RUSSOPHILIA AND RUSSOPHOBIA IN BULGARIA: DISCOURSES BRIDGING PAST AND PRESENT

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to bring to light the influence of Bulgaria's identity construction, with reference to its historical relationship with Russia, upon the debate and negotiation of current foreign and domestic policy issues. In order to do this, the thesis first delineates the basic discourses of Russophilia and Russophobia that developed over the course of Bulgaria's historical relations with Russia and the ways in which they construct the Bulgarian Self with relation to its Russian Other. The thesis then examines the arguments made in two contemporary policy debates – the debate over the mandatory inclusion of the communist period in Bulgarian school curricula, and the debate over the ratification of the Istanbul Convention - assessing them for the structuring influences of the motifs and logics of the basic discourses of Russophilia and Russophobia. The thesis finds that the basic discourses of Russophilia and Russophobia continue to act as conditions of possibility and structuring agents within contemporary policy debates. However, the development of these debates has had an effect on the discourses as well – emphasizing incompatibility between Russophilia and Russophobia, and thus polarizing the discourses.

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Introduction

Russia's potential to influence the domestic politics of other states is an issue of increasing interest and concern for states and intergovernmental unions and alliances, particularly in the West. Whether Russian influence is conceived of in terms of military force, through direct intervention or cyber warfare, or in terms of political influence, through the funding of right-wing parties and the popularizing of illiberal discourses, the question has become a polarizing one both on the international level, and within numerous domestic contexts.[1] The concern over Russia's role on the international stage became a pronounced characteristic in North American and European politics in light of the annexation of Crimea and has since been reflected both in these regions' foreign and economic policies, and in their media.[2]

The question of Russian influence is particularly prevalent and persistent within Central and Eastern Europe both because these regions represent the spaces of contact between the EU and Russia and because of these countries' recent history with Russia in the context of the Soviet space. Due to the stated geographical importance of the region, many analyses take a geopolitical approach to determine the material leverage or capacity for coercion that Russia might have in these countries.[3] Some of the focal points of these analyses include the widespread dependence on Russian energy sources, the levels of Russian diaspora, and the extent to which Russian

[1] "The Russian Connection: The spread of pro-Russia policies on the European far right," *Political Capital Institute*, March 14, 2014.
[2] Dmitri Trenin, "A Practical Approach to EU-Russian Relations," *Carnegie Moscow Center*, Janurary 2014, accessed December 01, 2016. http://carnegieendowment.org/files/Article_EU-Russ_Trenin_Eng2014.pdf
[3] Heather A. Conley, James Mina, Ruslan Stefanov, and Martin Vladimirov,*The Kremlin Playbook: Understanding Russian Influence in Central and Eastern Europe.Center for Strategic and International Studies*. New York: Rowman& Littlefield, 2016; Ivan Krastev, "The Cold War isn't back. So don't think like it is," *The New York Times*, December 21, 2016. Accessed April 11, 2017. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/21/opinion/the-cold-war-isnt-back-so-dont-think-like-it-is.html

finances have penetrated the political structures of Central/Eastern European states. While these factors are certainly worthy of attention, the meanings that they hold for the corresponding states and their populations are then mediated by the discourses that have developed about the states' relationship with Russia over the course of history. Consequently these discourses have established a structural longevity of their own which continues to infuse the geopolitical realities of different Central/Eastern European states with a variety of meanings.

The impact of these longstanding discourses upon Central/Eastern European states is demonstrated in the striking diversity that can be observed amongst contemporary discourses on Russia both between and within said states. This diversity can be attributed to the plurality of identities that emerged within the region and the variable ways in which these identities are renegotiated over time while being caught between two historically constituted axes of power – Western Europe and Russia.[4] As these discourses on Russia are deeply entwined with the way that some Central/Eastern European states conceptualize their identity and position on the international stage, the tendency of geopolitical analyses to overlook them might result in omitting crucial factors that could account for the diversity in the behaviors of the states in this region.

Bulgaria represents a demonstrative case both of the diversity of stances that exist in Central/Eastern Europe towards Russia and of the importance that identity plays in the negotiation of this position. By way of its geography, Bulgaria lies at the ephemeral boundaries of Europe and within the liminal space between East and West, precisely where attention is often directed in relation to Russia's potential for political influence.[5] Bulgaria was a member of the

[4] Milicia Bakic-Hayden, "Empires are us: identifying with differences," In *Images of Imperial Legacy*, edited by Tea Sindbaek and Maximilian Hartmuth. London: Transaction Publishers, 2011; Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*, Stanford, CA: Stanford Press, 1994.
[5] "The Russian Connection," 2.

