contributing to their "legitimization and identification via symbolic connections with certain ideological predecessors from the interwar period."⁵²

The theoretical and literature overview of studies on Interwar and modern Bulgarian nationalistic organizations reveals a dearth of adequate analyses of their structural and/or symbolic and rhetoric continuities and discontinuities. The issue is mainly approached from a discursive-analytical framework which often lacks sufficient contextual basis. Moreover, the Bulgarian case has simply failed to capture the interest of researchers dealing with the ideology and manifestations of radicalism both now and in the past. The current thesis aims at rectifying some of this "injustice" done to the Bulgarian extreme right by analyzing its ideology, discourse and context and identifying the links between its representatives from the Interwar and the post-1989 period.

⁵⁰ Kiril Avramov, "The Bulgarian radical right," in *Transforming the Transformation*, ed. Minkenberg, 300-301.

⁵¹ Avramov, 315

⁵² Ibid., 313-314

1.2. Methodology

Undoubtedly, researching political formations operating in a completely different historical timeframe presents a challenge. In terms of channels of communication, audience reach and electorate mobilization, the Interwar and the modern far right reveal a much changed picture. Problems of similar nature occur when the availability of primary sources is considered with an obvious bias in favor of the contemporary period. At the same time, for all its easier accessibility, the enormous and constantly growing flow of information regarding the modern far right could obstruct research if not filtered properly. Therefore, practical considerations have predetermined the selection of source material and methodology for each period.

In terms of overall methodological framework, the thesis uses qualitative content analysis and critical discourse analysis. The former predominates the treatment of Interwar sources while the later, due to its more encompassing features, is reserved for the post-1989 period. Both methods are essentially types of discourse analysis which “emphasizes the way various versions of the world, of society, events and inner psychological worlds are produced in language.”⁵³ The focus of the thesis on the ideologies of certain political movements and how these might relate to and feed off each other necessitates that most of the analysis is on language and texts. However, both the Interwar and the modern far right operated not only on linguistic level but participated in social life through political actions, events, use of symbols, etc. Therefore, since the thesis looks simultaneously at the historical and socio-political context in which the two objects of analysis existed, critical discourse analysis is chosen as the main research method. More specifically, the

⁵³ Michael Q. Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2002), 146.

thesis adopts its discourse-historical approach which “always attempts to integrate as much available information as possible on the historical background and the original historical sources in which discursive ‘events’ are embedded” and traces “the diachronic change, which particular types of discourse undergo during a specific period of time.”⁵⁴

To reconstruct and analyze the modern far right, the thesis relies on extensive use of primary sources such as ATAKA’s official newspaper, website and TV channel,⁵⁵ Volen Siderov’s books, parliamentary speeches and publications of prominent politicians, journalists and activists affiliated to ATAKA and similar parties and organizations. Apart from ATAKA, two other nationalistic political formations play a moderate role in the analysis – the Bulgarian National Union which alongside ATAKA intensely propagated the image of the state in crisis and “gypsy criminality” and the Patriotic Front – a coalition of the National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria (NFSB) and the IMRO (a party, claiming descent from the original Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization), which is currently influential in the Bulgarian parliament. The political activity and the publications of these formations help construct a more comprehensive picture of the current far right stream in Bulgaria. Nevertheless, for both pragmatic and conceptual reasons, the discourse of ATAKA is considered as most representative of the whole nationalistic camp and therefore predominates.

⁵⁴ Rudolf de Cillia, et al., *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, c2009), 7-8.

⁵⁵ Unfortunately, after the split between the SKAT TV channel and Volen Siderov video recordings of his initial TV broadcasts during his first election campaign turned almost impossible to be found. Still, courtesy of Stela Krasteva, a researcher who has worked on ATAKA’s discourse, some audio recordings of Siderov’s days at SKAT were obtained. The recordings are from 03.01.2005 to 05.03.2005. All other video footage from Siderov’s shows is thematically chosen from the subsequently found party TV channel Alfa ATAKA which is still functioning.

Several discursive events, above all the Lukov march, are chosen to narrow down the vast corpus of related materials and allow a thorough critical discourse analysis. Moreover, focusing on events enriches the nexus of the thesis – structure and discourse. The significance of events lies in their function and essence, described by the social scientist William Sewell as “sequences of occurrence that result in transformations of structures.”⁵⁶ Building on critiques to Sewell’s work on events, sociologist Mabel Berezin suggests that instead of focusing on events which are undoubtedly accepted as pivotal moments in history, we should rather conceptualize events as “templates of possibility that collectivities experience as political facts” which “permit us to see relations and interconnections that speak to broader macro- and micro-level social processes,” regardless whether these events fulfilled their transforming potential.⁵⁷ Already mentioned in the literature review section, the work of Stela Krasteva and Georgia Efremova on the modern Bulgarian far right and the Roma utilizes such an approach and demonstrates that event analysis is particularly beneficial for studying the far right and its means of mobilization, spread and transformation of existing or new political discourses. In the current thesis, the analysis of Lukov march attempts to suggest a similar function for the event.

The Bulgarian Interwar far right is very well-documented in the anthology compiled by Nikolai Poppetrov, containing the programs and organizational documents of the Bulgarian nationalistic formations.⁵⁸ Additional primary research is limited to several newspapers and magazines which were the mouthpiece of the main Interwar nationalistic organizations and

⁵⁶ William H. Sewell, *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 227.

⁵⁷ Mabel Berezin, “Chapter 23: Events as templates of possibility: An analytical typology of political facts,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Cultural Sociology*, ed. Jeffrey Alexander, Ronald Jacobs and Philip Smith (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 613-635.

⁵⁸ Nikolai Poppetrov, *Sotsiano - naliavo*

influential in the development of far right political thought in Bulgaria. The ones considered are *Mosht* [Might], *Idei i dela* [Ideas and actions] and *Prelom* [Watershed] for the *UBNL*, *Prolom* [Breakthrough] for the *Ratniks* and *Rodna zashtita* [Fatherland Defense] for the nationalistic organization with the same name. The thesis again pays attention on events which were significant for the period and resonate with modern-day nationalists – the murder of the leader of *UBNL*, General Hristo Lukov, and the “salvation” of the Bulgarian Jews.

The thesis looks at primary and secondary sources of both modern and Interwar nationalistic organizations through the prism of leading theories of fascism, right radicalism and populism, and seeks for common ideological patterns and the discursive strategies and topoi through which they are expressed in the public sphere. As mentioned earlier, the analytical findings are positioned within the theoretical framework of modern research on the continuities and discontinuities of far right political thought and politics within Europe.

Chapter 2: The “Authoritarian Cocktail” of the Interwar Period

The Interwar period, spanning over just two decades, produced radical alternatives to the liberal democratic system, coming from both left and right. The ruling parties were under constant pressure not only from the communists, which were a continuous source of legal and illegal opposition, but also from an emerging radical stream on the right side of the political spectrum. The nationalistic organizations, labeling themselves as patriotic, flirted with authoritarian and fascist ideas which gained momentum as Mussolini’s Italy and Hitler’s Germany set the stage for such tendencies to spread beyond their initial Italian host. As Bulgaria experienced its own authoritarian coup in 1934, these previously marginalized political formations received a new impetus to challenge for a leading role in Bulgarian politics. This thesis identifies three of these organizations as most representative for the state of development of the Interwar Bulgarian far right. The Union of Bulgarian National Legions and the Warriors for the Advancement of Bulgarianness, are chosen for being the most popular non-state political formations while the Union “Bulgarian Fatherland Defense,” is considered as the ideological and mobilizational precursor not only of the two organizations but of the entire far right Interwar current.⁵⁹ This chapter offers a brief historical and contextual overview of these organizations and then proceeds with four key themes in their ideology and rhetoric which, the thesis argues, bear resemblance with the ideology and rhetoric of the contemporary Bulgarian far right. At the very

⁵⁹ Nikolai Poppetrov, “Ideino-politicheski shvashtaniia na sąyuzu na bălgarskite natsionalni legion” i “Ratnitsi za napredăka na bălgarshtinata” v godinite na Vtorata svetovna voina,” [Ideological and politics beliefs of the Union of Bulgarian National Legions and the Warriors for the Advancement of Bulgarianness in the years of the Second World War] *Istoricheski pregled* [Historical review] 6 (1991): 53; Poppetrov, *Sotsialno – naliavo*, 215-216.

heart of these four themes lies the core idea about the organic Bulgarian nation – theme, also espoused by modern-day nationalists, allowing them to refurbish some of the concomitant key themes.

2.1. Context

The Union “Bulgarian Fatherland Defense” (hereafter referred to as *Fatherland Defense*), the Union of Bulgarian National Legions (*UBNL* or *the Legions*) and the Warriors for the Advancement of Bulgarianness (*Ratniks*) represent three of the most important right-wing organizations in Interwar Bulgaria. While scholarship has been divided on their nature, ideology and function within the Interwar political space, it is certain about that they all supported and openly propagated fascist ideas even if they did not wholeheartedly embrace the whole ideological package of either Italian Fascism or German National Socialism.⁶⁰ Common features between the three organizations and the rest of the nationalistic stream were anti-liberalism, anti-

⁶⁰ Classical Bulgarian Marxist historiography describes them as outright fascists and a vital pillar in sustaining the monarcho-fascist regime established as early as in 1923 (e.g. Zhelyazko Kolev, *Săyuz na bălgarskite natsionalni legioni*). However, due to internal ideological shifts and a general liberalization within the communist historiography even some of the works produced during the communist period demonstrate a more nuanced approach to Interwar history which resulted in pushing the starting point of the monarcho-fascist dictatorship up to 1934, absolving the so-called bourgeois parties from the fascist label as well as stressing the incomplete, underdeveloped and contested nature of Bulgarian fascism in comparison with Italian Fascism and German Nazism. (See Ilcho Dimitrov, *Bălgarskata demokraticzna obshtestvenost*; Vladimir Migeu, *Utvărzhdavane na monarcho-fashistkata diktatura*) Post-1989 critical approaches to Bulgarian fascism have built on that basis and there is currently a general consensus among historians of the Interwar period that while the Interwar regimes themselves cannot be classified as fascist but as authoritarian, fascism nevertheless took hold in Interwar Bulgaria, mainly through the nationalistic organizations, most of which openly espoused fascist ideas. (See the discussion/questionnaire on fascism in *Demokraticheski pregled* [Democratic review] 4-5 (1996), 368-381.

parlamentarianism, anti-individualism, anti-rationalism, ultra-nationalism (also referred to as “integral” or “radical” nationalism),⁶¹ extreme anti-communism, anti-cosmopolitanism and in some aspects anti-modernism, combined with ideas of regeneration of the nation, preference for hierarchy and discipline, authoritarian state and economic *dirigisme* along corporate lines. It should be noted that these organizations appeared at different historical moments within the Interwar period which is also reflected in their views and activities.

The first one to appear was *Fatherland Defense* which, according to Nikolai Poppetrov, belongs to the first phase of Bulgarian fascism – a period when proto-fascist organizations ushered in fascist ideas and attempted to acquaint the Bulgarian society with them.⁶² During this period, fascist ideas freely circulated in the country, officially or unofficially supported by the activities of local political, economic and cultural organizations as well as foreign ones, mainly related to Italy.⁶³ The second stage of Bulgarian fascism in Poppetrov’s chronology saw not only the intensification of fascist propaganda but also the mushrooming of nationalistic formations with a more pronounced fascist profile and ideas about transforming the political system. The political circle *Zveno* (Link), Alexander Tsankov’s National Social Movement, the *UBNL* and the National Fellowship for Political Revival (later National Fellowship of Fascists) all vied for a

⁶¹ Roger Griffin, “Fascism: ‘Rebirth’ and ‘Ultra-Nationalism,’” in *The Fascism Reader*, ed. Aristotle Kallis, 178.

⁶² Nikolai Poppetrov, *Fashizmăt*, 9.

⁶³ Gergana Velichkova (in Velichkova, *Propaganda na fashizma*, 21-96) describes the activities of such foreign organizations as the Italian Chamber of Commerce in Bulgaria, the Italian-Bulgarian Commercial Bank, the *fasci* established in Bulgaria, the Sofia section of the Italian League and its newspaper *Voce d’Italia*, the Italian-Bulgarian Society, the Institute Opera Italiana “Pro Oriente,” etc. as well as their local supporters – *Fatherland Defense*, the Bulgarian National Union “Kubrat,” the Union of Fighters/Bulgarians/Bulgarian Fascists and since 1927 the All-Bulgarian Union “Otets Paisii” which extensively published articles and organized lectures and gatherings in which the ideology of Italian Fascism was presented, explained and its applicability for Bulgaria debated.

role in the destabilized after the Great Depression political, economic and social order of the early 1930s. Most of these formations drew their leaders and followers from the already existing movements of the 1920s. Thus, the most popular nationalistic formation in the first decade after WWI, *Fatherland Defense*, was sapped of most of its membership base, split, and ultimately subsided into insignificance and obscurity. The new formations, which operated on the right side of the political spectrum from the 1930s onwards, were more energetic, ambitious and drastic in their demands for a complete overhaul of the political status quo, this time with coherently expressed authoritarian and fascist ideas in mind. In addition, the rise of Hitler and National Socialism in Germany gave them another example to look up to.

Zveno was the quickest to react to the changing European environment and dealt the final blow to parliamentary democracy on May 19, 1934, when it carried out a *coup d'état* amidst yet another parliamentary crisis. The political circle suspended the constitution, banned all parties and political formations and embarked on a wide program for political, economic and social renewal, heavily influenced by Italian fascism (above all, strong, authoritarian corporatist state which would regulate the relationship between labor and capital) but lacking key features such as mass political party and the leadership principle.⁶⁴ In addition, *Zveno* shared neither the xenophobia, antisemitism and biological racism of German National Socialism, nor its expansionist territorial program – features which found their way in the late 1930s evolution of the *UNBL* and in the *Ratniks* who appeared in 1936.

Even though *Zveno* was quickly pushed aside thanks to skillful political maneuvers of the Bulgarian Tsar Boris III, their 1934 coup represents a watershed moment for both Interwar Bulgaria's subsequent political development and for the other domestic right-wing forces. The

⁶⁴ Poppetrov, *Fashizmăt*, 42-43.

system never returned to parliamentary democracy but kept its authoritarian structure, with Tsar Boris strongly positioned at the very top, leaving little room for competitors and rendering the role of the nationalistic organizations quite uncertain. Never gaining the trust of the ultimate arbiter, Tsar Boris III, these organizations could not also count on substantial foreign support as it favored the traditional authoritarian elites. Nevertheless, pressure at home and possibly abroad to give them some credibility resulted in some members of the *UBNL* and the *Ratniks*, e.g. Hristo Lukov as Minister of War, Petar Gabrovski as Minister of Interior and Alexander Belev as head of the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs, being given important governmental positions. Nevertheless, even these moves did not put the nationalistic organizations at the political forefront. In fact, both in terms of ideology and actual political programs, these organizations seem to have suffered after the 1934 coup.

Comparing the political platforms of Tsankov's National Socialist Movement, the *UBNL* and the government in 1942, James Frusetta notes how hard it is to distinguish between the political plans of the three. Starting with *Zveno*'s rightist course in 1934 until the end of WWII and the communist takeover, the political measures initiated by the conservative elements in Interwar Bulgaria "acted to constrain the rise of mass fascist parties, partially by preempting elements of pro-fascist political platforms."⁶⁵ Referencing the similar cases of conservative regimes acting as a containment to fascists in Dolfuss' Austria, Horthy's Hungary, Greece, Yugoslavia and Romania, Frusetta suggests that Bulgarian pro-fascist formations were checked not only in terms of policies but also on a purely ideological basis. Indeed, once the old liberal-democratic order was scrapped, state-directed economy introduced, and the major points of the

⁶⁵ James Frusetta, "Fascism to Complete the National Project? Bulgarian Fascists' Uncertain Views on the Palingenesis of the Nation," *East Central Europe* 37 (2010): 292, accessed April 1, 2016, DOI 10.1163/187633010X534496.

national unification program fulfilled, it seemed that the ideological potential of the Bulgarian far right was largely exhausted. Furthermore, even when consecutive governments flirted at times with the possibility of using nationalistic organizations as a mass support base of the regime, they still lacked sufficient structural base – the middle class – to appear as force, strong enough to pass as either a competitor or a reliable ally of the regime.⁶⁶

Frusetta introduces one more important aspect in which the Bulgarian fascists fell short of the revolutionary nature of the Italian, German or Romanian models – the extent to which they truly embraced a palingenetic⁶⁷ vision of the nation. The historian argues that despite the “cult of the Revival”⁶⁸ that the Bulgarian far right did develop as a part of their re-birth projects, in reality there was an unspoken consensus the authoritarian conservatives and the pro-fascist right radicals that Bulgaria should continue the path of development set by the National Revival period of the previous century.⁶⁹ Therefore, the most obvious aspect which set apart the authoritarian conservative forces in power and their radical challengers was simply that the latter were more extreme in all of their demands. The xenophobia and antisemitism of the *UBNL* and particularly of the *Ratniks* provide an obvious example of such a cleavage.

Similarities in political programs and ideology between the regime in power and the Interwar extreme right provide a plausible explanation why the latter found themselves outflanked by political rivals. Yet, Maria Todorova suggests another reason why Bulgarian

⁶⁶ Daskalov, *Bălgarskoto obshtestvo 1878-1939* t.1, 233.

⁶⁷ Referring to Roger Griffin’s acclaimed definition of fascism as “a genus of political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism,” cited in Roger Griffin, “Fascism: General Introduction,” in *Comparative Fascist Studies*, ed. Iordachi, 118.