Eastern Bloc, and its dependency on political and economic relations with the USSR during this period lead the state to be currently portrayed as vulnerable to Russian interference.[6] Nevertheless, Bulgaria represents somewhat of an exception in Eastern Europe in that historically the country has valued its relationship with Russia positively, and continues to boast strong Russophilic sentiments both in popular and political spheres.[7] Much of this discrepancy can be attributed to the fact that Russia has often been framed discursively as an integral component of the Bulgarian Self.[8] On the other hand, Bulgaria's discourse on Russia includes an established vein of Russophobia which portrays Russia as a threat.[9] While these discourses have developed throughout Bulgaria's history and gone both through phases of polarization and compatibility, they have not always actively been referred to as 'Russophilia' and 'Russophobia.' It is in light of the significance that Russia's behavior has recently taken on the international level, that the categories of Russophilia and Russophobia have re-emerged in Bulgaria for the purposes of political debate both officially and in the media.[10]

The question that arises is – how have the discourses of Russophilia and Russophobia emerged in the processes of Bulgaria's identity negotiation and how do they continue to participate in that negotiation through their role in current domestic and foreign policy debates? In order to address these questions, this thesis aims precisely to unearth the basic discourses of

[6] Thomas Maltby, "Between Amity, Enmity and Europeanization: EU Energy Security Policy and the Example of Bulgaria's Russian Energy Dependence," Europe-Asia Studies, vol. 65, no. 5 (2015): 810.
[7] Stefanos Katsikas and Peter Siani-Davies, . "The Europeanization of Bulgarian Society: A Long-lasting Political Project," In *Bulgaria and Europe: Shifting Identities*, edited by Stefanos Katsikas (London: Anthem Press, 2011), 13.
[8] Panko Anchev, "Russophilia and Russophobia in Bulgaria," *Literary World*, vol. 45 (2012), Accessed April 14, 2018. https://literaturensviat.com/?p=67572
[9] Anchev, ""Russophilia and Russophobia in Bulgaria."
[10] Vasil Prodanov, "The Battle between Russia and the West on Bulgarian territory: From Perestroika to today it went through 5 phase," *Trud*. March 19, 2018. Accessed March 21, 2018. https://trud.bg/битката-между-русия-и-запада-на-териото/; BNT, "Putin on the path to eternity – Commentary by Boyan Chukov and Veselina Chervena," Interview, 18:14. Posted March 18, 2018. https://www.bnt.bg/bg/a/putin-po-ptya-km-vechnostta-komentar-na-boyan-chukov-i-vesela-cherneva

Russophilia and Russophobia that have developed over the course of Bulgaria's history in order to grasp the cultural motifs they have encompassed and the political functions they have served over the course of history. The delineation of these discourses creates the possibility for contemporary debates of foreign and domestic policies in Bulgaria to be placed within the context of this pre-existing web of meaning. Consequently, the thesis aims to assess the ways in which the longstanding discourses of Russophilia and Russophobia act as conditions of possibility for the positions taken in contemporary policy debates and as structuring agents that determine and invigorate the arguments and divisions that develop within these debates. This analysis must additionally remain sensitive to the ways in which the discourses of Russophilia and Russophobia are themselves molded and transformed in the context of the chosen contemporary debates.

The process of mapping out the discourses of Russophilia and Russophobia in Bulgaria will be predicated upon uncovering the constructions of Self and Other that were formed in light of Russian-Bulgarian relations and continually transformed as Russia's legacy was renegotiated. This approach is based on the models of the most seminal works on Othering within the Balkans, including that of Maria Todorova and Milica Bakic-Hayden.[11] While these scholars mapped out the ways in which the Ottoman legacy in the Balkans informed the creation of Self and Other in the region, both with reference to the Ottoman Empire and to Western Europe, this thesis aims to shed light on the effects of the Russian/Soviet legacy upon Bulgarian identity construction. Furthermore, the thesis will strive to demonstrate the ways in which this legacy continues to be re-conceptualized in light of the continuous renegotiation of Bulgarian identity.

[11] Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Milicia Bakic-Hayden, "Nesting Orientalisms: The case of the Former Yugoslavia." *Slavic Review*, vol. 54, no. 4 (Winter 1995): 917-931.

These aims will be executed with the use of Lene Hansen's methodology of discourse analysis, as it is presented in *Security as Practice*. In line with this approach, the project will first establish the basic discourses of Russophilia and Russophobia along with their respective constructions of Self and Other and the motifs that inform these categories. This will be done through the consultation of historical and historiographical work done on Bulgaria's relations with Russia over the last two hundred years supplemented by the textual analysis of Bulgarian literature, including poetry and prose.

The effects of these basic discourses upon contemporary political debate will be assessed through the analysis of two case studies. To demonstrate the potential that Russophilic and Russophobic discourses have to structure contemporary political debates, the case studies have been selected to be unrelated to geopolitics and comparatively distanced from the issue of Russian influence or coercion. These studies will represent hard cases, such that any noticeable structuring effects of Russophilia and Russophobia upon them suggests these effects will be pertinent within policy debates directly related to Russia and/or issues of geopolitics. The cases chosen are - the debate over the ratification of the Istanbul Convention which took place in the first months of 2018, and the debate over the mandatory inclusion of the communist period in the curricula of secondary schools which occurred over the years 2014 to 2018. The constructions of Self and Other established by both sides of each debate will be determined through the analysis of official, media, and academic sources. These constructions are analyzed with reference to the basic discourses of Russophilia and Russophobia in order to determine to what extent they are informed by these discourses and to what extent they incorporate new meanings and functions into them as well.

The analysis of these two case studies demonstrates that the existence of longstanding Russophilic and Russophobic discourses acts as a condition of possibility for the emergence of particular subject positions in contemporary policy debates. These positions draw from the themes and motifs of the original discourses and their arguments are given energy by re-evoking the motifs' cognitive and emotional appeals. However, due precisely to the appeal of these discourses, the two case studies demonstrate that the two categories of Russophilia and Russophobia are also remobilized in order to reinforce contemporary political divisions that were not previously fundamental to the original discourses, thus transforming the discourses themselves.

The importance of this topic stems from the growing tension that marks the relationship between Russia and the U.S., Europe, and the intergovernmental unions and alliances that they participate in. Gaining an understanding of the discursive foundations upon which these tensions are thriving may open productive possibilities for peaceful resolutions. Specifically, understanding the functions and developments of Russophilic and Russophobic discourses in the states that currently represent the borders of the EU is crucial in gaining an understanding how these countries construct their identities in relation to Russia and potentially negotiate their policies towards Russia in light of increasing international tension. The analysis conducted in this thesis on Bulgaria can be thought of as a prototype for research and comparative studies including other countries. Finally, the topic will provide insight into the developments of Bulgarian politics and identity negotiation not simply as a country geographically situated between the EU and Russia, but as a so called 'state in transition'.

The thesis will begin with a brief chapter reviewing existing literature on the topic of Bulgarian-Russian relations and an overview of the methodology that will be employed for the

research. The second chapter will provide a historical overview tracing the contents and developments of the basic discourses of Russophilia and Russophobia. Chapters 3 and 4 will consist of two case studies analyzing contemporary Bulgarian policies to determine how the basic discourses of Russophilia and Russophobia act as conditions of possibility and structuring forces within their respective debates. The conclusion will summarize the major findings of this work and provide suggestions for the future development of this research.

Chapter 1: Review of Literature and Methodology

I. Literature Review

Bulgaria has been the subject of several analytical approaches within political and academic realms over the last thirty years. Analysts and academics involved with European and American think tanks often frame their analyses and policy recommendations around Bulgaria's recent transition into the EU, and the effects of its political and economic history with Russia on this process. Consequently, these analyses rarely address Bulgaria's self-perceived identity or historical discourses on Russia. On the other hand, academics interested in communist legacies and collective memories within post-communist countries have explored the concept of nostalgia in Bulgarian society. While these studies address the renegotiation of Bulgarian identity in the aftermath of the Communist period, they do not put these discourses on the Soviet Union into context with previous discourses on Russia. Extensive work has been done on the phenomenon of 'Othering' in the Balkans, through the concepts 'Balkanism' and 'nested Orientalism,' which focus on the internal and external aspects of identity creation within the Balkans in light of Ottoman legacies. This thesis attempts to take a similar approach by tracing Bulgarian discourses on Russian legacies as processes of Bulgarian identity negotiation and then demonstrating the ways in which they continue to inform contemporary policy debates.