⁶⁸ At the same time it was not uncommon for nationalistic organizations such as the Bulgarian National Union “Kubrat” and most notably the Bulgarian Horde to valorize pre-Christian proto-Bulgarian myths, symbols and history.

⁶⁹ Frusetta, “Fascism to Complete the National Project,” 294-296.

nationalism, did not gain mass support. She characterizes Bulgarian nationalism as ultimately weak in nature but notes that during the Interwar period, it nevertheless produced nationalistic organizations who were “undoubtedly the most vociferous and some of the most active in generating nationalist propaganda.”⁷⁰ Despite their appearance, however, Todorova maintains that “proponents of these views are not representative of the overall scene of Bulgarian nationalism in this period.”⁷¹ Her analysis poses an interesting paradox – the general state of societal crisis in the period appears as both a stimulating and an inhibiting factor for the development of Bulgarian nationalism and its most staunch exponents – the far right organizations.

It is beyond the scope of the current thesis to delve deep into the Interwar crisis but it does serve as the most important background to the emergence and development of Interwar nationalistic organizations, even if it functioned more on the level of perceptions instead of actual implications. The crisis was perceived as such by the whole gamut of political and social actors. It started with the two “national catastrophes” – the Second Balkan War and the First World War which, according to contemporary intellectual historian Ivan Elenkov, left the whole war experience of “the victims at the battlefield, the territorial losses, the economic downfall, the collapse of the national ideals” to dominate the perceptions of total political and spiritual crisis in the Interwar years.⁷² The sense of humiliation and loss of the national ideal for territorial unification provided a further challenge to Bulgarian identity and morale and intensified the perception of an all-encompassing crisis.

⁷⁰ Maria Todorova, “Is there weak nationalism and is it useful category?,” *Nations and Nationalism* 21, no. 4 (2015): 681-699, accessed November 25, 2015, DOI: 10.1111/nana.12112.; Maria Todorova, “Bulgarian Nationalism,” 85.

⁷¹ Todorova, “Bulgarian Nationalism,” 85.

⁷² Elenkov, *Rodno i diasno*, 31.

It is of no surprise that solutions to this real and perceived deep societal crisis were sought in both the leftist, socialist and agrarian, and the rightist, conservative and radical, political circles. The pervasiveness of the crisis is reflected in all the thematic cores in the ideology of the three Interwar nationalistic organizations that the current thesis analyzes. It is to four key ideological and rhetorical themes, largely contingent on the context of the crisis and its solutions, that the thesis turns now.

2.2. Nationalism

If there is an ideological and discursive nexus of all the nationalistic organizations in Interwar Bulgaria, it is undoubtedly the idea of the nation. It lies at the center of their ideology, program and rhetoric, and represents the *raison d'être* for their appearance and activities. Nationalism as a discursive theme is developed in four main directions: the concept of the nation as a living organism, the nation in crisis and how it should be strengthened/consolidated/recovered, the theme about national rebirth, and the plans for the coveted national unification. While the first three are tightly intertwined, the fourth direction is more typical for the period of consolidated fascist character in the late 1930s and therefore appears more often in the rhetoric of the *UNBL* and the *Ratniks*.

In line with the understanding of the nation in the fascist and national-socialist ideology, Bulgarian Interwar nationalists see the nation in anthropomorphic terms as a living organism.⁷³ This organism is an entity, which can “decay” and be “regenerated”, it has “its own life-cycle,

⁷³ Todorova, “Bulgarian Nationalism,” 101

collective psyche, and communal destiny, embracing in principle the whole people (not just its ruling elites), and in practice all those who ethnically or culturally are ‘natural’ members of it, and are not contaminated by forces hostile to nationhood.”⁷⁴ Therein lies the basic division between what constitutes the in-group and the out-group, the “us” and “them,” and it dominates and precedes over any other ideological, political or economic considerations.

Each of *Fatherland Defense*, the *UBNL* and the *Ratniks* posits the nation as a living organism as the foundation of their ideology and expresses it through frequent use of corporeal metaphors and medical symbolism. The first organization to appear, *Fatherland Defense*, is mostly concerned with the state of crisis, which calls for their patriotic intervention to salvage the national consciousness, and with the destructive influence of foreigners. The *UBNL*, which appeared second and drew both members and inspiration from its predecessor, is the organization that most frequently uses the anthropomorphic language about the nation but also suggests paths for action. The *Ratniks*, due to their late appearance in 1936, operate in a strictly authoritarian political climate, face frequent suppression from the authorities and have limited opportunities to develop complex ideological schemes about the nation. Therefore, they find their niche for differentiation from the regime and existing political formations by being most extremist in everything, mostly through their rabid antisemitism and plans for future territorial expansion.

Fatherland Defense contains in its very name the notion of defense and protection, invoking the cry of the French Revolution *La patrie en danger*. In its first statute from around 1924, it sets the tone for its entire rhetoric by defining the enemy from which it is determined to defend the fatherland. According to it, “all sorts of harmful for the Bulgarian national consciousness and defense foreign influences” are to be eradicated and “the widespread

⁷⁴ Griffin, “Fascism: General Introduction,” in Iordachi, *Comparative Fascist Studies*, 118

immorality and depravity whose self-interest has turned the Bulgarian away from his national consciousness” are to be severely censured.⁷⁵ In another document, the Bulgarian people are explicitly referred to as an organism which has gone through a “severe illness” due to the “corrupting germs,” the reference point being the “Bolshevik epidemic.”⁷⁶ The theme about the corrupting foreign influences dominates *Fatherland Defense*’s publications including all issues of its newspaper. Furthermore, its Creed from 1927 the organization is presented as a counterforce to the “extreme destructive currents” and “the aspirations of the foreign in all spheres of our cultural and social life, which threaten to strip the Bulgarians of their Bulgarianness.”⁷⁷ The nation-state is juxtaposed to the principles of the French Revolution, according to which the individual takes precedence over the collective.

Rejecting individualism in favor of collectivism, *Fatherland Defense* goes further towards authoritarianism by arguing for the removal of parties and establishing strong rule not of the masses but of the leader, the dictator who could discipline them and channel their will.⁷⁸ During its third congress in 1928, the organization adopted the principles of fascism⁷⁹ and took a more radical stance towards issues such as racial hygiene, praising its importance for the “productive

⁷⁵ “Ustav na sąyuzu “Bălgarska rodna zashtita” v Bălgariia,” [Statute of the Union “Bulgarian Fatherland Defense” in Bulgaria] (before January 29, 1924), in *Sotsialno – naliavo*, Poppetrov, 217.

⁷⁶ „Izlozhenie na Vărhovното upravlenie na sąyuzu “Bălgarska rodna zashtita” po situatsiia v stranata i za haraktera i tselite na organizatsiia” [Exposition of the High administration of the Union “Bulgarian Fatherland Defense” regarding the situation in the country and the character and goals of the organization] (between December 8, 1925 and January 1, 1926) in *Sotsialno – naliavo*, Poppetrov, 227.

⁷⁷ “Nasheto veruiu,” [Our Creed] (November 20, 1927), in *Sotsialno – naliavo*, Poppetrov, 244.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 245.

⁷⁹ “Resheniia na Tretiia redoven săbor na sąyuzu “Bălgarska rodna zashtita,” [Decisions at the Third Regular Congress of the Union “Bulgarian Fatherland Defense] (October 15, 1928), in *Sotsialno – naliavo*, Poppetrov, 249.

forces of the state” and preventing the “degeneration of the state.”⁸⁰ The tasks of the fatherland defender are compared to that of a ploughman who has to plow through a weeded field and “throw away on the garbage a lot of bad and deeply-rooted weeds”⁸¹ – a metaphor, which invokes Zygmunt Bauman’s classical take on fascist regimes as ‘gardening states’ – “separating and setting apart useful elements designed to live and thrive, from harmful and morbid ones, which ought to be exterminated.”⁸²

If the *Fatherland Defense*’s publications rarely feature Bauman’s gardening and medical archetypes, the *UBNL*’s are replete with them. Declaring its fascist allegiances from the very beginning,⁸³ the organization uses extensively such language to construct the image of the nation and its enemies. It argues that the individual is but a “cell, an ingredient in the potentially immortal organism, called a nation.”⁸⁴ References to the nation, the people and society as an organism, a collective entity, can be found in all three of the major publication channels of the *UBNL* – the magazines *Idei i dela* [Ideas and actions], *Mosht* [Might] and *Prelom* [Watershed].⁸⁵ In addition, the *UBNL* often focuses on the idea of the Bulgarian national spirit, spiritual and physical might, and creative energies.⁸⁶ These spiritual powers of the nation, according to the

⁸⁰ “Edna ot zadachite na rodozashtitnika,” [One of the tasks of the fatherland defender] *Rodna zashtita* 4, no. 138, January 29, 1928, Sofia, 3.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁸² Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1989), 70.

⁸³ Even one of its mouthpieces, the magazine *Mosht* [Might] was called “magazine for fascist thought”

⁸⁴ “Liberalizma,” [Liberalism] *Prelom* 1, no. 7-8 (December 1933), Sofia, 118.

⁸⁵ E.g. “Rabotnicheskiiia vāpros,” [The workers’ question], *Idei i dela* 1, no. 1 (March 1936), Sofia, 19; “Natsionalizmāt v uchilishteto i nashteto uchitelstvo,” [Nationalism in school and our teachers] *Prelom* 1, no. 2 (February 1933), Varna, 33; “Fatalnite kompromisi,” [Fatal compromises] *Mosht* 1, no. 1 (January 1933), Plovdiv, 16.

⁸⁶ “Zashto?,” [Why?] (January 1933), Plovdiv in *Sotsialno – naliavo*, Poppetrov, 387; “Vmesto progra,” [Instead of a program] (before January 15, 1938) in *Sotsialno – naliavo*, Poppetrov, 394

UBNL, find their temporal and spatial source in the National Revival period of the 19th century and in the Bulgarian village which is idealized and features prominently in the organization's plans for rejuvenation of the nation.⁸⁷ These are the pre-modern sources to which the nation should turn back to in order to save itself from its current predicament and follow its the path towards the *UBNL* ideal – “nationally mighty and socially just legionnaire Bulgaria.”⁸⁸ It borrows the concept of *Lebensraum* from the Nazi ideology and assigns a leading role for Bulgaria on the Balkans.⁸⁹ Furthermore, the *UBNL* even makes an unsuccessful attempt to organize a voluntary Bulgarian foreign legion to join the African Corps in 1943, where “our national destiny is also at stake.”⁹⁰

In the ideology and rhetoric of the *Ratniks*, the elements appearing in both *Fatherland Defense* and the *UBNL* are connected into a more or less developed fascist-like system of thought, significantly colored with National Socialist antisemitism and biological racism. The nation is described in anthropomorphic terms with vivid medical and botanic imagery, as “an ethnic, spiritual, material and political whole, which has its own life and destiny. Its interests do not coincide always with the transitional interests of the personal and cumulative elements which form it.”⁹¹ The state is considered only as a vehicle for the nation and defined as the

⁸⁷ “Osvobozhdenieto na Bălgariia,” [The liberation of Bulgaria] (March 3, 1937) in *Sotsialno – naliavo*, Poppetrov, 393; “Vmesto programa,” [Instead of a program] (before January 15, 1938) in *Sotsialno – naliavo*, Poppetrov, 395; “Natsionalizăm i sotsializăm kato nerazdelni elementi na novo politichesko săznanie,” [Nationalism and socialism as indivisible elements of the new political consciousness] (March 1939), in *Sotsialno – naliavo*, Poppetrov, 425-428.

⁸⁸ “Izlozhenie n.2,” [Exposition №2] (after September 1940) in *Sotsialno – naliavo*, Poppetrov, 439.

⁸⁹ “Poziv, koito predstavia osnovnite legionerski tseli,” [Leaflet, presenting the main goals of the legionnaires] (January 20, 1943) in *Sotsialno – naliavo*, Poppetrov, 467.

⁹⁰ “Kăm bălgarskiia narod,” [Towards the Bulgarian people] (after February 13, 1943) in *Sotsialno – naliavo*, Poppetrov, 474.

⁹¹ “Veruiu,” [Creed] (before August 1936) in *Sotsialno – naliavo*, Poppetrov, 688.

“organizational collective which has a goal to express the vital drives of the nation.”⁹² The *Ratniks* also issue their rallying cry towards the Bulgarians that “the Bulgarian tree, on which branches you are working, is being cut from its bottom,” hence the organization has no other option than to come down and expel the hewers and strengthen the trunk of the tree.⁹³ Despite the establishment of authoritarian government, the *Ratniks* still believe that Bulgaria is being destroyed by internal and external enemies who “cover the waist of Bulgaria like an eczema” and “weave their cobwebs and openly desire even the heart of Bulgaria.”⁹⁴

For all these dangers that the *Ratniks* see, they remain ultimately positive in the outcome of the struggle between the destructive elements and the Bulgarian nation. Like other nationalistic organizations, the *Ratniks* put their trust in the nation’s youth which can “withstand the new times” and ensure that the Bulgarian people “rises from the challenges like a fenix from the ashes and will be ready as always to fulfill its destiny” – to be “the most important factor in Southeast Europe,” “the torch which shines in the Southeast” and “the main artery at the heart of the Balkan peninsula.”⁹⁵ This unabated optimism in the future of the nation also features in other publications of the *Ratniks* as well as in the rhetoric of the other nationalistic organizations. The deeper the presumed crisis, the stronger seems to be their belief that the Bulgarian youth, which they claim to represent, will regenerate the nation and start anew.

Fatherland defenders, legionnaires and *ratniks*, despite their differences in some ideological and rhetorical aspects, display a common understanding of what the nation is – a collective entity

⁹² Ibid., p. 689.

⁹³ “Obrāshtenie programa,” [Exposition program] (before August 1936) in *Sotsialno – naliavo*, Poppetrov, 686.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 684-685.

⁹⁵ “Semeistvo, narod i dārzhava,” [Family, people and country] *Prolom* 1, no. 12 (May 5, 1939), Sofia, 6.

which functions like a living organism, takes precedence over individual desires and has to fight its enemies which attack it from all sides. They idolize youth and thus legitimize their own agenda as they claim to represent the new generation, who only can guide the nation in the turbulent times in which they are living.

2.3. Anti-modernism

Zygmunt Bauman sees fascism and Nazism as well as their most extreme consequence, the Holocaust, as ultimately a product of modernity, for in his view one of the most defining aspects of modernity is the drive towards “building and keeping order” meaning “first and foremost purging *ambivalence*” in both the political and intellectual domain.⁹⁶ Detlev Peukert also points at aspects of fascism which reject the view on it as a “backward-looking ideology” or “simply an ideological regression into medieval darkness.”⁹⁷ Indeed, the nationalistic organizations in Interwar Bulgaria valorized discipline, hierarchy and order and viewed themselves as ultimately a modernizing force which would bring social harmony by settling the division between labor and capital. At the same time, the nationalists openly proclaimed their aversion to rationality and reason. In addition, their strong belief in the mystical, spiritual powers of the nation and its people, in collective will and other intangible “characteristics” of the nation, stand in stark contrast with the positivist attempts to rationalize society, individual and collective behavior. This ambivalent relationship with modernity has led scholars like Michael Mann talk about

⁹⁶ Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 1991), 24.

⁹⁷ Detlev Peukert, “Fascism and the Crisis of Modernity: NSDAP Members and Supporters,” in *The Fascism Reader*, ed. Kallis, 403.

fascism as “the dark side of modernity” which had “bridged the ideological schism of modernity” by combining the tradition of the Enlightenment (its focus on freedom but also reason and rational planning in society) with Romanticism (focus on emotions, souls and the unconscious and the masses).⁹⁸

Bulgarian Interwar nationalists’ attitude towards modernity is also evident from the title of their magazines. The *UBNL* and the *Ratniks* issues are named *Prelom* and *Prolom*, respectively words with almost identical meanings – on one hand, a breakthrough, a breach in the system, while on the other, a turning point, a watershed, a break between what existed before and what comes afterwards. Both meanings contain the understanding that modernity is a period which is to be overturned and rejected, so that a new (although often the notion of “new” invokes an idealized past) era is to be ushered in. This understanding of modernity as being antithetical to progress and the nation’s interest also explains the nationalists’ strong opposition to concepts such as cosmopolitanism, universalism, pacifism, internationalism, humanism and individualism which are linked with the most destructive forces in their ideology – communism/socialism/Marxism/bolshevism, liberalism and Judaism. The latter, as will be discussed in the subsequent subchapter is strongly connoted with rationalism, individualism, liberalism as well as with modernism as a philosophical and cultural movement. Thus modernism also becomes part of this ideological mixture and is totally rejected as being a degenerative force. Through establishing close semantic connections between all these notions, *Fatherland Defense*, the *UBNL* and the *Ratniks* formulate their ideology and rhetoric towards both modernity and modernism. Such a negative attitude however, does not prevent them from employing a parallel

⁹⁸ Michael Mann, “Fascists,” in *Comparative Fascist Studies*, ed. Iordachi, 213.

discourse of themselves as a modernizing force, which is committed to putting their nation back on the path of progress and creating a new order.

Fatherland Defense does not explicitly discuss modernism or modernity. However, in its frequent descriptions of the nation in crisis and in the persistent xenophobic publications which juxtapose the native and authentic with the foreign and international, one can presume that modernity is perceived as the current destructive order responsible for the crisis. Both the *UBNL* and the *Ratniks* are much more outspoken in their usage and denunciation of modernism, particularly as they relate it to Judeo-Bolshevism and cosmopolitanism. One of the most rabid Bulgarian antisemites, the *ratnik* Alexander Belev, who later headed the notorious Commissariat of Jewish Affairs, writes about the negative effects Western modernism, which he classifies as “Jewish in essence” and aiming to establish the hegemony of Jewish culture as it has happened in the West.⁹⁹ Another publication of the *Ratniks*, a review on a theater play by a Jewish writer ridicules the “theater genius and morality of modernism” and claims a direct connection between Jews and modernism by stating that “as it is known, the greatest modernists are precisely the Jews.”¹⁰⁰

The *UBNL* use a similar rhetoric in their writings – Western models are forced on the country and have produced a “cacophony of numerous mixtures and influences”, “spiritual dead end and moral degradation.”¹⁰¹ The Western culture, according to the legionnaires, has removed the Bulgarian from the “treasury of pure character, higher ideals and source of vital energy and well-being” – the village and has instead supported the town, which is “rightfully considered a

⁹⁹ “Evreiskiiat vāpros,” [The Jewish question] *Idei i dela* 1, no. 2 (1943), Sofia, 3-4.

¹⁰⁰ “Evreisko izkustvo,” [Jewish art] *Prolom* 1, no. 8. (March 5, 1939), Sofia, 7.

¹⁰¹ “Problemāt za bălgarskoto selo,” [The problem of the Bulgarian village] *Idei i dela* 1, no. 2 (April 1936), Sofia, 22.

symbol of evil.”¹⁰² The *UBNL*’s publications abound in such proclamations of the crisis of the current system but also of its imminent death. Introducing a global dimension to their rhetoric they claim that “today, all over the world the incompetence of the liberal-democratic system is admitted and the cosmopolitan and international spirit is condemned.”¹⁰³ The *UBNL* are convinced that the West has declined as a result of the leading role of liberalism and democracy.¹⁰⁴

According to the discourse of the three main Interwar nationalistic organizations modernity is in deep crisis and needs to be replaced with a new political, economic and social order. Modernism, as a cultural manifestation of the crisis of modernity, is presented as degenerative, instead of a progressive movement. The language of progress and modernization is only limited to the nationalists’ projects of going back to the village and the land where real culture and spirit lie. The rest needs to be pushed in the dustbin of history, along with all interrelated movements such as humanism, cosmopolitanism, liberalism and most importantly – Judeo-Bolshevism.

2.4. Antisemitism

If modernity and modernism remained a somewhat dubious issue in the ideology and rhetoric of the nationalistic organizations, antisemitism did not have that air of uncertainty. For *Fatherland Defense*, the *UBNL* and the *Ratniks*, antisemitism emerged as a core rhetoric theme.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ “Mladezhata i natsionalnite borbi,” [Youth and the national struggle] *Prelom* 1, no. 6 (June 1933), Varna, 89.

¹⁰⁴ “Likvidirane na edno politichesko nasledstvo,” [Eliminating a political legacy] *Prelom* 2, no. 2-3 (March 1934, Sofia), 20.

Although antisemitism has never had strong roots in Bulgarian history,¹⁰⁵ these organizations drew from a repository of past stereotypes, made extremely potent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century when the religiously based anti-Judaism was supplemented with the theories of Social Darwinism and its pseudoscientific offsprings eugenics and biological racism. The ideas of international Jewish conspiracy involving Bolsheviks, the international masonry and financial capital fitted well within the anti-capitalist and anti-communist rhetoric of Bulgarian far right movements. According to this powerful concoction of ideas, the “Jewish question” was perceived as the ultimate evil source of degeneration of national communities.

According to Nikolai Poppetrov, despite the close ideological underpinnings of the Bulgarian far right to Italian Fascism and German Nazism, antisemitism as a trait of the

¹⁰⁵ Antisemitism in Bulgaria before the Interwar period can hardly be viewed as endemic to Bulgarian society. Rare antisemitic events in the Ottoman Empire – usually religiously-based and related to the medieval myth of the blood libel – reappeared in independent Bulgaria, particularly with the coming of Russian troops in the Russo-Turkish 1877-1878 war. Peter Meyer mentions antisemitic incidents in Vratsa (1890), Pazardzhik (1895), Lom (1903) and Kyustendil (1904). (Peter Meyer, “Bulgaria” in *The Jews in the Soviet Satellites*, ed. Meyer et. al. (Syracuse, N.Y: Syracuse University Press, 1953), 567) Various factors can be credited for this state of affairs but the most important ones are the size and visibility of the Bulgarian Jews. According to the official 1934 census, only 0.8 percent of the population were Jews. (For a complete picture of the social and economic conditions of Bulgarian Jews see the chapter “The Demographic and Social-Economic Development of the Jews in Bulgaria (1926-1946),” in David Cohen, *The Survival 1940-1944* (Sofia: Shalom Publishing House, 1995) Their visibility and economic presence simply did not resemble the Jewish communities in other countries – e.g. Hungary (Budapest), Austria (Vienna), Greece (Salonika). Statistical data about Bulgarian Jews occupied as doctors, lawyers, government officials and their percentage receiving financial support from charitable associations (17.4%), point to the conclusion that Bulgarian Jews never managed to attain the stereotypical economic influence and affluence. (Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue, *Sephardi Jewry: A History of the Judeo-Spanish Community, 14th-20th Centuries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 95-96) Nevertheless, for the Interwar nationalistic organizations, these statistics were meaningless as they frequently published their own data portraying Bulgarian Jews as disproportionately well-off and powerful vis-a-vis the Bulgarian population. (e.g., a 1938 *ratnik* leaflet counting 35,000 foreign Jews in addition to the official figure of around 50,000 which together control 80% of the economic life of the country with the clear goal to colonize it. “Poziv razasniavashst stanovishteto na ratnitsite po evreiskiiia vāpros,” [Leaflet, explaining the stance of the *Ratniks* on the Jewish question] (1938) in *Sotsialno – naliavo*, Poppetrov, 702).

Bulgarian far right lacked the racial aspect which did not resonate strongly with the Bulgarian political sphere and society.¹⁰⁶ The most widely spread antisemitic images of the Bulgarian far right were the one of the state-subverting communist Jews and of the capitalist Jew, robbing the fruits of Bulgarians' honest labor. As early as 1927, *Fatherland Defense* uses the figure of Shakespeare's Shylock to portray Jews as cunning, concealing and cruel, living off "the live body/flesh" of Bulgaria.¹⁰⁷ The organization mostly references Jews in their anti-foreigners/anti-immigrant speeches and documents but nevertheless paves the way for the subsequent far right formations to use antisemitism. The next movement to take on the antisemitic mantle, the *UBNL*, included a point in its program from May 1933 about the expulsion of "all foreigners, who steal the bread of the Bulgarian – workers, craftsmen, officials or employers," stating that Bulgarian citizenship should be only for those, in "whose veins runs Bulgarian blood."¹⁰⁸ Later on, the *Legions* intensified their xenophobic utterances and specified that "the Jews are the biggest enemy of the peoples" who "suck our vital juices," "destroy like worms the Bulgarian body" and should therefore be expelled.¹⁰⁹ Their use of such vivid rhetoric about purity and decay alludes to their general discourse on the healthy Bulgarian nation with its source of strength – the village and the corrupting influence of the foreigners, above all the Jews. The same rationale is employed when the *Legions* express their great dissatisfaction with the internment of the Jews from Sofia in

¹⁰⁶ Poppetrov, *Fashizmut v Bulgaria*, 71-72.

¹⁰⁷ "Obräshtenie kām rodozashtitnitsite s antimasonski i antisemitski harakter po povod obvineniiata kām SBRZ v nasiliia," [Address of the fatherland defenders with anti-masonic and antisemitic character regarding the allegations in violence against the Fatherland Defense] (July 31, 1927) in *Sotsialno – naliavo*, Poppetrov, 240.

¹⁰⁸ "'Programa' na Säyuz na mladezhkite natsionalni legioni," ['Program' of the Union of Youth Legions] (May, 1933) in *Sotsialno – naliavo*, Poppetrov, 388-389.

¹⁰⁹ "Izvadki ot 'Narodno zname. Uchenieto na bälgarskite narodnitsi' – sbornik s razraboteni temi värhu legionerskata programa i ideologiia," [Exerpts from 'New Flag. The teaching of Bulgarian patriots' – collection of developed themes on the program and ideology of the legionnaires] (1940) in *Sotsialno – naliavo*, Poppetrov, 447.

the countryside in 1943. The *UBNL* claim that “the Jews will continue to parasitize on the wide back of the Bulgarians” and “spread their poisonous seed for our national decay.”¹¹⁰ Their solution – expulsion outside of the country while putting them in concentration camps meanwhile.¹¹¹

The *Ratniks* also devote special attention to the internment and dispersion of the Jews of Sofia into the countryside. They see the labor colonies as “recreational colonies,” a cover of the government to “protect the Jewish masses from the air strikes and from deportation to Poland” while at the same time allowing influential Jews to continue to poison the Bulgarian people with their arts, politics, capital and influence.¹¹² Their lengthy response to the state policy of interment mentions some of the most prominent Bulgarian artists of Jewish origin along with another popular pejorative image of the “hysterical” Jew.¹¹³ Not only the government is criticized by the *Ratniks* for measures deemed counterproductive and duplicitous – the Bulgarian church and especially the metropolitan bishops of Sofia and Plovdiv who hid and baptized Jews in order to spare them persecution receive criticism as well.¹¹⁴ The *Ratniks*’ antisemitic discourse involves a staggering plethora of antisemitic images, revealed in organizational documents and leaflets,

¹¹⁰ “Izlozhenie-poziv ‘Koi pokrovitelstva bălgarskite evrei,’” [Exposition-leaflet ‘Who patronizes the Bulgarian Jews?’] (after March 9, 1943) in *Sotsialno – naliavo*, Poppetrov, 477; “Izlozhenie-poziv protiv izselvaneto na sofiiskite evrei v provinciata,” [Exposition-leaflet against the expulsion of the Sofia Jews to the countryside] (May 26, 1943) in *Sotsialno – naliavo*, Poppetrov, 479.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 480.

¹¹² “Svetogledna beseda №65: “Razselvaneto na evreite ot Sofiia v provinciata (ili yudeistvashtite bez maski),” [Worldview talk №65: “Dislocation of the Jews of Sofia to the countryside (or the Judaizers without masks)”] (May 29, 1943) in *Sotsialno – naliavo*, Poppetrov, 739.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* 740.

supplemented by the production and dissemination of antisemitic literature, and on and off antisemitic actions such as harassing of Jews, attacks on Jewish shops, etc.

Despite its antisemitic policies, the government did not approve of the excesses of the *Ratniks* and they, along with members of other far right organizations were often persecuted and imprisoned. Moreover, the extreme antisemitic rhetoric of the *UBNL* and the *Ratniks* appears to have largely fallen on deaf ears as far as the Bulgarian political elite and society was concerned. Gabriele Nissim, author of the book on the fate of the Bulgarian Jews during WWII, argues that “there was no anti-Semitic tradition in Sofia, and radical anti-Semitic groups did not have much influence over the rest of the population.”¹¹⁵ In his point of view, the antisemitism of the Bulgarian political elite was “opportunistic” and the Jews were “a good bargaining chip with which to achieve their national goal.”¹¹⁶ Indeed, the subsequent theme in the discourse of the Bulgarian right – economic nationalism – would add further substance to the claim that antisemitism was mainly presented and perceived as an economic issue.

2.5. Economic Nationalism

With the rise of the modern nation state the economy ceased to be perceived as an abstract notion detached from the state/nation. Starting in the Interwar period, the new discourse on the economy also led to a “re-imagination of the nation-state” and provided “a new language in

¹¹⁵ Gabrielle Nissim, “The Man Who Made a Whole Nation Feel Ashamed: The Story of Dimitar Peshev, Vice-President of the Bulgarian Parliament” in *Jewish Studies at the Central European University 1999-2001*, ed. András Kovács and Eszter Andor (Budapest: Central European University, 2002), 137.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

which the nation-state could speak for itself and imagine its existence as something natural, bounded and subject to political management.”¹¹⁷ Eric Helleiner, one of the most prominent scholars of economic nationalism, argues that “the ideology of economic nationalism should be defined by its nationalist content rather than by its endorsement of specific economic policies or as an economic strand of realism” and “economic nationalists can have a variety of policy goals which may even include support for liberal economic policies.”¹¹⁸ Therefore, the driving force behind any measures of economic nationalism is the primary concern about the nation and not about the economy. Political scientist Andreas Pickel also downplays the economic aspect of economic nationalism in favor of the national one, stating that “the economic dimensions of specific nationalisms make sense only in the context of a particular national discourse, rather than in the context of general debates on economic theory and policy.”¹¹⁹ Pickel’s accent on national discourse hints how economic nationalism could be viewed – as a discursive tool, used to legitimize a specific nationalistic discourse.

It is precisely the role that economic nationalism played for the Interwar nationalistic organizations in Bulgaria. For all their extolment of the economic and social advances of Mussolini’s Italy or Hitler’s Germany, it was not economic considerations which tipped the scales towards favoring the Italian or the German economic model. It was the primacy of the nation in the discourse on the economy in these countries which appealed to the Bulgarian nationalists.

¹¹⁷ Timothy Mitchell, “Fixing the Economy,” *Cultural Studies* 12, no.1 (1998): 89-90, accessed March 13, 2016, DOI: 10.1080/095023898335627.

¹¹⁸ Eric Helleiner, “Economic Nationalism as a Challenge to Economic Liberalism? Lessons from the 19th century,” *International Studies Quarterly* 46 (2002): 325, accessed March 15, 2016, doi: 10.1111/1468-2478.00235.

¹¹⁹ Andreas Pickel, “Explaining, and explaining with, economic nationalism”, *Nations and Nationalism* 9, no.1 (2003): 105-106, accessed March 14, 2016, doi: 10.1111/1469-8219.00077.

To a large extent the rhetoric of *Fatherland Defense*, the *UBNL* and the *Ratniks* on economic and social issues overlaps with the dominant discourse in Interwar Italy and Germany after the advance of their extreme right parties. Pinpointing social antagonism and unequal wealth distribution between those who toil the land and the ones who profit from it, the Bulgarian nationalists employ a leftist anti-capitalist discourse. The narrative however intersects with clear ethnic divisions, separating the nation from its “enemies” who become the main target of the discourse of economic nationalism. The economic situation is depicted in powerfully evocative language – alluding to the traumatic periods of foreign political domination in the past, the current state of affairs is described as a “new slavery,” which “suffocates any attempt for national revival”¹²⁰ and Bulgaria is but an “infinite gold mine”¹²¹ for its foreign suitors. *Fatherland Defense* is particularly consistent in using this anti-slavery rhetoric and includes in its newspaper slogans like “Buy only Bulgarian! Prefer Bulgarian manufacture and Bulgarian labor [...]. Don’t give your money to foreigners because they export them outside and enrich themselves while Bulgaria is impoverished.”

Such calls for a boycott of foreign products are the more innocent side of the discourse of economic nationalism at an earlier phase when extremity is not that openly manifested. When conflated with antisemitic rhetoric, economic nationalism as a discourse becomes a potent manipulation tool as it could rely on a large number of foreign examples. At the onset of WWII antisemitic legislation is already a reality in many countries in Europe and Bulgaria soon follows suit with the 1941 Law for the Defense of the Nation, designed to emulate the Nuremberg Laws in Germany, limiting Jewish economic activities and posing severe restrictions on Jewish social

¹²⁰ “Nova godina,” [New Year] *Rodna zashtita* 4, no. 134 (January 1, 1928), Sofia, 1.

¹²¹ “Tsionizmăt na teoriia i praktika,” [Zionism in theory and practice] *Rodna zashtita* 4, no. 144 (March 11, 1928), Sofia, 4.

life. This provides a rare case when two of members of the *Ratniks*, Petar Gabrovski and Alexander Belev, attain important governmental positions. They are in charge of the Ministry of Interior and the Commissariat of Jewish Affairs, the latter being established to oversee the implementation of the antisemitic legislation and solve the “Jewish Question” in Bulgaria. It is quite indicative that once co-opted into power, the nationalists had to tone down their rhetoric and succumb to the dominant rhetoric of the government. When questioned about the antisemitic legislation and the situation with the Bulgarian Jews, both *ratniks* refrain from using racialized rhetoric and state that the new law is supposed to “open economic space for the Bulgarian people,”¹²² while the Jewish Question is “more than anything an economic question.”¹²³ Wrapping antisemitism in economic and social arguments becomes a feature of the official governmental discourse and differs greatly from the virulent biological antisemitism found on the pages of the Interwar nationalist organizations.

The Jewish Question is only one side of the larger task which the nationalistic organizations set for themselves – to construct an economic model which will serve the national interest. The solution that they suggest follows the Italian Fascist corporatism as “the corporation is most susceptible to public scrutiny and most suitable economic form for conducting the so-called “economic dirigisme.”¹²⁴ Citing Werner Sombart as the most celebrated scholar of their “new” political economy, the nationalists reject the classical economic theories of Adam Smith and David Ricardo, representative of the old demo-liberal order which should “remain a memory

¹²² Quoted in Rumen Avramov, “*Spasenie*” i padenie. Mikroikonomika na durzhavniya antisemitizum v Bulgariia, 1940-1944 [“Salvation” and Abjection. Microeconomics of State Antisemitism in Bulgaria, 1940-1944] (Sofia: Sofia University Publishing, 2012), 36.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ “Korporatsiata vchera, dnes i utre,” [The corporation yesterday, today and tomorrow] *Idei i dela* 1, no.1 (March 1936), Sofia, 13.

from the past.”¹²⁵ Nevertheless, the most enticing aspect of the fascist economic policies for Bulgarian Interwar nationalists seem to be their malleability. In a talk, a legionnaire praises fascism for “having no dogmatically fixed economic policy” – “idealizing the interests of the nation, it is ready to accept, depending on the conditions, free trade or protectionism, state intervention or absolute freedom in economic relations, without losing sight of its main goal – the creation of an authoritative and corporate state.”¹²⁶ This flexibility to interpret fascism as it suits them becomes particularly valuable when the organizations set on to explain their autochthonous nature in contrast to being simply imitative movements.