Analyses and policy papers developed by American and European think tanks and non-governmental organizations are often directed towards assessing Bulgaria's transition from communism to its current membership in the EU. As such, it is Bulgaria's political and economic structures and their geopolitical implications that are stressed within the majority of these analyses. As Bulgaria's return to Europe is most often set against its recent association with the Soviet Union, analyses have generally contrasted the extent to which Bulgaria's political and economic structures have been re-directed towards Europe with the extent that continue to be

tied to Russia.[12] The focus on this contrast has increased since the crisis in Ukraine and taken on a new meaning which has led to Bulgaria's portrayal as being caught between Russia and Europe, or East and West.[13] Contemporary analyses, such as those developed by New Direction: Foundation for European Reform, the Polish Institute for International Affairs, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and the Bulgarian NGO, Center for Liberal Strategies, all highlight several entanglements as the foundations of Russian presence in Bulgaria. These include Bulgaria's dependence on Russian energy supplies, strongly pro-Russian and Russian financed political parties in Bulgaria, and the weighty presence of Russia capital and Russian lobbyists in Bulgarian political structures.[14] These geopolitical realities are typically presented as obstacles for Bulgaria to overcome as a part of its development and membership in the EU.

While some of the above described analyses will take a sentence or two to mention Bulgaria's historical ties with Russia, none of them address the integral part that discourses on Russia have taken in Bulgaria's processes of identity negotiation. Consequently, the analyses do not account for the role that these discourses take in the political debates that occur over geopolitical factors. The result, apart from the loss of an important dimension of Bulgaria's policy debates, is that these analyses tend to deprive Bulgaria of its subjectivity within the context of its own politics. By focusing on the forms and extent of Russian influence and

[12] Examples Include: Dimitar Bechev, "Russia's Influence in Bulgaria," *New Direction: The Foundation for European Reform*. May 12, 2015. Accessed April 22, 2017. http://europeanreform.org/files/ND-report-RussiasInfluenceInBulgaria-preview-lo-res_FV.pdf; Center for the Study of Democracy. "Energy Security Risks and the case for natural gas diversification. Policy Brief No. 63." July 2016. Accessed May 10, 2017. http://www.csd.bg/artShow.php?id=17764; Maltby, "Between Amity, Enmity and Europeanization"; Conley et al., The Kremlin Playbook.

[13] Krastev, "The Cold War isn't back."

[14] Further examples: Jakub Pienkowski, "The future of Russia-Bulgaria Relations after the Bulgaria Relations after the Bulgarian Presidential Election," The Polish Institute of International Affairs, December 2, 2016, Accessed February 12, 2018. https://www.pism.pl/files/?id_plik=22637; Center for the Study of Democracy. "The Wind that Blows from the East: Russian Influence on Central and Eastern Europe. Policy Brief No. 65." December 2016. Accessed April 16, 2017. http://www.csd.bg/artShow.php?id=17888

structural ties, these analyses often fail to engage with the ways in which Bulgarian society engages and participates within these phenomena.

An approach that is more sensitive towards the ways in which Bulgarians themselves experienced communism and its aftermath, including Bulgarian-Russian ties, can be found in the disciplines of History and Sociology. Collections such as *Remembering Communism: Private and Public Recollections of lived experience in Southeast Europe* and *Post-Communist Nostalgia*, both edited by Maria Todorova, aim both to preserve the records of the communist period and to explore how this period is being remembered through collective memory and popular discourse. Kristen Ghodsee explores both the rise of the communist regime and the aftermath of its dissolution through a combination of historical, sociological, and anthropological approaches.[15] Her research ultimately demonstrates the ways in which the communist period was experienced and remembered by Bulgarians and accounts for current nostalgia by highlighting the relevance of popular disillusionment with the transition to democracy and free markets.

While these works productively contend with Bulgarian identity renegotiation on a popular level in light of the communist legacy and the period of transition, they ultimately do not address the ways in which this legacy builds off of and is incorporated into pre-existing discourses on Bulgarian-Russian relations. Instead, research on post-communist Bulgaria remains self-contained and unconnected to previous developments of Bulgarian identity and discourses. This becomes problematic when analyzing Bulgaria's current political atmosphere as post-communist nostalgia and the presence of Euroskepticism are only interpreted in light of the legacy of the communist period and the processes of transition. Nostalgia can appear to be a social phenomena resulting from the structural and systemic failures of the transition period,

[15] Kristen R. Ghodsee, *Red Hangover: Legacies of twentieth-century Communism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017; *Lost in Transition: Ethnographies of everyday life after Communism*. Durham: Duke University, 2011.

rather than having a logic of its own that is informed by a history of discursive developments. The possible implication of the former approach is that discourses will re-align themselves once these systemic issues are mitigated, without accounting for the structural functions of the discourses themselves. Studying discourses as structural agents that develop and transform provides the ideational with significance beyond that of an epiphenomena of geopolitical factors. In this way discourses are pivotal in infusing the geopolitical with meaning and constructing the reality which informs policy making.