The latter point can be stretched to summarize the whole discourse of the Bulgarian Interwar nationalist movement. As discussed above, the nationalists heavily rely on demagoguery as a rhetorical tool to stylish themselves as they pleased – mainly as a fascist-inspired but nevertheless native response to the local conditions, aiming at resolving the perceived all-encompassing crisis in the Bulgarian society by placing the collective interests of the Bulgarian nation in front of any other ideological considerations. Their nationalistic organizations may have been terminated with the coming of the communists, but the discourse of the Bulgarian nation remained there – always handy to be utilized in leftist or rightist political projects.

¹²⁵ “Nalaga se preotsenka na tsennostite,” [A re-evaluation of the values is required] *Idei i dela* 1, no. 2 (April 1936), Sofia, 14.

¹²⁶ “Ikonomicheskata politika na fashizma,” [The economic policy of fascism] *Prelom* 1, no. 1 (January 1933), Varna, 11.

Chapter 3: “Old Wine in New Bottles?”¹²⁷ – The Contemporary Far Right Discourse in Bulgaria

It took almost six decades since the end of WWII and fifteen years since the communist regime fell for a self-proclaimed nationalist party to enter the Bulgarian parliament and to remind the world that nationalism still matters in the country. To the Bulgarian political elite and society in 2005, this came as a surprise, for Bulgaria had been lauded by local and international observers as an island of tolerance in a region which has had its share of ethnic conflicts in the post-1989 period.¹²⁸ The “Bulgarian ethnic model” – referring to the country’s peaceful post-1989 transition, the political representation of the country’s Turkish minority and the perceived ethnic and religious tolerance of Bulgarians, was considered an achievement to the extent that it became

¹²⁷ Reference to Stephen Fischer-Galati’s introductory chapter “Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century: “Old Wine in New Bottles,” in *The Columbia History of Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Joseph Held, 1-16.

¹²⁸ Benedict DeDominicis presents the country as an example of successful ethnic conflict resolution and compares it with the situation in Yugoslavia. (Benedict DeDominicis, “The Bulgarian ethnic model: post-1989 Bulgarian ethnic conflict resolution,” *Nationalities Papers* 39, no.3: 441-460 (May 19, 2011), accessed May 20, 2016, DOI: 10.1080/00905992.2011.565317); While pointing that “Bulgaria is not an ethnic idyll,” particularly concerning the Roma population, Antonina Zhelyazkova also concludes in 2001 that the most distinct characteristic of the Bulgarian ethnic model is its democratism, which, “at least so far, rendered the model impervious to the threatening interference of xenophobic rabble-rousers and fanatical ideologues.” in Zhelyazkova, “The Bulgarian Ethnic Model,” *East European Constitutional Review* 10, no. 4: 66 (Fall 2001), accessed May 20, 2016, http://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/eeurcr10&div=37&g_sent=1&collection=journals.

an auto-stereotype.¹²⁹ Yet, some scholars had perceived preconditions for ethnic tension and the emergence of far right parties which engaged in explicitly anti-minorities rhetoric.¹³⁰

What followed after the first election of such a party into Parliament validated the latter group of scholars. Bulgarian society was, indeed, receptive to extreme right ideas, especially if political entrepreneurs manage to play with already existing stereotypes and manipulate people's discontent through populist nationalistic rhetoric. The aim of this chapter is to reconstruct the context in which contemporary far right parties (mainly ATAKA, with occasional references to the Bulgarian National Union and the Patriotic Front) emerged and to deconstruct the key themes in their discourse and rhetoric.¹³¹ By doing so, the chapter will add one more piece to the puzzle of the *longue durée* of Bulgarian political radicalism and prepare the ground for the final analysis on continuities and discontinuities.

¹²⁹ Bernd Rechel, "The 'Bulgarian Ethnic Model': Reality or Ideology?," *Europe-Asia Studies* 59, no. 7 (November, 2007), 1201, accessed May 20, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20451435>.

¹³⁰ See for example Stephen Fischer-Galati's pessimistic chapter, written in the beginning of the nineties, claiming that "present conditions are no better for making Eastern Europe safe for democracy than they were at the end of World War I." in Fischer-Galati, "Eastern Europe," 15; Minkenberg considers Bulgaria prior to the appearance of ATAKA an "odd case" since "based on their analytical model, there should have been a large electoral potential for the radical right, but the findings pointed for the opposite." (Minkenberg, "Leninist beneficiaries," in Minkenberg, *Historical Legacies*, 21)

¹³¹ It should be noted that the attention dedicated to ATAKA and its ideology and rhetoric will be significantly disproportionate in comparison with other nationalistic formations. Above all, this choice is conditioned on the political presence and significance of ATAKA compared to the other parties and organizations. In addition, purely pragmatic reasons such as the length of the thesis played a part in the author's selection of discourses with the nationalistic space.

3.1. Context

Up to the 2005 elections, Bulgaria had not seen a far right or nationalistic party or movement gain enough votes to enter Parliament and to be perceived as a real player in the post-1989 political arena. True, nationalistic movements appeared in the first post-1989 decade, but none of them managed to spread their views outside of a very limited circle of supporters, making them “fringe, small and politically irrelevant.”¹³² Ivanov and Ilieva mention the following parties and organizations as operating under the general guise of nationalism, but having racist extremist views: the IMRO, the Zora Political Circle, the Bulgarian National Radical Party, the Bulgarian Christian Democratic Party, the Bulgarian Democratic Forum, the Bulgarian National Front, the Bulgarian National Union, the Bulgarian Horde-1938, Warriors of Tangra Movement, the Dulo Society, the Bulgarian National Front (émigré), the Union of Bulgarian National Legions, the Student National Movement “Greater Bulgaria” and the Europe Civic Initiative Committee. The modern *UBNL*, the Bulgarian Horde-1938, the Bulgarian Democratic Forum, the Bulgarian National Front and the Bulgarian National Front (émigré) all claim direct continuity with Interwar nationalistic organizations or are established by their former members.¹³³ Yet none of the above organizations have contributed to popularizing far right ideas apart from the Bulgarian National Union (BNU), which is to some extent covered in this thesis. It was ATAKA that put such views back into the public discourse and, implicitly, revived tropes and themes from the Interwar period.

¹³² Christo Ivanov and Margarita Ilieva, “Bulgaria” in Cas Mudde (ed.), *Racist Extremism in Central and Eastern Europe*, 2

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 3-12

Given the fragmentation and weakness of the preexisting nationalistic organizations in the country, no one had expected that ATAKA, formed just two months prior to the 2005 election, would muster formidable 8.93% of the vote, becoming the fourth power in Parliament.¹³⁴ Moreover, since the other three political parties – the incumbent National Movement Simeon the Second (NMSS), the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) and the Movement for Rights and Freedom (MRF, also known as the party of Bulgarian Turks and Muslims) formed a coalition government, ATAKA could exploit its status as the strongest opposition party. In doing so, it gained an even larger percentage of the votes in the subsequent presidential and European Parliament elections.

What explains the sudden rise of a new party that lacked any established structure, organizational networks, its own stable electoral base or even coherent and recognizable party program and ideology, is still subject to debates. However, there are several contextual factors behind ATAKA's success, in addition to the emergence of formations such as the BNU and the coalition Patriotic Front, which has currently replaced ATAKA as a balancing factor in Parliament. The combination of strong public discontent with the political elite and disenchantment with the post-1989 transition to democracy, stands out as the foremost reason for the emergence of the Bulgarian far right.

The socio-economic turbulences that have accompanied the transition have resulted in a strong resentment against the Bulgarian political elite. Looking for reasons why ATAKA's "far-right rhetoric, replete with anti-establishment, anti-liberal, and anti-corruption references" fell on a sympathetic ear, Yannis Sygkelos quotes the Pew Global Attitudes Survey and the Standard Barometer which revealed that "83% of the Bulgarians were discontent with the state" and

¹³⁴ Bulgaria. Central Election Committee, "Parlamentarni izbori 2005 – Okonchatelni rezultati za stranata" [Parliamentary Elections 2005 – Final Results for the Country] (2005), accessed March 20, 2016, <http://pi2005.cik.bg/results/>.

“slightly over 10% trusted the Bulgarian political system.”¹³⁵ Furthermore, despite the frequently exploited metaphor of the “Bulgarian ethnic model,” surveys revealed strong negative attitudes and prejudices against Bulgaria’s minorities – “29% of Bulgarians considered Turkey as the major threat, while 56% and 15% were unfavorable towards Roma and Jews respectively.”¹³⁶ Yet, other scholars who compare anti-minority attitudes among ATAKA voters with those of other parties’ supporters, argue that “the ATAKA phenomenon should not be interpreted exclusively or even foremost as a resurgence of ethnic Bulgarian nationalism and anti-minority sentiment.”¹³⁷ Neither does criticism of EU integration and parliamentary democracy or specific economic issues such as privatization or nationalization, emerge as defining factors for the salience of the party. Demographic data hints that the vote for ATAKA was mainly a sign of protest and strong disaffection with the performance of the preceding governments.¹³⁸

ATAKA’s exploitation of the fraught social and economic situation, traditional prejudices towards minorities and the increasing all-round dissatisfaction with the Bulgarian political elite is corroborated by Evgenia Ivanova’s fieldwork, which reveals the existence of social, political and nationalistic motives for supporting ATAKA and suggests two prevailing factors – “fear” and “thirst for revenge.”¹³⁹ Regardless of their varying social status or education, ATAKA’s

¹³⁵ Yannis Sygkelos, “Nationalism versus European Integration: The Case of Ataka,” *East European Quarterly*, 43 (2-3): 165 (2015), accessed 20 March, 2016, <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2706052>

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 165

¹³⁷ Maria Popova, “What brought Ataka to the Political Scene? Analysis of the Vote for Bulgaria’s Radical Nationalists,” in *Beyond Mosque, Church, and State: Alternative Narratives of the Nation in the Balkans*, ed. Theodora Dragostinova and Yana Hashamova (Budapest & New York: CEU Press, 2016), 275.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 275-276

¹³⁹ Evgenia Ivanova, “Izbirateliat na Ataka – opit za portret,” [The Ataka voter – a profile attempt] *Kultura* [Culture] 40, no. 2434 (2006), accessed March 26, 2016, <http://www.kultura.bg/bg/article/view/12313>.

supporters “fear yet another loss of status: another impoverishment, social re-categorization, loss of prestige.”¹⁴⁰ According to Ivanova, this fear is not yet experienced in purely ethnic terms; instead, anger is directed at a larger group of “unfairly privileged,” including “the rich, the politicians, the minorities, and the foreigners”.¹⁴¹ This explains why ATAKA’s electorate does not constitute simply “the losers of the transition” but also “relatively educated, relatively well-off and employed” voters from all social groups, including people with “university education, businessmen, young people, pensioners and the unemployed.”¹⁴²

In addition to the frustration with the transition process and the Bulgarian political elite, Igor Novakovic considers three additional contextual factors behind the rise of political extremism in Bulgaria. The first one concerns the “Bulgarian ethnic model,” which, according to him, has only temporarily diffused the ethnic tensions and has antagonized ethnic Bulgarians by painting the MRF as a clientelist party abusing its influence on the Bulgarian Turkish population. The other two factors are related to the post-2000 changing political landscape in Bulgaria, namely the rise of populism after the 2001 electoral victory of the NMSS and the growing influence of the media for shaping Bulgarian politics and public opinion.¹⁴³

The latter two factors are intertwined and deserve a more thorough examination as they shape one of the most defining features of the contemporary Bulgarian far right – its populism. For Cas Mudde, populism is the third defining component in the ideology of the populist right

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Igor Novakovic, “The of political extremism in Bulgaria – The political party ‘Ataka,’” (master’s thesis, University of Bologna, 2008), 27 in Portal on Central Eastern and Balkan Europe, *PECOB’s Volumes*, accessed May 18, 2006 on www.pecob.eu

radical family of parties,¹⁴⁴ nativism and authoritarianism being the other two.¹⁴⁵ Ruth Wodak, on the other hand, sees right-wing populism as a “political style which can relate to various ideologies, not just one.”¹⁴⁶ This thesis assumes the latter stance and maintains that even though several key ideological themes can be discerned in the rhetoric of the Bulgarian far right – most importantly its nationalism, anti-globalism, hate speech and economic nationalism/welfare chauvinism – only the combination of these themes with the skillful use of populism as a political and rhetorical style enabled such formations to gain wide support.

Bulgarian media occupies a central place in the process of establishing and popularizing the Bulgarian far right. Both the BNU and ATAKA enjoyed a platform for their ideas through their own TV programs. ATAKA’s leader, Volen Siderov, was first to employ this venue to address potential supporters. Using the private TV channel SKAT, where he hosted a regular TV program, and publishing several books “exposing” an international conspiracy against Bulgaria involving Jews and masons, Siderov quickly became the face of the Bulgarian far right. Other nationalistic organizations quickly followed suit and the BNU also acquired its own TV program for almost two years before being taken off air due to change in the channel’s ownership. The reliance on their own alternative media platforms bolstered the nationalists’ argument that mainstream media deliberately misinform the public and serve foreign propaganda and

¹⁴⁴ ATAKA is considered by the scholar as part of this family group

¹⁴⁵ Cas Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 22

¹⁴⁶ Ruth Wodak, “‘Anything goes!’ – The Haiderization of Europe,” in Ruth Wodak, et. al. (ed.) *Right-Wing Populism*, 27

interests.¹⁴⁷ Siderov and his party have also pioneered the use of electronic media (especially online social networks and forums) for disseminating propaganda.¹⁴⁸

ATAKA's marketing ingenuity is not limited to exploiting new media channels. TV presentation style was also quite unlike the media appearances of political figures at the time. Siderov had daily ten-minute broadcasts and a Saturday one-hour show where he would address his audience frontally in a studio with minimalistic décor, using extremely politically incorrect language, even street jargon, to tackle topics which the political elite and the mainstream media would sometimes neglect or discuss in a very vague and neutral language. The contrast between the bellicose Siderov and the other Bulgarian politicians was further emphasized by the open phone line through which his audience could interact with him directly. Allowing all kinds of extremist views to be freely broadcast on air helped in constructing Siderov's narrative that these are the views of "the people."¹⁴⁹ In addition, for his one-hour show, Siderov invited carefully selected guests who supported his views and added a sense of expertise and credibility to his extremist position. These techniques of hosting a show were later copied verbatim by the BNU leader Boyan Rasate.

Having outlined the means and manner through which Siderov attracted followers, this thesis will briefly summarize the ideology of the Bulgarian far right before engaging in a discussion of its four key themes. As noted earlier, ATAKA's political program mirrors the main

¹⁴⁷ Christian Vatchkov, "Etnicheski sblăsătsi," 306

¹⁴⁸ Elza Ibroscheva, "A different kind of massive attack: How the Bulgarian Ultranationalist Party Ataka engineered its political success using electronic media," *Central European Journal of Communication* 7 (1) (2013): 52, accessed March 20, 2016, <http://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=276439>.

¹⁴⁹ For instance, he had an entire one-hour show without the customary guests and dedicated only to viewers' calls. Volen Siderov, (TV Show Host and Writer), *Ataka* [Television broadcast] (March 4, 2005) (Sofia: SKAT TV)

sources of discontent of most Bulgarians – the difficult socio-economic situation, the widespread corruption among the political elite, and internal and external “others.” Kristen Ghodsee and Martin Marinos argue that ideologically and rhetorically, ATAKA fuses leftist social and economic arguments with rightist exclusionary populist rhetoric, most strongly pronounced against the Roma and the Turkish minorities.¹⁵⁰ Marinos views ATAKA’s radical leftist socio-economic stance as “filling the gap” left by the traditional left-wing player in Bulgaria, the BSP, which moderated its views, jumped on the pro-EU and pro-NATO bandwagon, and even implemented a flat tax.¹⁵¹ Regardless whether ATAKA’s political stance is leaning more towards the left or to the right, it has been ATAKA’s decision to style itself as the only alternative to the “corrupt Bulgarian political elite” and to take whichever position resonates best with the conscious or unconscious fears of most Bulgarians that has allowed it to steal followers from both sides of the political spectrum.

Anti-Roma sentiments, which propagated the image of Bulgarian Roma as incorrigible criminals and lazy welfare abusers, have been heavily exploited by the Bulgarian far right. They are combined with anti-Turkish/Muslim and homophobic rhetoric, leftist anti-capitalist slogans, as well as “several core far-right themes”: “preservation of the ‘heartland’, that is a conception of an idealized and romanticized community untainted by globalization, Europeanisation, intellectuals, politicians, and bureaucrats; defense of national sovereignty; national narratives; territorial nostalgia; nativism; monoculturalism; anti-Semitism; religious fundamentalism;

¹⁵⁰ Martin Marinos, “Anti-Neoliberal Neoliberalism: Post-Socialism and Bulgaria’s ‘Ataka’ Party,” *3C: Communication, Capitalism & Critique* 13 (1) (July 20, 2015): 274-297, accessed March 21, 2016, <http://www.triple-c.at/index.php/tripleC/article/view/641>; Kristen Ghodsee, “Left Wing, Right Wing, Everything,” 26-39

¹⁵¹ Marinos, 283

economic nationalism and protectionism; and welfare chauvinism.”¹⁵² The following sections deal in details with four of these themes – nationalism, anti-globalism, hate speech, and economic nationalism/welfare chauvinism.

3.2. Nationalism

When ATAKA entered Bulgarian politics in 2005, it relied on a very simplistic political program condensed into twenty points that summarized what Siderov had already been preaching in a much more radical form via SKAT TV, periodicals and his books. Up till now, “ATAKA’s 20 Principles” constitute the core of ATAKA’s political program, with some points gaining prevalence in response to shifting local and international political realities. Together with a “Program Scheme,” a 2013 lengthy program document, titled “The Siderov Plan against Colonial Slavery,” and Siderov’s four speeches in the four opening sessions of Parliaments where ATAKA has been represented, these political utterances constitute the party’s official political stance. Another thread of ATAKA’s discourse is to be found in their numerous publications, media appearances and political actions. While the official programs and speeches appear significantly less radical and vague, the main link between all of these political utterances is the idea of the organic Bulgarian nation. This emerges as the only key ideological principle guiding nationalists in their programs. Cas Mudde has aptly labeled this phenomenon *nativism*, understood as “an ideology which holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group

¹⁵² Yannis Sygkelos, “Nationalism versus European Integration,” 164

(“the nation”) and that nonnative elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the homogenous nation-state.”¹⁵³

ATAKA’s 2005 manifesto clearly prepares the ground for what will become a permanent feature of the party’s discourse – the integralist idea of the Bulgarian nation as a “unitary, monolith state,” understood as monoethnic and monocultural, since no other ethnic groups are to be allowed linguistic or political expression.¹⁵⁴ In his first speech from the tribune of the 40th National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria, ATAKA’s leader sets the boundaries for what he considers constitutive of the Bulgarian nation – “the honest Bulgarian patriots” who, by voting for ATAKA, “have broken the model of the oligarchs and the national traitors” and have “stated that they do not want to be discriminated against in their own motherland for the benefits of privileged minorities.”¹⁵⁵ To them Siderov juxtaposes the Bulgarian political elite, described in zoomorphic and dehumanizing terms (such as “a herd of grunting pigs,” and “insensitive balls of fat”) who have committed “national betrayals, frauds and thefts, politics of genocide,” who are “deaf for the problems and sufferings of the Bulgarian people,” and whose “Bulgarophobic plan” is to “reduce the Bulgarian population to 3.5-4 million people” through selling out the country to foreigners, so that Bulgarians can “die in misery, lack medication and medical service, be terrorized by Gypsy gangs, attacking, robbing, raping and torturing the Bulgarian nation on an everyday basis.”¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ Cas Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties*, 19

¹⁵⁴ “ATAKA’s 20 Principles,” Political Party ATAKA (2005), accessed March 10, 2016, http://www.ataka.bg/en/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=14&Itemid=27.

¹⁵⁵ Bulgaria. National Assembly, “Stenogrami ot plenarni zasedania,” [Transcripts from plenary sittings] (July 11, 2005), accessed March 23, 2016, <http://www.parliament.bg/bg/plenaryst/ns/2/ID/29>.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

Such strong evocative language is not reserved for the political elite or for the Roma only. Similar rhetoric has been uttered by ATAKA members in regards to the “un-Bulgarian” Turkish minority and the MRF, as well as towards international bodies and foreign countries, such as the IMF, the World Bank (WB), NATO, EU, Turkey, the USA and Israel, which “colonize” Bulgaria. Perhaps most telling for Siderov and ATAKA’s exclusionist rhetoric is a statement for which he was successfully sued by domestic NGOs – “Finally Bulgarians will have their representation in the parliament. There will not only be faggots, Gypsies, Turks, non-natives, Jews and all other sorts, but Bulgarians and only Bulgarians!”¹⁵⁷ This was one of the very few occasions when Siderov was convicted, but it did not deter him from continuing to categorize and divide the Bulgarian society.

ATAKA’s rhetoric presents the Bulgarian nation in a state of deep crisis, frequently decrying the “genocide” that is allegedly being committed against it. This crisis is all-pervasive, and it has demographic, economic, cultural and spiritual dimensions. Responsibility is placed on the nation’s imagined endogenous and exogenous enemies. These destructive forces are always linked in a grand master plan, which aims to destroy the Bulgarian nation.

Having set the boundary between “us” (the nationalists/patriots) and “them” (the national traitors), Siderov introduces a theme which has become one of the leitmotifs in his rhetoric – the demographic collapse of the Bulgarian nation. According to him, the decrease in Bulgaria’s population is a result of systematic efforts by the political elite and foreign “enemies.” While

¹⁵⁷ “Kolko sa skandalite, v koito Volen Siderov se okazva zabarkan“ [How many are the scandals in which Volen Siderov has got himself into], *Dnevnik* [Daily], October 10, 2015, accessed March 23, 2016, http://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2015/10/10/2625930_kolko_sa_skandalite_v_koito_volen_siderov_se_okazva/.

addressing an actual problem,¹⁵⁸ the nationalists use it to add another layer in the multifaceted image of the nation in crisis. Kotzeva and Dimitrova analyze the nationalist rhetoric related to demographics and point out the extreme terminology with which the topic is treated.¹⁵⁹ Preference for phrases such as “national catastrophe,” “collapse of the nation,” or “heavy crisis” are frequently employed, instead of more neutral terms such as “population decline” or “depopulation”.¹⁶⁰ These alarmist messages are inevitably combined with real or fake statistics on higher birth rates among minorities, mainly the Roma and to some extent the Turks, culminating in fictitious doomsday scenarios featuring the death of the “Bulgarian nation.” Even though Kotzeva and Dimitrova focus on the demographics discourse of the IMRO, their observation that the IMRO has put the “Gypsy threat” at the core of their demographic projects can easily be extended to ATAKA. As noted earlier, Siderov’s debut speech in the 2005 Parliament casually related the “gigantic genocide on the Bulgarian nation” and the “Gypsy gangs.”¹⁶¹ The alleged link between demographic decline and the presumed “Gypsy criminality” – another important tropes in ATAKA’s discourse – features extensively in the party’s subsequent publications, TV programs and political speeches.

The “demographic collapse” is not the only challenge to ATAKA’s concept of the national community. In his TV broadcasts prior to the 2005 election, Siderov sketches the parameters of an impending economic crisis, partially a product of the energy crisis, which will hit the country

¹⁵⁸ Due mainly to low birth rates, societal changes in reproductive models, and emigration Bulgaria’s population – and especially that of ethnic Bulgarians – has indeed been shrinking since the beginning of the 1990s.

¹⁵⁹ Tatyana Kotzeva and Elitsa Dimitrova, “Nationalism and Declining Population in Bulgaria after 1990,” *Comparative Population Studies* 39 (4) (November 27, 2014): 772, accessed March 20, 2016, doi: 10.12765/CPoS-2014-15en.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Bulgaria. National Assembly, “Stenogrami ot plenarni zasedania“ (June 11, 2005)

after the Bulgarian political elite has succumbed to EU pressure to close four of the six reactors in Bulgaria's only nuclear power plant.¹⁶² Another governmental decision that incurred Siderov's ire and shaped his economics narrative was to allow selling land to foreigners.¹⁶³ The culprit in both cases was the "traitorous" Bulgarian political elite which acted in accordance with the guidelines of the external "enemies" of the nation – the WB, IMF, USA, Turkey and Israel, often described by Siderov as a monolithic block.¹⁶⁴ The crisis also had its moral and cultural dimensions – aided by the compliant media, a spirit of "national nihilism" pervaded Bulgarian society; Bulgarian sanctuaries, holy symbols and national dignity were being "desecrated," while Bulgarian culture was being "gypsyfied."¹⁶⁵

According to Siderov, there is only one response to this all-encompassing crisis which has befallen the Bulgarian nation – patriotism and nationalism, perceived as the "immune system of the nation which protects it in such moments of crisis."¹⁶⁶ He also argued that he is the only real opposition to the anti-Bulgarian forces and an embodiment of the national interests. As illustrated above, the party's political success largely depended on manipulating the perceived sense of societal crisis, popular dissatisfaction with the status quo, and constructing a narrative of the nation and its internal and external enemies. These features of ATAKA's nationalism, also visible in the discourse of other modern nationalistic organizations, are manifested and intertwined in three other key ideological themes.

¹⁶² Volen Siderov, *Ataka* [Television broadcast] (January 7, 2005; January 8, 2005)

¹⁶³ Siderov, *Ataka* (January 29, 2005; February 2, 2005; February 16, 2005; February 18, 2005; February 19, 2005; February 26, 2005)

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. (February 19, 2005)

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. (January 3, 2005; January 6, 2005; January 13, 2005)

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. (January 18, 2005)

3.3. Anti-globalism

The more globalization is perceived as a process, impacting people across the world, the more it provokes a negative, defensive reaction from political formations viewing this process as a challenge to the nation state. Their defensive agenda becomes the “preservation of the status quo or the status quo ante – as it was before mass migration, Europeanization and globalization.”¹⁶⁷ Such reaction is common among conservatives everywhere but it features most prominently among far right organizations in Europe. In Eastern European countries, the topics of globalization, cosmopolitanism and even European integration have emerged as a clear ideological divide between the extreme right and the political mainstream.

András Kovács demonstrates how the Hungarian far right party *Jobbik* was able to portray the “tensions, caused by economic and cultural globalization [...] as a conflict between cosmopolitan and national interests,” using strong anti-colonial rhetoric.¹⁶⁸ In Hungary this discourse evoked preexisting negative associations from the past about communists and Jews – acting “as the secret agent of globalization.”¹⁶⁹ Bulgarian far right parties have in many respects followed a similar trajectory in denouncing globalization as detrimental to the country’s national sovereignty. However, since antisemitic tropes have never been very salient in Bulgaria and the Bulgarian far right has increasingly turned its political compass towards Russia, Bulgaria’s most vociferous anti-globalist philippics have been focused on the EU, the USA, the IMF and the WB.

¹⁶⁷ Pelinka, “Right-Wing Populism,” 10

¹⁶⁸ András Kovács, “The Post-Communist Extreme Right: The Jobbik Party in Hungary,” in Wodak, et. al. (ed.) *Right-Wing Populism*, 223

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 226

One more threat to the fabric of the Bulgarian nation by the encroaching global forces was the agreement of the NMSS government to allow US military bases in the country. Siderov discusses the development during one of his hour-long broadcasts with a guest who parrots his views and argues that the Bulgarian national sovereignty is violated.¹⁷⁰ American bases, the argument goes, turn Bulgaria into a potential target of international terrorism and solidify the colonial status of the country vis-à-vis the USA.¹⁷¹ Conversing with another guest with a penchant for Orwell, Siderov suggests that the modern world is in fact an Orwellian dystopia come true, with the USA and its CIA acting as the Big Brother.¹⁷² The Prime Minister and the entire Bulgarian political class constitute the “native colonial administration, serving its foreign masters.”¹⁷³

For nationalists, globalization is further responsible for damages to the nation by advancing an immoral world order, which destroys the authentic national culture and its patriotic and nationalistic spirit.¹⁷⁴ According to Siderov, the nation is forced to instead adopt liberalism, “perhaps interpreted” by some of its local proponents as “the freedom to have homosexual relations and to use white powder to stimulate yourself”¹⁷⁵ and as “pedophilia,” “hypothetically defended” by the then US ambassador to Bulgaria, James Pardew, who is suggested to “have an attraction for little girls.”¹⁷⁶ Not shying away from openly insulting local and international public figures and politicians, Siderov deliberately scandalizes his audience with such statements, frequently picked by his viewers and internalized as their own position.

¹⁷⁰ Siderov, *Ataka* (February 19, 2005)

¹⁷¹ Ibid

¹⁷² Ibid. (January 22, 2005)

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid. (January 16, 2005)

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. (February 10, 2005)

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. (March 1, 2005)

The other main carrier of globalization, according to ATAKA is the EU. However, having realized the overall positive attitude of Bulgarians towards EU accession, Siderov refrains from arguing against it, joining the Eurosceptics instead.¹⁷⁷ His criticism targets EU demands on Bulgaria, which are presented as incompatible with national interests, and “European values,” a concept that is always used mockingly. He exploits one of the most popular national heroes and martyrs – Hristo Botev – to prove that European culture is essentially inferior to Bulgarian (and Russian) culture.¹⁷⁸ Bulgaria has allegedly founded the first nation state and developed the oldest culture on the continent, which subsequently spread and civilized most of Europe.¹⁷⁹ Therefore, it does not need the guidance of Brussels.

In the last couple of years, ATAKA has adopted less coherent position towards European culture and values. While the party maintains a stark dichotomy between the latter and its newly found appreciation for everything Russian/Orthodox, it framed itself as a defender of those despised “Western” values against refugees and terrorists. Turkey used to be the bogeyman; now this role has been accorded to refugees and Muslims in Europe more generally. Mudde observes an all-European tendency to rely on Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” model, which “functions as the modern *Protocols*.”¹⁸⁰ Modern Islamophobic discourse argues that “the social

¹⁷⁷ ATAKA has cooperated and sought alliance with other nationalist, far right and Eurosceptic parties such as the French Front National, the Flemish Vlaams Belang, the Austrian Freedom Party, etc. (Yannis Sygkelos, “Nationalism versus European Integration: The Case of ATAKA”, 180); for a more thorough description of ATAKA’s international cooperation see Novakovic, “The of political extremism in Bulgaria,” 90-93

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., (January 6, 2005)

¹⁷⁹ Bulgaria. National Assembly, “Stenogrami ot plenarni zasedania,” July 11, 2005.

¹⁸⁰ Mudde, *Populist Right Radical Parties*, 84

order of Islam is opposed to our Western values” and for ATAKA, it is precisely these global liberal values promoting tolerance that have led to the current situation.¹⁸¹

Embracing Euroscepticism, anti-Americanism and Russophilia, the Bulgarian far right parties, such as ATAKA, have taken a strong stance against international movements, structures and processes. The USA has emerged as the epitome of the neo-colonial model promoted by globalization. Adjusting itself to contemporary Western European far right discourse, ATAKA has added another layer in its criticism towards globalization – that it is responsible for the Islamic threat. This new feature has found its way into the discourse on domestic matters and has enriched the “enemy within” topos.

3.4. Hate Speech

Even though hate speech (antisemitism, racism, homophobia, Islamophobia, etc.) is criminalized in both EU and international courts, the lack of universal definition of the terms “hate speech” and “hate crime” invites member states to adopt their own interpretation of the existing legislative frameworks.¹⁸² The European Commission for Racism and Intolerance has been very critical of Bulgaria’s anti-discrimination legislation and measures, flagging ATAKA and Siderov as particularly malevolent in their use of racist rhetoric in political and public

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² European Parliament. Directorate-General for Internal Policies, “The European legal framework on hate speech, blasphemy and its interaction with freedom of expression,” (September 2015): 33, accessed May 26, 2016, [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/536460/IPOL_STU\(2015\)536460_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/536460/IPOL_STU(2015)536460_EN.pdf)

discourse.¹⁸³ The Commission's report notes that ATAKA's anti-Roma, anti-Turkish, antisemitic, and anti-refugee propaganda is shared by a growing number of smaller ultra-nationalist parties that receive official recognition and, in some cases, even state subsidies.¹⁸⁴ However, ATAKA has been the biggest cause for concern – its constant political presence since 2005 has paved the way for similar formations to use extremist nationalist discourse and attract voters. This section deals specifically with ATAKA's discourse that can be classified as hate speech.

Even before ATAKA became a political party, its leader had gained notoriety for openly expressing antisemitic, anti-Turkish, anti-Roma and homophobic views. Bulgarian human rights activist Krasimir Kanev traces the origins of Siderov's hate speech and suggests that Siderov seems to have had his "initiation in the international antisemitic circles" by participating in a conference in Moscow in 2002, where leading conspiracy theorists, antisemites and Holocaust deniers (e.g. Jürgen Graf, Ahmed Rami, Gerald Töben and David Duke) presented.¹⁸⁵ The first of his openly antisemitic books, *Bumerangut na zloto* (The Boomerang of Evil), came out later that year, followed by *Vlastta na Mamona* (The Power of the Mammon) in 2014. Both books discuss world conspiracies against the Christian (particularly the Orthodox Christian) world and identify the forces behind this international plot – communists, masons, French Revolutionaries, the USA, but above all the Jews.¹⁸⁶ Since then, antisemitism features prominently in the discourse of Siderov

¹⁸³ Council of Europe. European Commission for Racism and Intolerance, "ECRI Report on Bulgaria (fifth monitoring cycle): Adopted on 19 June 2014," (16 September 2014):15, accessed March 20, 2016, <https://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/Country-by-country/Bulgaria/BGR-CbC-V-2014-036-ENG.pdf>.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Krasimir Kanev, "Po sledite na edna snimka," [Tracing a photo], *Bulgarian Helsinki Committee* (November 8, 2006). accessed May 25, 2016 <http://www.bghelsinki.org/bg/publikacii/obektiv/krasimir-knev/2005-11/po-sledite-na-edna-snimka/>.