Such an emphasis on discourse's role in identity creation and giving meanings to the material is made by scholars of Othering and Orientalism in the Balkans such as Maria Todorova and Milica Bakic-Hayden. The concepts of Balkanism and Nesting Orientalisms address the internal and external processes that were involved in the development of identities in the Balkans in light of the region's Ottoman legacy while capturing the mutually constitutive nature of ideational and material factors in this process.[16] Todorova and Bakic Hayden reveal how the Ottoman legacy led to the creation of Others in the Balkans, whether a 'Balkan' Other with relation to Europe, or nested Others within the Balkans themselves.[17] Diana Mishkova, on the other hand, traces the ways in which the Balkan identity was used for the construction of a collective Self by scholars in the region of South-eastern Europe.[18]

While the above mentioned authors addressed thoroughly the effects of the Ottoman legacy in the Balkans, they did not similarly address the Russian/Soviet legacy in the region. In fact, both Todorova and Mishkova imply that this legacy will eventually fade, while the Ottoman one will remain an integral aspect of Balkan identity. No doubt this interpretation may have

[16] Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*; Bakic-Hayden, *Nesting Orientalism: The case of the former Yugoslavia*.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Diana Mishkova, "The Balkans as an Idée-force: Scholarly Projections of the Balkan Cultural Area." *Civilizations*, vol. 60, no. 2 (2012): 39-64

arisen due to the diverse levels of interaction that Balkan states had with Russia, in addition to the lack of centuries long Russian occupation within the region (as there was with the Ottomans). However, for Bulgaria, as well as for other Eastern European countries, the historical relationship with Russia remains a contentious one that is constantly renegotiated in the context of those states' identities. Previously, as a Balkan country, Bulgaria was described as being caught between East and West, such that East designated the Ottoman Empire. Currently, as can be noted in the political analyses of contemporary think tanks, Bulgaria remains trapped between East and West, where 'East' has come to signify the legacy of imperial Russia, the USSR, and the continuing influence of Russia.

The current atmosphere on the international stage towards Russia suggests that its legacy in Europe and the division it incites will be emphasized, thus increasing the importance of Russia related discourses in Bulgaria and elsewhere in Eastern Europe. Thus the aim of this thesis will be to evaluate the current and historical discourses on Russia that exist within Bulgaria through a similar framework such as did the scholars of Balkanism with regards to the Ottoman legacy. This means evaluating the ways in which Bulgarian discourses on Russia conceptualize the Bulgarian Self in relation to Russia – as compatible, non-radical Other, or threatening radical Other – and the ways in which these conceptions have maintained continuity and transformed.

II. Analytical Framework and Methodology

The impetus for this project stems from the desire to delineate Bulgaria's identity negotiation with regards to its historical relationship with Russia and demonstrate the continued importance of this process upon the country's domestic and foreign policy debates. The method of discourse analysis suits this aim as it allows a researcher to investigate precisely the ways in which identity and policy making are mutually constitutive and mediated through discourse. This

thesis will rely on historical research, textual analysis, and interviews in order to delineate the basic discourses of Russophilia and Russophobia and the discourses that emerge in the policy debates of the two case studies.

The philosophy behind discourse analysis, as explained by Lene Hansen in *Security as Practice*, speaks directly to the duality between the ideational and the material, in this case geopolitical, that is implied in the aim of this work. The object is not to argue that the explanatory power of one supersedes the other, but rather to unearth the discourses which give geopolitical factors meaning by drawing from a set of identity constructions.[19] By tracing the discourses of Russophilia and Russophobia in Bulgaria and demonstrating the ways in which they are implicated in policy debates, this thesis opens a pathway towards further considering the implications of these discourses upon wider and more pressing policy issues. As the aim is to emphasize the structuring potential of Russophilic and Russophobic discourses even in the more unlikely cases, the case studies for the project were chosen to be seemingly unrelated to issues of geopolitical contention or Russian influence.