¹⁸⁶ See Novakovic, 56-57 for a description of the main themes in "The Boomerang of Evil"

and his party, combined with anti-American, anti-globalist and anti-colonial rhetoric. Pointing out the Jewish origin and connections of Bulgarian politicians and public figures has turned into a standard *argumentum ad hominem* technique used in media and political discourse.¹⁸⁷ One figure which has emerged as a symbol, central to these anti-Jewish (but also anti-American and anti-globalist) discourses, in which local and foreign public figures and organizations are implicated, is George Soros, labelled “the international swindler,” “parasite” and “symbol of the international crime network.”¹⁸⁸ His role (along with the role of Israel, Bulgarian citizens of Jewish origin and the foundations and organizations associated with or sponsored by them,) is described as “dividing the Bulgarian nation.”¹⁸⁹

Turkey and its “fifth column” in Bulgaria, the Bulgarian Turks, are another frequent target of ATAKA’s hate speech. Quotes by the national poet Hristo Botev are again used to construct the image of the “Turkish barbaric and fanatic tribe,” which maintains its intentions to re-enslave the Bulgarians.¹⁹⁰ Foreign authoritative voices, such as the late 19th-century American journalist Januarius MacGahan, who stated that the Turks are “illiterate, stupid, lazy and debauched,” are utilized in the same manner.¹⁹¹ The aim of the discourse – to revive preexisting notions of the Ottoman Empire as Bulgaria’s eternal enemy and to project them onto modern-day Turkey, the Bulgarian Turks and the MRF. Siderov’s rhetoric on the MRF and its former leader, Ahmet Dogan, is particularly vitriolic – Dogan is a „political degenerate,” whose party consists of “national traitors,” who not only rule Bulgaria but have the temerity to accuse Bulgarians of

¹⁸⁷ Siderov, Ataka (January 13, 2005; January 20, 2005; January 28, 2005; February 16, 2005; February 21, 2005;

¹⁸⁸ Ibid. (January 25, 2005; March 1, 2005)

¹⁸⁹ Ibid. (February 2, 2005)

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. (January 6, 2005)

¹⁹¹ Ibid. (March, 3 2005)

intolerance.¹⁹² As an illustration of the Turkish influence in Bulgaria, Siderov often starts his daily shows by playing excerpts from the Turkish language news broadcast on Bulgarian National Television, which has enraged Bulgarian nationalists and stimulated several campaigns to ban the emissions.

ATAKA's hate speech also includes homophobic utterances meant to insult the party's opponents by speculating about their sexual orientation.¹⁹³ Homosexuality is frequently conflated with pedophilia and represents a "Western" disease. Siderov's moral indignation at the LGBT community culminated when he dedicated one of his daily broadcasts to a pop singer – Azis, who had expressed his intentions to enter Bulgarian politics. Since Azis is also Roma, the situation provides a golden opportunity for the TV host to associate "sexual perversion" with the Roma ethnicity, political corruption and cultural degeneration of the nation.¹⁹⁴

The abovementioned episode also engages a trope that has assumed a central place in ATAKA's hate speech – the Roma as the internal source of degeneration. While Turks, Jews, Americans or the EU are more or less external threats, the Roma are framed as an enemy within, which threatens the very existence of the Bulgarian nation. ATAKA and other far right political formations have not been alone in their extremely negative rhetoric about the Bulgarian Roma – public figures, mainstream politicians and the media can all be held accountable for constructing a negative image of the Roma.¹⁹⁵ In his study of Roma's representations across twenty Bulgarian

¹⁹² Ibid. (January 31, 2005)

¹⁹³ Ibid. (February 7, 2005; February 10, 2005)

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. (February 10, 2005)

¹⁹⁵ There are numerous studies documenting the prevalent negative representations of the Roma in Bulgarian media. One of the most recent is by Ilona Tomova, "Obrazăt na romite v shest elektronni medii," [The Image of the Roma in Six Electronic Media] (Razgrad: Integro Association, 2015) which analyzes the content of six leading Bulgarian media (including the

print newspapers, Alexey Pamporov argues that the “metahistory” of Roma stereotypes sounds like this: “Drunken swarthy offenders live in illegal houses in the ghetto and don’t pay their bills for communal services. They live in big family clans, which fight each other for the interests of the local bosses. The successful ones become chalga¹⁹⁶ singers.”¹⁹⁷ Notwithstanding this preexisting popular negative image, it was ATAKA’s 2005 parliamentary campaign that assigned a central importance to the “Roma problem” and encouraged other public and political actors to adopt similarly extreme rhetoric.

At the core of ATAKA’s anti-Roma discourse is racism, conveniently hidden behind welfare chauvinistic arguments about social injustice and eligibility for social benefits, as well as arguments about fundamental cultural differences between Roma and ethnic Bulgarians. This topic (similarly presented in the discourse of the BNU and, to a lesser degree, of the Patriotic Front) has been a cornerstone in their political program and a rallying point for their supporters. Georgia Efremova calls this phenomenon “integralist narratives and redemptive anti-Gypsy politics.”¹⁹⁸ On one hand, it denotes the use of “vernacularized” democratic discourses and procedures to “defend national culture against immigrant groups, ‘foreign values’, or even the

nationalistic SKAT TV and ATAKA’s later creation – Alfa TV) for the period 01.01.2014 – 30.06.2014.

¹⁹⁶ Typically Bulgarian term denoting the local pop-folk music style, widely perceived as a symbol of low culture and an emanation of the “Gypsyfication” and “Turkification” of the country

¹⁹⁷ Alexey Pamporov, “Piyanite murgavi prestupnitsi (Obrazut na romite v bulgarskite pechatni izdaniya v predizboren kontekst) [The Drunken Swarthy Offenders: The Image of the Roma in the Bulgarian Press in a Pre-election Context], *Naselenie* [Population] 3-4 (2011): 206, accessed March 3, 2016, <http://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=143509>.

¹⁹⁸ Georgia Efremova, “Integralist Narratives and Redemptive Anti-Gypsy Politics in Bulgaria,” 45 in Michael Stewart (ed.), *The Gypsy ‘Menace’*

unwanted influence of their neighbouring states in domestic affairs.”¹⁹⁹ On the other hand, it engages the idea of “redemptiveness” – “Roma are presented both as cause and manifestation of state weakness and are in turn placed at the centre of national/cultural decline and the need for salvation.”²⁰⁰ Efremova argues that the powerful concoction of these two concepts in the rhetoric of the far right, which aims at “the forging of the new-Bulgarian identity [...] imagined as passing through a purge of the Roma from Bulgarian society,” has helped legitimize the claims of such movements.²⁰¹

The anti-Roma discourse of ATAKA is comprised of several related themes – negative stereotypes about their demographic statistics, about their criminality, about their cultural distinctiveness, and about their social parasitism. While the demographic aspect of the nationalistic discourse was discussed earlier and the socio-economic one is covered in the last section of this chapter (dealing with economic nationalism/welfare chauvinism), the theme about “Gypsy criminality” will be analyzed next. Regarding Roma’s alleged cultural incompatibility, this is merely one way of framing ideas about racial differences. It is rather the background against which the other three themes have been projected.

The phrase “Gypsy criminality” is among the most damaging legacies of the rise of ATAKA and other nationalistic political formations. While antisemitism and anti-Turkish rhetoric have declined in intensity due to political reshufflings and collaboration between far right parties with more moderate political formations, the anti-Roma discourse and its core theme of “Gypsy criminality” have not subsided. The nationalistic parties in Bulgaria love to paint the

¹⁹⁹ Michael Stewart, “Populism, Roma and the European Politics of Cultural Difference,” 10 in Michael Stewart (ed.), *The Gypsy ‘Menace’*

²⁰⁰ Efremova, 46.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

Roma collectively as criminals and some have even staged several protest actions against the “Gypsy criminality,” which prepared the ground for all-round ethnic riots.²⁰² After one such altercation, ATAKA did its best to further aggravate the situation by circulating a brochure just four days after the incident. The brochure, called “The Gypsies Criminality – a Threat to the State,” is a collection of short texts “exposing” the criminal nature of the Roma with explosive titles and racist and hate-inciting categorizations and statements (“Gypsy banditry”, “freaks”, “drunken and dirty Gypsies”, “maddened and merciless”, “The bestialization of the Gypsies has reached such a level that they kill their own children. Unless when they give birth to them for sale”, “The Gypsies’ weapon is demographics”, “the Gypsy scum”, “the brute”, etc.).²⁰³ Despite subsequent investigation after signals from Roma and human rights activists, no legal action was taken against the party.

Bulgaria’s most vociferous nationalistic party has frequently employed hate speech towards the perceived enemies of the Bulgarian nation. Internal and external targets of ATAKA’s wrath – such as the Roma and the Turkish minorities, homosexuals and Jews – have been dehumanized

²⁰² The most notorious case had been in the village of Katunitza in 2011 when a confrontation between ethnic Bulgarians and Roma, associated with a local “Gypsy baron,” resulted in the death of one of the Bulgarians. Local residents of the village “rose up in rebellion” and looted the baron’s property, setting on fire one of his houses. The local strife escalated when football hooligans from across the country, believed to be successfully mobilized by nationalist parties such as VMRO and ATAKA, started flocking at the village. What could be viewed as an extreme but somewhat comprehensible reaction on behalf of the locals to the social conflict with the corrupt practices and impunity that the Roma businessman and his entourage represented, ultimately turned into an ethnically-charged altercation that reverberated throughout the country. (Antoni Todorov, “Extreme Right Wing in Bulgaria,” 5)

²⁰³ Denislav Tsonev, “Volen Siderov ne e izvrshil prestuplenie s broshurata “Tsiganska prestupnost – opasnost za durzhavata” [Volen Siderov has not committed a crime with the brochure “The Gypsy Criminality – A Threat to the State”], *Praven svyat* [Legal World], (March 27, 2012), accessed March 26, 2016), <http://www.legalworld.bg/26178.volensiderov-ne-e-izvrshil-prestuplenie-s-broshurata-ciganskata-prestupnost-%E2%80%93-opasnost-za-dyrjavata.html&orderby=1>.

and blamed for the misfortunes of the Bulgarian people. Demographically, culturally and even physically, these groups have been portrayed as a destructive force against which the nationalists have pledged to fight. The last section of the chapter will delve deeper into the thread of Bulgarian nationalist discourse that focuses on economic threats to the nation.

3.5. Economic Nationalism and Welfare Chauvinism

As previously defined, economic nationalism describes any measures in the economic sphere whose primary concern is for the nation as opposed to the economy. Most literature on economic nationalism has focused predominantly on its international aspects. Since the anti-colonial discourse of contemporary Bulgarian nationalists has already been sketched, this section will focus on the inward-oriented aspect of economic nationalism – the drive to maintain and to further the homogeneity and cohesiveness of the nation within its respective state through economic policies. A crucial role in this domestic project is attributed to social welfare measures, which adds a new function of the state – “to compensate for the negative effects of the market on significant numbers of citizens.”²⁰⁴ In addition, Beland and Lecours frame welfare policies as a “source of social cohesion” that “represent a tangible manifestation of the existence of a political community.”²⁰⁵ Andreas Wimmer shares this view but also highlights the negative aspects of this phenomenon – that “the welfare state represents the last step in the construction of a nationally

²⁰⁴ Robert Cox, *Production, Power and World Order: Social Forces in the Making of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 165.

²⁰⁵ Daniel Beland and Andre Lecours, “The Politics of Territorial Solidarity: Nationalism and Social Policy Reform in Canada, the United Kingdom, and Belgium”, *Comparative Political Studies*, 38 (6) (2005): 679, accessed March 14, 2016, doi: 10.1177/0010414005275600.

framed society, and it is accompanied with the gradual exclusion of those who are not members of the national community/citizenry/sovereign.”²⁰⁶

This dual function of welfare policies – as a vehicle for social cohesion and as a political tool ensuring that domestic and international markets do not jeopardize the wellbeing of the citizens – makes them extremely important to the political programs and rhetoric of political formations. For nationalistic parties, in particular, welfare policies often feature at the very top of their political agenda that alleges to defend and uphold the political, social, economic and cultural integrity of the nation against any inside or outside threats. For this reason they use rhetoric falling under the description of “welfare chauvinism.”²⁰⁷ In Bulgaria, such rhetoric originated in the 1990s in relation to the Roma, who were framed as “others” and undeserving of the social benefits that Bulgaria provides for “the people.” More recently, it has been extended to Middle-Eastern refugees as well.

Nationalist political actors have successfully propagated the notion that Roma are responsible for the country’s socio-economic predicament because they are “privileged” over ethnic Bulgarians. This “reverse discrimination” argument “ethicizes Bulgaria’s socio-economic decline and blames it on the Roma, the group that is ’10 times more likely to be poor than ethnic

²⁰⁶ Andreas Wimmer, *Nationalist Exclusion and Ethnic Conflict: Shadows of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 13

²⁰⁷ The term “welfare chauvinism” appeared first in the context of the social welfare states in Denmark and Norway. Propagated first by Jørgen Goul Andersen and Tor Bjørklund in their 1990 article on the ideology and electoral support of the right wing parties in these two countries, the term “welfare state chauvinism” denotes quite a simplistic concept – “welfare services should be restricted to ‘our own.’” (Jørgen Goul Andersen and Tor Bjørklund, “Structural Change and New Cleavages: The Progress Parties in Denmark and Norway,” *Acta Sociologica* 3, no. 33 (1990): 212, accessed March 15, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4200798>).

Bulgarians’.”²⁰⁸ Several recent publications address two main problems, allegedly endemic to the Roma – housing conditions and social benefits for teenage mothers.

Proposals for a government fund for housing impoverished Roma provoked the nationalists’ wrath. Ilian Todorov, an MP from ATAKA and a frequent contributor to their newspaper, presents such proposals as an example of discrimination against Bulgarians.²⁰⁹ According to him, the project amounts to succumbing to EU pressure to build quality housing only for the Roma.²¹⁰ Todorov thus resorts to a common trope used by ATAKA – integration efforts benefitting the Roma are forced upon the government from abroad. The authorities are criticized for complying with the EU agenda, which supposedly favors the Roma. This helps the nationalists construct their narrative about the Bulgarian politicians who have sold the interests of the “true” Bulgarians for personal financial enrichment.

Another discursive strategy employed by ATAKA is to relativize the plight of the Roma and the need for addressing it. For this purpose, nationalists employ comparisons with impoverished ethnic Bulgarians. Todorov asks who will provide housing for the Bulgarians, who are “forced to support a large parasitizing mass.”²¹¹ Furthermore, the author chooses to illustrate the “parasite” metaphor by providing irrelevant and grossly inaccurate information about astronomical monthly subsidies, supposedly received by an eighteen-year-old Roma mother with

²⁰⁸ Marinos, 287

²⁰⁹ “Ataka пита: Kolko shte struvat sotsialnite zhilishta za tsiganite?” [Ataka asks: How much will the social housing for the Roma cost?], *Vestnik Ataka* [Ataka Newspaper], (April 17, 2014), accessed March 26, 2016), <http://www.vestnikataka.bg/2014/04/%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B0%D0%BA%D0%B0-%D0%BF%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B0-%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%BA%D0%BE-%D1%89%D0%B5-%D1%81%D1%82%D1%80%D1%83%D0%B2%D0%B0%D1%82-%D1%81%D0%BE%D1%86%D0%B8%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%82/>.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid.

three children who stands for all Roma mothers.²¹² The article ends with a victim-perpetrator role reversal – a threat that ATAKA might take legal action if the government’s proposal materializes since it allegedly contradicts Bulgaria’s anti-discrimination legislation.²¹³ Accusing the Roma and the government for discriminating against ethnic Bulgarians, while at the same time propagating virulent anti-Roma discourse and advocating discriminatory anti-minority measures has become a staple in ATAKA’s discursive repertoire.

Fallacious generalizations and the manipulation and fabrication of statistics are two of the most common discursive strategies used by ATAKA and other nationalist formations. In another article about Roma housing, Petya Valentinova cites various sums in the scope of hundreds of thousands and millions to quantify the argument that the “horror blocks” in which Roma live have caused extreme financial burden on the Bulgarian economy due to unpaid bills for rent, water and electricity.²¹⁴ To these Roma deviants, she contrasts the ethnic Bulgarian who always pays his bills and suffers from the so-called “Gypsy terror.”²¹⁵ Valentinova argues that “every normal person” associates “the Gypsy hordes who turn tens of municipal blocks in the country into stinky ruins, emanating filth and fear” with “parasites who suck out and destroy everything decent that they can lay their hands on.”²¹⁶ Roma domiciles are described evocatively as “a den of diseases, crime and anarchy”, “brothels in which only illiteracy, criminality and diseases are

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ PetyaValentinova, “Tsiganski ‘blokove na uzhasite’ belyazaha tsyala Bulgaria [”Gypsy ‘horror blocks’ scarred all Bulgaria”] *Vestnik Ataka* [Ataka Newspaper] (May 11, 2012), accessed March 25, 2016), <http://www.vestnikataka.bg/2012/05/%D1%86%D0%B8%D0%B3%D0%B0%D0%BD%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B8-%D0%B1%D0%BB%D0%BE%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B5-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D1%83%D0%B6%D0%B0%D1%81%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B5-%D0%B1%D0%B5%D0%BB%D1%8F%D0%B7/>

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

produced,” “pigsties,” while the residents are called “bestial,” “the state’s spoilt children,” who “cannot be coexisted with” and “wherever they go, would live illegally, in disregard for the law, with no commitments or responsibilities.”²¹⁷ This harsh language juxtaposes ethnic Bulgarians and Bulgarian Roma and suggests that the former group cannot withstand the latter any more, thus the need for ATAKA to give them voice.

The debate about maternity benefits has featured in ATAKA’s discourse in a similar denigrating fashion. The party proposes that family benefits legislation should be amended and child allowances be given only to parents over eighteen years of age.²¹⁸ Parallel to this, the party constructs a generalizing image of the twelve or thirteen year-old Roma mother, leaving no doubt which ethnic group is targeted by the proposed legislation. The nationalists claim that “this sinful practice puts the entire Bulgarian society, the working Bulgarians and the Bulgarian economy in an unfair position to raise through their taxes a group of individuals for whom giving birth has turned into a business and survival strategy.”²¹⁹ According to ATAKA, Bulgarians have to work and support not only their own children but also “huge unemployed families and their children,” which contributes to the demographic crisis.²²⁰ In support of this argument, ATAKA published an open letter to the Bulgarian president, prime minister and ministers of finance and social care in which an ethnic Bulgarian laments that the state “considers her child less important than the

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Polina Naydenova, “ATAKA predlaga: detski nadbavki samo za roditeli, navurshili pulnoletie” [ATAKA proposes: Child allowances only for parents who have come of age], *Vestnik Ataka* [Ataka Newspaper], (February 5, 2014), accessed March 25, 2016), <http://www.vestnikataka.bg/2014/02/%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B0%D0%BA%D0%B0-%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%B4%D0%BB%D0%B0%D0%B3%D0%B0-%D0%B4%D0%B5%D1%82%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B8-%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%B4%D0%B1%D0%B0%D0%B2%D0%BA%D0%B8-%D1%81%D0%B0%D0%BC%D0%BE-%D0%B7/>.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Ibid.

child of a Roma woman” since the government “discriminates against the educated and working people in favor of the uneducated, unemployed and parasitizing.”²²¹ The letter is signed as “one that has already lost faith in you, a BULGARIAN, Iva Nicheva” and should quell all doubts that only ATAKA could save the desperate ethnic Bulgarians. It is followed by photos of teenage Roma mothers with captions such as, “at the age of 30 Gypsies are with two or three grandchildren” and “the Roma have turned giving birth into business.”²²²

Another article by Ilian Todorov, combines almost all of the racial and cultural stereotypes that ATAKA disseminates about the Roma with the party’s other priorities. Entitled “Multicultural Genocide,” the article is an all-out attack on local NGOs, the political elite, the electricity monopolies, multicultural Europe and its “duplicity,” and the Bulgarian Roma. The latter are accused of terrorizing working Bulgarian families, breeding uncontrollably, parasitizing on social benefits, selling their votes and engaging in prostitution and other illicit activities.²²³ This angry rant, however, did not provoke any legal action. Neither have any of the other regular contributors to ATAKA’s newspaper, even though the ethnic hatred they openly incite is clearly reflected in the comments under their articles.

²²¹ “Mlada maika ot Dobrich: Durzhavata diskriminira bulgarskite detsa” [Young mother from Dobrich: the state discriminates against Bulgarian children], *Vestnik Ataka* [Ataka Newspaper], (April 11, 2014), accessed March 25, 2016), <http://www.vestnikataka.bg/2014/04/%D0%BC%D0%BB%D0%B0%D0%B4%D0%B0-%D0%BC%D0%B0%D0%B9%D0%BA%D0%B0-%D0%BE%D1%82-%D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%B1%D1%80%D0%B8%D1%87-%D0%B4%D1%8A%D1%80%D0%B6%D0%B0%D0%B2%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B0-%D0%B4%D0%B8%D1%81%D0%BA%D1%80/>.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ilian Todorov, “Multikulturen genotsid” [Multicultural Genocide], *Vestnik Ataka* [Ataka Newspaper], (April 4, 2012), accessed March 25, 2016), <http://www.vestnikataka.bg/2012/04/%D0%BC%D1%83%D0%BB%D1%82%D0%B8%D0%BA%D1%83%D0%BB%D1%82%D1%83%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%BD-%D0%B3%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%BE%D1%86%D0%B8%D0%B4/>

Siderov and his party proceed freely to preach their politics of hate and the repercussions of their discourse are perhaps yet to be fully felt. The analysis of Siderov's 2005 broadcasts and several of ATAKA's more recent publications reveals a continuous use of discursive strategies to construct a discourse in which there is no middle ground – Bulgaria and the outside world are divided into friends and enemies, patriots/nationalists and traitors. Some of these discursive strategies include relying on unsubstantiated arguments, fallacious generalizations, manipulative use of statistical data, trivializing and relativizing important topics, using *argumentum ad hominem*, victim-perpetrator reversal, impersonal third-point of view, quotes by people of great national significance (*argumentum ad verecundiam*), unreal and hypothetical scenarios, etc. The last chapter of this thesis will analyze whether these strategies and ideological themes can be related to the ones used by nationalists in the Interwar period. In addition, it will suggest a further point of convergence between the two periods – commemorative events.

Chapter 4: Meeting Points

Nationalistic parties worldwide rely on common ideological themes presenting them as the true embodiment of the national will and spirit. At the center of their ideology and rhetoric, lies the idea about their nation's unitary nature and functioning like a living organism. This understanding suggests that outside influences are detrimental to the nation's essence and therefore sets clear boundaries to prevent mixing. The political, social, economic and cultural ramifications of such a nativist view predetermine the discourse and the rhetorical strategies of nationalistic organizations which often manipulate their context to convey a sense of societal crisis.

Such strategies, however, are not new. Even before the Great Depression, Interwar politicians and intellectuals had propagated the narrative of a deep crisis in which their country, Europe and the world in general have plunged after WWI. Bulgarian Interwar nationalists were no different – portraying the Bulgarian nation as being threatened by foreign influences and their local supporters, by ideologies and movements, believed to be incompatible with a supposed Bulgarian “national essence”, served to legitimize their political projects. The post-1989 Bulgarian nationalists have freely borrowed from the context of the perceived crisis and the main ideological themes, rarely with the proper reference.

The heritage of the Interwar period is not confined to ideologies, rhetoric and crisis perception. Common features can be noticed in public and political actions, particularly in commemorative events. One such event – Lukov March – establishes a direct symbolic link between the contemporary nationalists and their Interwar counterparts. The event is a rare

occurrence in which an Interwar nationalistic figure is rehabilitated and the legacy of his organization, the *UBNL*, comes into the public spotlight. This last chapter of the thesis analyzes Lukov March as a potential bridge for nationalists from the two eras and proceeds with a final comparative analysis of the discourse of the Bulgarian nationalistic formations from the two periods.

4.1. Lukov March

While political expression prior to the 2005 elections has been relatively limited for nationalistic organizations, events have played a significant role during both the Interwar and the contemporary period in maintaining political presence of the nationalists, establishing their image, disseminating ideas and attracting new followers. These manifold functions of events for political purposes have certainly not been restricted to nationalistic organizations. However, their ideological preference for hierarchy and discipline, leadership cult, reliance on myths and symbols, monopoly of power and control over the masses, deems them more suitable to benefit from the process of “transforming permanently the occasional crowds of civil events into the liturgical masses of the political cult” – a modern process which Emilio Gentile calls the “sacralisation of politics.”²²⁴

According to Juan J. Linz fascists have particularly profited from their “discovery of new forms of political action” as it “offered an opportunity for action, involvement, participation,

²²⁴ Emilio Gentile, “The sacralisation of politics: Definitions, interpretations and reflection on the question of secular religion and totalitarianism,” in Constantin Iordachi, *Comparative Fascist Studies*, 261

breaking with the monotony of everyday life,” which “satisfied certain psychological and emotional needs.”²²⁵ Combined with the uniforms, symbols, torches, marches, etc., these features have contributed to their stark differentiation from traditional parties. Contemporary right wing populist parties’ distinctive features such as “performative strategies in modern media democracies,” “focus on ‘charismatic’ leaders” and “front-stage performance techniques” suggest a similar reliance on appearance and performance going beyond the usage of media.²²⁶ As noted earlier, the manner in which contemporary nationalistic parties and organizations like ATAKA and the Bulgarian National Union have gained popularity through media savvy performances could explain why they would also seek to engage in additional types of performative actions.

Indeed, the BNU’s main public activity apart from the previously mentioned TV show has been to organize protest and commemorative events. ATAKA’s successful political campaign in 2005 changed the norm of political activity of the far right stream according to which “smaller extreme right-wing organizations do not take part in the national and local elections, but they are very active in certain youth milieus and among football fans” who they mobilize for their public actions.²²⁷ With ATAKA providing political legitimation of such activities, these methods of political expression have become better organized, more salient and potentially more dangerous for ethnic relations.

Since their establishment in 2001 and 2005, both the BNU and ATAKA have participated in many political protests and commemorative events which have attracted attention to their activities. Both nationalistic formations rarely miss an opportunity to flag their patriotism, be it

²²⁵ Juan J. Linz, “Fascism as ‘Latecomer’: An Ideal Type with Negations,” in Aristotle Kallis, *The Fascism Reader*, 64, 67

²²⁶ Wodak, “‘Anything goes!,’” 27-28

²²⁷ Antony Todorov, “Extreme Right Wing in Bulgaria,” 5

celebrating the National Independence Day on March 3, anti-Neuilly treaty marches, public commemorations of the life and death of the Bulgarian national heroes Vasil Levski and Hristo Botev as well as of the WWII Bulgarian pilot Dimitar Spisarevski, anniversaries of the 1876 April Uprising, etc. These commemorative events have attracted a fluctuating group of attendants, ranging from the formations' hardcore supporters to governmental officials, and unaffiliated Bulgarian citizens. Parallel with these activities, the nationalistic formations have organized public demonstrations in regards to issues they perceive as crucial for the national interests, e.g. anti-NATO demonstrations, anti-Gay Parade demonstration, anti-Turkish or anti-Roma protests, particularly in the aftermath of an incident or social unrest. Such incidents include the previously mentioned incident in the village of Katunitza, as well as Gurmen, Radnevo, Banya Bashi Mosque in Sofia, Dzhumaya Mosque in Plovdiv, Zaharna fabrika, etc. Stela Krasteva suggests that the latter event, an interethnic brawl in the Zaharna fabrika neighborhood of Sofia in May 2005, has special importance for the rise of ATAKA as it allowed Volen Siderov to transform "the 'Roma problem' from a social into a political issue" and organize his successful campaign around it.²²⁸ Other analysts have also noted the easiness with which "ethnic tension" erupts or is rather instigated by political entrepreneurs.²²⁹

Among the ethnicized clashes and patriotic events, it seems hard to pinpoint an event which emerges as symbolic for the state of Bulgarian post-1989 nationalism. Yet, the Lukov March, a memorial torchlight procession, dedicated to the *UBNL* leader General Hristo Lukov, could be perceived as such an event. During the past thirteen years, it has not only continuously provoked

²²⁸ Krasteva, "Structure, Opportunity" 8

²²⁹ Emiliya Milcheva, "Da mu drasresh klechkata v Radnevo," [To strike the match in Radnevo] *Ureport.bg*, May 5, 2016, accessed May 5, 2016, <http://ureport.bg/117749/2016/05/05/300-dumi/da-mu-drasresh-klechkata>.

public controversy but has also been touted by modern-day nationalists as the largest manifestation of nationalism. This event also establishes a symbolic connection between members of the contemporary nationalistic organizations and their Interwar counterparts, thus suggesting further ground for locating continuities.

The event starts in 2004 when members of the BNU organize their first memorial torchlight procession on the 61st anniversary of the general's death. According to the organizers, "no one from the roughly fifteen people, who attended the first Lukov March [...] had thought that they are starting a tradition which will become the largest event of the national movement in Bulgaria."²³⁰ Twelve years later, the nationalists from BNU perceive the event as "a symbol of the rising and united nationalistic youth in Bulgaria" because "General Lukov's name and ideas unite the nationalists from various organizations and groups."²³¹ Indeed, the leaders of the parliamentary represented nationalistic formation IMRO,²³² Krasimir Karakachanov and Angel Dzhambazki, have frequently expressed their support for the march and denied that it could be related to neo-Nazi propaganda.²³³ The latter, currently vice-chairman of the IMRO and a member of the European Parliament, has personally participated in the march, delivering a lecture

²³⁰ "Napred i nagore," [Forward and upward] Lukovmarsh, last modified January 16, 2015, accessed May 20, 2016, <http://www.lukovmarsh.info/%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%B4-%D0%B8-%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%B3%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%B5/>.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² IMRO is in the parliament in coalition with the National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria (NFSB) within the Patriotic Front.

²³³ "Dzhambazki: Lukov Marsh ne e neonatsistka proiava," [Dzhambazki: Lukov March is not a neonazi manifestation] www.vmro.bg (February 13, 2014), Accessed May 30, <http://www.vmro.bg/%D0%B4%D0%B6%D0%B0%D0%BC%D0%B1%D0%B0%D0%B7%D0%BA%D0%B8-%D0%BB%D1%83%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B2-%D0%BC%D0%B0%D1%80%D1%88-%D0%BD%D0%B5-%D0%B5-%D0%BD%D0%B5%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%86%D0%B8%D1%81%D1%82%D0%BA%D0%B0-%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%BE%D1%8F%D0%B2%D0%B0/>

entitled “Gypsyfication and the gypsy question in Bulgaria and Europe. Chronology of the de-socialization and self-isolation of the gypsies in the Bulgarian society. Reasons and consequences. Possible solutions of this questions in Bulgaria and Europe” at the international nationalistic conference “Europe of the free nations, not a dictatorship of the euro bureaucrats” which followed the march.²³⁴ Nationalists from other European countries, such as France, Belgium, Germany, Croatia, and Hungary, have been frequent guests and speakers at the march as well as participants in such nationalistic forums, organized by the BNU.²³⁵

The organizers from BNU, the IMRO and its leadership are not the only supporters of Lukov March. Volen Siderov and his party ATAKA have also expressed their sympathy with annual coverage of the event on the party’s TV channel.²³⁶ The founder and leader of the BNU, Boyan Rasate, was even a guest on Siderov’s show in 2005, when the two nationalists collaborated during ATAKA’s first years.²³⁷ Other “patriotic organizations,” which have stood beside the main organizers throughout the years, include National Resistance and the Bulgarian fraction of Blood and Honor, the latter being internationally recognized as an openly neo-Nazi formation.²³⁸ Undoubtedly, the event has emerged as a rallying point for various nationalistic parties and organizations which is also reflected in the event’s growing support – from a dozen

²³⁴ “Programa na mezhdunarodnata natsionalisticheska konferentsiia – ‘Evropa na svobodnite natsii, a ne diktatura na evroburokratite,’” [Program of the international nationalistic conference – ‘Europe of the free nations, not a dictatorship of the euro-bureaucrats’] Lukovmarsh, last modified February 13, 2012, accessed May 30, 2016, <http://www.lukovmarsh.info/%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BC%D0%B0-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%BC%D0%B5%D0%B6%D0%B4%D1%83%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B0-%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%86%D0%B8%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%BB/>.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Siderov, *Ataka* (February 12, 2005)

²³⁷ Ibid. (January 15, 2005)

²³⁸ Antoniy Todorov, 7

participants in the first march to a few hundred in its subsequent editions and to more than two thousand recently.

Nevertheless, Lukov March's rising popularity does not predetermine its significance. Traditional parties such as the Bulgarian Socialist Parties or the dominant force in the Bulgarian government over the last six years, Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB), have both been able to top the nationalistic audience manifold in their party gatherings. It is the symbols and messages associated with the event which unites contemporary nationalists but also makes an obvious reference to their "predecessors" from the Interwar period.

The event starts at a gathering point, normally the National Palace of Culture, from where the nationalists, accompanied by heavy police presence, march across the streets of the capital and stop at various locations such as the Memorial of the Unknown Warrior or the monument of the national hero Vasil Levski towards their final destination – the house of the general, which was also his place of death. The participants, clad in black or in military uniforms, carry portraits of the general, torches, national flags and flags of the BNU as well as wreaths. The whole procession marches in unison, shouting nationalistic slogans such as "For Bulgaria – freedom or death!," "Then and now, Macedonia is Bulgarian!," "Bulgaria, wake up," the national anthem, as well as the slogan of the UBNL – "Free, social, national."²³⁹ In front of Lukov's house the procession stops and several key note speakers hold dramatic speeches praising the legacy of the general but also denouncing the current unpatriotic spirit of the country. Frequent targets of the speeches are the Bulgarian political elite, international financial circles, the Bulgarian Roma and

²³⁹ "Lukovmarsh 2012 – Den na geroi," [Lukov March 2012 – a day of heroes] Lukovmarsh, last modified February 18, 2012, accessed May 30, 2016, <http://www.lukovmarsh.info/%D0%BB%D1%83%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%BC%D0%B0%D1%80%D1%88-2012-%D0%B4%D0%B5%D0%BD-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%B3%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B8/>.

Turkish minorities, the communists and the Jews, the latter two groups due to their involvement in Lukov's murder although such slogans and public utterings have been muffled recently as opposition and criticism at the event has mounted.²⁴⁰

The organizers from BNU have vigorously denounced any allegations of antisemitism, fascism or (neo-)Nazism or xenophobia on their behalf, as well as from the historical *UBNL* and its leader. According to the BNU, the memory and the image of both Interwar and modern "patriots" (*rodoluybtsi*) has been tarnished in the past by the "Bolshevik occupiers" and now by their heirs, the "ethnic unconstitutional party MRF – an instrument of the neo-Ottoman expansion in Bulgaria," a number of NGOs with foreign financing such as the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee and the Open Society Institute, who "receive money to conduct subversive activity, to incite inter-ethnic tension and to destroy the national consciousness of Bulgarians," and finally, by the Zionist lobby in Bulgaria, which "aim at guaranteeing vassal attitude of the Bulgarian political class towards the state of Israel."²⁴¹ This list of "enemies" of Bulgarian nationalism

²⁴⁰ Besides pressure to cancel the event from local NGOs such as the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, the Shalom Organization of the Jews in Bulgaria, foreign embassies and many others, international organizations have also condemned the march. "Otvoreno pismo na Evropeiskata mreza sreshtu rasizma po povod 'Lukov marsh,'" [Open letter of the European Network Against Racism regarding 'Lukov March'] Bulgarian Helsinki Committee (February 13, 2012), Accessed May 30, 2016, <http://www.bghelsinki.org/bg/novini/press/single/otvoreno-pismo-na-evropejskata-mreza-sreshu-rasizma-po-povod-lukov-marsh/>

²⁴¹ "Pozitsiia na Bulgarski Natsionalen Suyz po otnoshenie na klevetnicheskata kampaniia sreshtu Lukovmarsh," [Position of the Bulgarian National Union regarding the slandering campaign against Lukov March] Lukovmarsh, last modified February 12, 2014, accessed. May 31, 2016, <http://www.lukovmarsh.info/%D0%BF%D0%BE%D0%B7%D0%B8%D1%86%D0%B8%D1%8F-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%B1%D1%8A%D0%BB%D0%B3%D0%B0%D1%80%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B8-%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%86%D0%B8%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%B5%D0%BD-%D1%81%D1%8A%D1%8E%D0%B7/>.

roughly coincides with what Siderov and ATAKA have been preaching against as well as with the perceived threats to Bulgarian consciousness, identified by the Interwar nationalists.