The first step of this research will be to establish the two basic discourses of Russophilia and Russophobia such that their themes and structuring logic can be recognized in the analysis conducted for the contemporary case studies. The research on these two discourses will start from Bulgaria's National Revival period – when political national consciousness began to form. This moment is chosen specifically because while discourses on Russia may have existed before that, it is only when Bulgaria emerges as a state, first conceptually and then physically, that the discourses become implicated in such functions as domestic and foreign policy.

While historians have explored in detail Bulgarian-Russian relations and popular sentiments towards Russia throughout Bulgaria's history, there has not been significant work

[19] Lene Hansen, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War*. (New York: Routledge, 2006), 19.

focused on illuminating the contents, functions, and effects of Russophilic and Russophobic discourse over the course of Bulgaria's history.[20] Professor Stefan Detchev, who currently represents one of the most knowledgeable historians on expressions of Russophilia and Russophobia in Bulgarian history, was interviewed as a part of the research conducted. In addition his expert knowledge and the consultation of historical and historiographical work on Bulgarian-Russian relations, the research encompassed a representative sample of Russophilic and Russophobic Bulgarian literature. The explored poetry and prose comes from what is considered to be the canon of Bulgarian national literature and constitutes the primary sources consulted for the delineation of the basic discourses of Russophilia and Russophobia. One of the limitations of this research presents itself in the lack of time and space that would be desired to focus more deeply on uncovering Russophilic and Russophobic discourses through the research of primary documents such as literature and newspapers. However, the produced summary on the emergence and development of the discourses of Russophilia and Russophobia over the course of the history of the Bulgarian state nevertheless presents a comprehensive and novel contribution to this field.

The latter half of the research will be devoted to two case studies which will demonstrate how the basic discourses of Russophilia and Russophobia still inform and structure political debates and simultaneous identity negotiation in Bulgaria. Furthermore, the case studies point towards the ways in which the discourses themselves change as they are re-evoked in contemporary debates. The use of case studies is necessary in order to be able to focus on

[20] Anchev, "Russophilia and Russophobia in Bulgaria"; Stefan Detchev, "Mapping Russia in the Bulgarian Press (1886-1894)." *Fundatia Culturala Echinox* vol. 5 (2003): 136-155; Detchev, Stefan. "Who are the Bulgarians? 'Race,' Science and Politics in Fin-de-siècle Bulgaria." In *We the People* edited by Diana Mishkova, p237-269. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2009.

specific iterations of Russophilia and Russophobia within the limited space available for this project. The two cases chosen for analysis are the debate over the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention which became prominent in the media during the first months of 2018, and the debate over the inclusion of the communist period in secondary school curricula which developed over several years, 2014 - 2018. These cases were both chosen because their outcomes have few material or geopolitical consequences for Bulgaria's relationship with Russia. The question of how to teach the communist period, or even portray communism in general, is one of controversy all over Europe and certainly bears consequences for the norm setting of future generations. Nevertheless, the outcome of the debate over the curriculum reform in Bulgaria was often extremely technical and went relatively unpublicized. Ultimately, the education reform has had no immediate consequences on Bulgarian-Russian relations and has gone unnoticed in Russia. The main topic of the Istanbul convention, the prevention of violence against women and domestic violence, is not one of notable contention between Russia and the EU even on the level of normative contestation. These debates thus serve as hard cases – if notable structuring effects by Russophilic and Russophobia discourses can be observed in these cases, it is logical to assume that they would also be present in debates directly related to Russia and its geopolitical influence.

To approach the discourses of the debates in a structured manner, I will once again use a framework of Hansen's by identifying spatial, temporal, and ethical constructions within the political identities developed on both sides of the debate.[21] Spatial constructions in the case of Bulgarian debates will be relatively straight forward - the two main geographical Others that emerge within the debates are those of the EU and of the Slavic world/Russia-oriented geography. While the category of the EU seems more concrete than the abstract notion of the

[21] Hansen, *Security as Practice,* 51.

Slavic world, both categories are equally esoteric in that they are entwined with their corresponding ethical constructions, as both the EU and the Slavic world come with strong connotations of a distinct sets of values in Bulgaria. Finally, the temporal constructions present themselves through the association of the Self and/or the Other with processes predicated on the passing of time. For instance associations with development, stagnation, or decay, which are the processes that distinguished themselves within the case studies. For all of these constructions it can be the case that the associations are made explicit only for one political identity (for instance for the Other) and are implicit for the supplementary identity.

The sources that are focused on within this discourse analysis are the official discourses of politicians involved in the decision making, as well as media coverage and academic analyses. The majority of the sources are from the time period from November 2017 to March 2018, as this is when the chosen debates received the most public attention. With regards to the media sources, the aim was to include a wider array of political affiliations that would include both Russophilic and Russophobic stances. Thus the media analyzed include those of the main political parties, the most popular news sources, and a few alternative publications. In the case of the Istanbul convention, the sources focused primarily on official and media discourses as the debate was highly publicized. In the case of the school curricula reform, there is a stronger emphasis on academic analysis, both because the main advocates were academics themselves, and because the debate revolved around the different possible interpretations of Bulgaria's communist history which was conducted by specialists.

A total of five interviews were conducted for this research with academics that specialize in Bulgarian history and politics. Amongst these professors was one of the main advocates for the education reform, Prof. Evelina Kelbecheva, as well as a Professor Ivo Hristov whose

primary occupation now is as an MP of the Bulgarian Socialist Party. Each of these professors appears frequently in Bulgarian media to give interviews on the state of Bulgaria's politics and to offer positions on current debates. In this way, the interviews conducted were able to embody official, media, and academic discourses of both Russophilic and Russophobic leanings.

Chapter 2: A Historical Introduction to the Discourses of Russophilia and Russophobia

I. Introduction

The popular sentiments and political inclinations that developed and transformed over the course of Bulgaria's history and interactions with Russia were not always subsumed under the general categories of Russophilia and Russophobia. Nevertheless, the two discourses have participated in the polarization of Bulgarian society during several phases of the state's history. The terms Russophilia and Russophobia most recently became re-popularized within media and popular discourse as political categories that describe the current Bulgarian population in light of the crisis in Ukraine which broke out in 2013.[22] This chapter focuses on the development of the discourses of Russophilia and Russophobia throughout history, rather than the current political categories which will be addressed in the case studies. As such the chapter will establish the themes and qualities that distinguished the two basic discourses as they emerged during Bulgaria's National Revival. These discourses will then be traced through the 20th century until the present day in order to highlight some of the ways in which they have both transformed and maintained continuity.

To provide an all-encompassing portrayal of Russophilic and Russophobic discourses, it is important at times to distinguish between the content of the discourses versus the political functions they fulfilled and the effects they wrought. These two dimensions tend to be mutually constitutive and deeply entangled – it is this symbiosis that establishes the discourses of Russophilia and Russophobia as structural forces while still allowing aspects of their contents to transform, disappear, and re-emerge over the course of time and in light of various political, economic, and social developments.

[22] Stefan Detchev, interview by author, Sofia, Bulgaria, April 25, 2018.

II. The Emergence of Russophilia and Russophobia

The Romantic Origins of Russophilia

Russophilia was initially part of a bouquet of emancipating ideologies, along with nationalism and Slavophilia, that spurred the development of a self-conscious Bulgarian population and incited action in the name of independence.[23] Russophilia represented both a political ideology and a form of cultural expression, whose themes were fundamental to the creation of Bulgarian national identity and the first conception of a Bulgarian Self.[24] This deep entanglement between Russophilia and Bulgarian identity made Russophilia subject to powerful patterns of reproduction. Furthermore, the emergence of Russophilia predated that of Russophobia, which developed in the later years of the National Revival.[25] Initially, Russophilia was not an inclination that implied social or political division due to the lack of an alternative mentality.[26]

Beginning in the late 18th century, the Bulgarian National Revival represented a period during which the Bulgarian population, led by its elites and intelligentsia, developed a sentiment of national community and a desire for this community to become autonomous by way of an independent state.[27] The movement both emerged from and emphasized the importance of the Bulgarian language and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church as consolidating aspects of the Bulgarian Self.[28] These two aspects also represented the shared roots between Bulgarian and Russian culture that spurred discourses claiming a shared identity. The proximity of the Russian language and its use of the Cyrillic alphabet correspondingly was emphasized and valued, while

[23] Anchev, "Russophilia and Russophobia in Bulgaria."
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Simeon Radev, *The Builders of Modern Bulgaria vol. 1-2,* (Sofia, Bulgaria: Bulgarian Writers, 1973): 143
[27] Ibid., 89.
[28] Anchev, "Russophilia and Russophobia in Bulgaria."