It is not without significance that the organizers and participants of the march devote so much attention to historical revisionism regarding the *UBNL* and its leader. On the third edition of the march in 2006, BNU officially proclaimed General Hristo Lukov as their patron.²⁴² Furthermore, the then leader of the BNU concluded his speech at the event by claiming that “today the sole successor of the ideas of the Union of Bulgarian National Legions can be the Bulgarian National Union because only it combines the ideas, youth and the energy of the legionnaires.”²⁴³ In addition, one of the symbols of the organization – its uniforms – is explained to be “a continuation of the traditions of the Bulgarian nationalistic organizations,” among which are the *UBNL*, the *Ratniks*, *Fatherland Defense*, *Brannik*, the historical IMRO as well as earlier Bulgarian resistance groups.²⁴⁴ Perhaps most revealing of the Lukov March’s organizers’ ideological indebtedness to the Interwar nationalistic organizations, above all the *UBNL*, is their program. Not only does the most famous legionnaire slogan about “nationally mighty and

²⁴² “Lukovmarsh 2006 – Gen. Lukov, patron na BNS,” [Lukov March 2006 – Gen. Lukov, patron of the BNU] Lukovmarsh, last modified February 11, 2006, accessed May 31, 2016, <http://www.lukovmarsh.info/%D0%BB%D1%83%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%BC%D0%B0%D1%80%D1%88-2006-%D0%B3%D0%B5%D0%BD-%D0%BB%D1%83%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B2-%D0%BF%D0%B0%D1%82%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%BD-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%B1%D0%BD%D1%81/>.

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ “Simvoli,” [Symbols] *Bulgarian National Union*, Accessed April 25, 2016, <http://bgns.net/%D1%81%D0%B8%D0%BC%D0%B2%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%B8/>

socially just Bulgaria” appear in the BNU program but the style and the ideas in the entire document are staggeringly similar to the programs of the *UBNL*.²⁴⁵

The combination of symbols, style and slogans of Lukov March has led Nikolai Poppetrov to declare it as a kind of a “remake” of similar Interwar developments.²⁴⁶ He discusses the reasons why the figure of the general has been mythologized and argues that the process has already started with his death. Poppetrov also states that one can only speculate whether the typical combination of social and nationalistic slogans at the march stems from the contemporary perception that the national and social question in Bulgaria are not yet resolved or has its roots in outside influences of Hitler’s National Socialist ideology.²⁴⁷ In his comparison of several Bulgarian and Romanian Interwar organizations with contemporary ones, James Frusetta and Anca Glont are more unambiguous in their opinion – they suggest that “there are multiple fascist discourses and heritages members of the BNU draw upon, not all of the Bulgarian.”²⁴⁸ For the two scholars there is an ongoing process of “globalization of historical fascist symbols,” which “may represent an emerging, international fascist heritage not constrained to Central and Eastern Europe.”²⁴⁹

Frusetta and Glont point out the existence of multiple legacies and heritages which influence contemporary Bulgarian nationalists. The cooperation of ATAKA with international far

²⁴⁵ “Kakvo iskame,” [What do we want] *Bulgarian National Union*, Accessed April 25, 2016, <http://bgns.net/%D0%BA%D0%B0%D0%BA%D0%B2%D0%BE-%D0%B8%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B0%D0%BC%D0%B5/>

²⁴⁶ Nikolai Poppetrov, “Lukovmarsh kato rimeik,” [Lukov March as a remake] *Kultura*, February 24, 2013, accessed May 10, 2016, <http://kultura.bg/web/%D0%BB%D1%83%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%BC%D0%B0%D1%80%D1%88-%D0%BA%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%BE-%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%BC%D0%B5%D0%B9%D0%BA/>.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ James Frusetta, Anca Glont, “Interwar fascism and the post-1989 radical right,” 178.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 178-179.

right movements or the international guests at the Lukov March adds substance to claims that the discourse and ideology of modern-day nationalistic organizations looks in many directions for inspiration. A further illustration of this analytical quandary is the very name of ATAKA, which could be associated with the name of the newspaper of the Interwar National Socialist Bulgarian Workers Party of Hristo Kunchev or of Goebbels's *Der Angriff*. Such questions of authenticity have troubled researchers of nationalistic organizations from the Interwar period and seem to have been transposed into the contemporary context.

In any case, Lukov March suggests that at least on symbolic level modern-day nationalists do consider the heritage of their Interwar predecessors as important and seek continuity. The last section of the thesis provides a comparative analysis of the ideological themes and rhetoric of the nationalists from the two periods should give a more comprehensive answer to the question of their continuities and discontinuities.

4.2. Continuities and Discontinuities in Discourse

The different context in which Interwar and contemporary nationalistic organizations operate would suggest that their discourse and rhetoric should have little in common. After all, during the Interwar period, authoritarian, fascist and National Socialist ideas were freely circulating in Bulgaria and in all of Europe and the region was ruled by regimes which identified themselves with such ideologies. In contrast, to openly espouse fascist or Nazi ideas now could mean a political suicide and result in imprisonment and serious legal charges. Some scholars even argue that “right-wing parties in Europe – at least in Western Europe – have become parties

without a history,” in the sense that the “far right had to dissociate itself from any direct link to its fascist/Nazi past.”²⁵⁰

By contrast, in their search for historical legacies, nationalistic parties in post-1989 Eastern Europe could rely more openly on the Interwar period in addition to communism and the period of transformation from 1989-1992.²⁵¹ Their denunciation of the dogmatic communist interpretation of Interwar history has allowed them greater room for revisionism. Therefore, nationalistic parties from the region have been more eager to instrumentalize the context, ideology and rhetoric of their Interwar counterparts in order to construct their discourse. Contemporary Bulgarian nationalistic organizations have certainly borrowed ideological themes from the Interwar nationalistic repository and adjusted them to the new context. Furthermore, they have benefitted from employing a reverse technique – framing the post-1989 context in a way that would resemble the one before WWII and the nationalistic themes circulating at that time would seem more suitable for the contemporary context.

Such discursive shifts have rendered the actual context in which contemporary nationalistic organizations such as ATAKA, the BNU or the Patriotic Front exist meaningless. As long as these political formations manage to successfully manipulate the sense of crisis, corruption of the political system and the people’s perception of being “losers” from the post-1989 transition and the contemporary social and political order, they could rely on some popular support. The results of studies of electoral support for ATAKA by Maria Popova and Evgenia Ivanova, already mentioned in the thesis, have proven precisely this tendency.²⁵² Thus, fraught social and

²⁵⁰ Pelinka, “Right-Wing Populism,” 11.

²⁵¹ Minkenberg, “Leninist beneficiaries,” 16.

²⁵² Maria Popova, “What brought Ataka to the Political Scene”; Evgenia Ivanova, “Izbiteliat na Ataka.”

economic situation, traditional prejudices towards minorities and increasing dissatisfaction with the Bulgarian political elite, all factors which also existed in the Interwar period to some extent, serve as a background which needed to be discursively constructed before any ideological themes – new or pre-existing – are introduced.

The first and most important of these themes, which has dominated the discourse of contemporary nationalists once the background factors have been put in place, is the idea about the nation. This notion, which emerges as the central theme in the discourse of both Interwar and contemporary nationalistic organizations, is developed through the frequent use of medical and botanic imagery. According to the nationalists, the nation is a living organism, an entity, a tree, a field or a garden; in any case, a collective and integral unit which could be contaminated, destroyed, desecrated and therefore needs constant protection from outside forces. A starting point in the discursive strategies of Bulgarian nationalists has been to identify themselves not only as part of this holistic concept of the nation, but also as its representatives and defenders. From then onwards comes the boundary-setting – the process in which the external and automatically labelled as hostile forces would be defined – the national “traitors,” the national minorities, international bodies, foreign states, etc. They are perceived and discussed as biologically and culturally incompatible and detrimental to the nation’s presumed essence. They feature extensively in the discourse of the nationalistic organizations from both the Interwar and the contemporary period with varying degrees of intensity and with a certain re-framing and re-contextualization to be made more relevant. In this sense, the discourses of Bulgarian nationalists about the nation reveals not only continuities but clear overlapping.

The second set of key themes which invites parallels between nationalistic organizations from the two periods includes anti-modernism/anti-modernity and anti-globalization. Modernity

as a historical period and modernism as a form of cultural and philosophical movement combine all the negative influences that Interwar nationalists identify as destructive on a global scale but particularly dangerous for Bulgaria's authentic culture. In these two concepts organizations such as the *UBNL*, the *Ratniks* and *Fatherland Defense* invest their aversion to cosmopolitanism, individualism, and internationalism and portray them in most negative light. Modernity and modernism are further associated with Judaism and communism, two other sources of corruption for the nation's identity.

Contemporary nationalists debate modernity through their discourse on international and global entities which, due to the far reach of their influence, have become its symbols. Such entities are, above all, the European Union, the United States, the World Bank and the IMF, which are presented in the discourse of the contemporary Bulgarian nationalists as the carriers of modernity or rather its latest transformation – globalization. In a similar fashion to Interwar nationalists, who reject modernism as a product of modernity, the contemporary nationalists denounce European values, which are viewed as a product of globalization and no longer bringing progress and civilization. In their rejection of globalization, the contemporary nationalists have even further questioned the notions of progress and civilizational development to suggest that Bulgaria had once been the cradle of European civilization and could attain its past cultural glory by going back to its roots, rather than by following Europe and the globalized world. In this sense, they appear more backward-looking than the organizations from the Interwar period who still perceive themselves as a modernizing force, which would put the country back on its track towards progress and catch up with the European development.

A direct continuity of tropes and figures of antisemitism can be found in both Interwar and contemporary nationalistic organizations. Nevertheless, antisemitism plays a much more

marginal role in the overall hate speech discourse of contemporary nationalists. Combined mainly with pseudo-economic arguments and conspiracy theories, modern antisemitism in Bulgaria serves more as a demagogical tool instead of displaying a coherent ideological predisposition.²⁵³ On the contrary, anti-Turkish and anti-Roma rhetoric occupy a central position in the discourse of contemporary nationalistic organizations, while none of that can be noticed on the pages of Interwar nationalistic publications. The anti-Roma sentiments, obvious in the discourse of formations such as the BNU and ATAKA, even exceeds the antisemitic rhetoric of their Interwar counterparts. Similarly to the attitude towards Jews, Bulgarian Roma are presented as culturally different internal enemies whose presence causes tremendous damage on the country's economy. This shift of the negative discourse – from aiming most intensely at the group, perceived according to sociologists Phalet and Poppe's four-fold typology of group stereotypes as “sinful-winners,” the Jewish minority, to the group, perceived as “sinful-losers,” the Roma and to some extent the Turks, does not, however, decrease the threat and conflict perception.²⁵⁴ In fact, by pushing forward the tropes about “Gypsy criminality” and welfare chauvinistic claims about Roma living off welfare benefits, contemporary nationalistic formations like ATAKA and the BNU have done a great deal to transform pre-existing negative stereotypes to a whole new level of inter-ethnic animosity. No Interwar Bulgarian nationalistic organization has been so successful in manipulating prejudices and antagonizing ethnic groups to such an extent. Nor has any of them paid as much attention to the question of homosexuality, which features alongside anti-

²⁵³ Alfred Krispin, “Ima li antisemitizăm v Bălgariia dnes,” 26-28.

²⁵⁴ Karen Phalet and Edwin Poppe, “Competence and morality dimensions of national and ethnic stereotypes: a study in six Eastern-European countries,” in *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 27 (1997), 703-723.

modernistic rhetoric in the Interwar discourse, but has gained in importance in the discourse of the contemporary nationalists.

Last but not least, economic arguments appear just as important for contemporary and Interwar nationalists. A direct continuation of anti-capitalist and anti-colonial rhetoric can be traced in political utterances from both periods. The legionnaires' demands for "socially just" Bulgaria have made their way straight into the ideology of the BNU, while ATAKA has also instrumentalized social issues to construct its discourse. The leftist anti-colonial discourse of the organizations from both periods targets the international financial hubs. Foreign states and international bodies such as the United States, France, Great Britain and the League of Nations stand out as the Interwar "villains" of this discourse, while the European Union, the United States, the World Bank and the IMF, already denounced as carriers of globalization, take their role in the contemporary nationalistic discourse.

The new element which distinguishes the Interwar from the contemporary discourses is the welfare chauvinist theme of the latter. As explained in the third chapter, this theme becomes a cornerstone in the rhetoric of ATAKA and adds a whole new dimension to its views on economics. Combining arguments about demographics, culture and economics, ATAKA in particular has created an unparalleled image of the Bulgarian Roma as the ultimate "other" and the most serious threat to the Bulgarian nation. To exploit this issue, the party has employed a vast array of discursive strategies. This representation of the Roma in contemporary nationalistic discourse can only be rivalled in importance by the general precedence of the theme about the nation in the discourse of the nationalistic organizations from both periods. As has already been argued in the thesis, this negative image legitimized the use of extremist rhetoric against the Roma and has opened space for other nationalistic organizations to imitate. Its impact on the

overall perception of the Roma and the discourse on them by the mainstream parties is yet to be fully comprehended. However, it might as well turn out to be the contemporary nationalists' most significant legacy for the nationalistic organizations of the future.

Comparing the context and the four ideological themes identified as most important in the discourses of the Interwar and contemporary nationalistic organizations suggests that continuities do exist on more one level – symbolic as seen in the case of Lukov March, ideological and rhetorical as noted in the analysis of their discourses, and even contextual if the perception of the context is considered on par with the actual conditions. Notwithstanding the differences that exist among nationalistic organizations from each of the two periods, the general picture suggests that continuities deserve a greater attention than scholarship has given them so far.

Conclusion

The analysis of the discourse and rhetoric of Bulgarian nationalistic organizations from the Interwar and the contemporary period supports the original hypothesis of the thesis of a certain level of continuity between their ideological themes as well as rhetorical strategies. Events such as the Lukov March also point at a common heritage from which modern-day nationalists often draw their symbols, slogans and aesthetics. Even though the context in which nationalistic organizations have operated then and now certainly differs, the way that the perception of societal crisis has been instrumentalized by such organizations brings them closer in this aspect too. Thus, although proving the existence of direct structural continuity seems unrealistic, such ideological links appear more solid than originally hypothesized and not purely restricted to symbolic features and performative actions.

This conclusion in some respects answers the question of continuities and discontinuities, posed by the few scholars who have delved into the history of nationalistic organizations beyond the contemporary period. According to Anton Pelinka, “the general debate accepts a significant overlapping between the old, (neo-)fascist or (neo-)Nazi far right and the newly emerged populist far right” but “the different opinions are about the extent of continuity between the old and the populist far right.”²⁵⁵ Indeed, the question of continuities and discontinuities can hardly be answered unequivocally but the analytical findings of the current thesis reveal that the Interwar period should be at least as carefully considered when studying the contemporary nationalistic organizations as the communist and the post-1989 one. The original theoretical framework of

²⁵⁵ Pelinka, “Right-Wing Populism,” 12.

scholars like Michael Minkenberg and Andrea L. P. Pirro about these organizations being a *sui generis* phenomenon therefore might require a revisiting when applied to Bulgaria.²⁵⁶

Last but not least, there are many caveats which have to be taken into consideration when discussing nationalistic organizations from any period in general. Even within a particular country such as Bulgaria, neither the contemporary nor the Interwar nationalistic organizations can be viewed in essentializing terms as comprising unified movements with clearly established and identical ideologies, rhetoric and goals. What can be inferred from the context in which they existed and their discourses, are common features which make an organization resemble another without necessarily fully overlapping. Perhaps this is precisely the level on which ideological links between Interwar and modern-day nationalistic organizations should be analyzed - on a case to case basis or as parts of a whole chain of organizations, ideas and actions which are somehow interrelated. Using Wittgenstein's idea of "family resemblance," the late Italian scholar Umberto Eco develops his concept of Ur-Fascism or Eternal Fascism to describe the features around which fascism can "coagulate."²⁵⁷ It seems that Bulgarian nationalistic organizations in the Interwar and contemporary period can also be better interpreted in a similar fashion – as ideologically linked in some aspects, yet convergent on others, constantly interacting directly or indirectly with each other despite the passage of time. It remains a possibility for further research to realize such a project and build up on the analytical findings of the current thesis.

²⁵⁶ Pirro, "Populist Radical Right Parties," 600-629; Minkenberg, "Leninist beneficiaries," 11-28.

²⁵⁷ Umberto Eco, "Eternal Fascism," *The New York Review of Books*, June 22, 1995, accessed May 10, 2016, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1995/06/22/ur-fascism/>.

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