the Russian Orthodox Church was hailed as a moral beacon and patron of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, which was struggling for autonomy.[29]

The cultural revival that took place during this period found its political manifestation in the nationalist aspirations for Bulgarian liberation from the Ottoman Empire and establishment of an independent state. The desire to create a Bulgarian state corresponded with Russophilia both on the cultural level of romantic nationalism, and the political and military need for a strong ally in the battle against the Ottoman Empire. The romantic and the military were often combined in the poetry of early nationalists such as Ivan Vazov, said to be the father of Bulgarian literature and a fervent Russophile, who wrote many poems in praise of the Russian tsar and his arrival to liberate Bulgaria: "Today upon our land/ you go with glory and thunder,/ to ugly tyrants/ an ugly blow bestow."[30]

The strong popular support for Russia and the Russian army also had clear political advantages for the Bulgarian elite who hoped to be the head of their own state but did not have the military capabilities to fight the Ottomans. For a certain period Russophilia managed to encompass all conceptualizations of Bulgaria's future development, because no other path towards liberation was conceivable apart from that of Russian aid. The political and cultural unifying power of Russophilia certainly carried the potential for political utility which could be subject to active manipulation.

Yet, the utility of Russophilia should not be seen as discounting the strength and sincerity with which it motivated Bulgarian populations and reinforced the processes of identity creation that were taking place in the country. Russophilia created deep feelings of shared identity with

[29] Anchev, "Russophilia and Russophobia in Bulgaria."
[30] Ivan Vazov, "Nikolai Nikolaevich," In *Deliverance*, 1877.

Russia which instantiated powerful conceptions of brotherhood and camaraderie.[31] The connection implied in the 'blood ties' of the Slavic people provided the familial metaphor that infuses such ideologies with their emotive call for loyalty to a shared cause.[32] Russia was often depicted as a mother protecting Bulgaria or else an older brother fighting Bulgaria's name: "My King! You come with an open embrace/ with your heroes, with your eagles/ to free your poor brothers."[33]

Many Bulgarians came to believe that while for the rest of Europe the fight for Bulgarian nationalism was remote and of little concern, for Russia the battle was as important as if it were for her own freedom: "Her great chest trembles/with every cry of our success/ah, how else can it be/-half of her heart lies here!"[34] Ultimately, Russian participation in Bulgaria's liberation from the Ottoman yoke led to the depiction of Russia as a "Liberator" and "Savior" in popular and literary discourse: "no captive has waited/ with such joy for his liberator,/ No mother has cried/ so sweetly to this hour.../ as today in Bulgaria/ when the poor, troubled mother,/ saw the awaited end/ of her terrible enslavement."[35] This image was accompanied by a feeling of obligation and gratitude for the sacrifices Russia made in the name of Bulgaria's freedom which was reinforced by references to the "Russian blood," "Russian bones," and "Russian graves" which are strewn over Bulgaria's territory: "..The Russian eagles/ will fly towards the Balkans/ where they will lay/ over the fields human bones/ over the hills black blood."[36]

[31] Anchev, "Russophilia and Russophobia in Bulgaria."
[32] Stefan Detchev, "Who are the Bulgarians? 'Race,' Science and Politics in Fin-de-siècle Bulgaria," In *We the People* edited by Diana Mishkova, (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2009), 246.
[33] Ivan Vazov, "Ode to the Emperor Alexander II," In *Deliverance*, 1877.
[34] Dobrin Dobrev, "Vazov and the juxtaposition between young and old," *Liternet*, Accessed April 10, 2018, https://liternet.bg/publish2/ddobrev/vazov.htm
[35] Vazov, "Nikolai Nikolaevich."
[36] Stefan Detchev, "Mapping Russia in the Bulgarian Press (1886-1894)." *Fundatia Culturala Echinox* vol. 5 (2003): 141.

For Bulgarian Russophiles, association with the Slavic culture, and at times race, also served the purpose of distancing the Bulgarian Self from the Ottoman Other.[37] The Slavic identity brought Bulgarians closer to Europe by placing them within a 'European' or 'Indo-European' type and thus higher on a Western cultural/racial hierarchy than the Turks.[38] The question of Bulgarians' ancestral heritage had become a topic for academic research within Bulgaria during the National Revival, but the emphasis given to Bulgarians' 'pure Slavic' roots and the rejection of 'Old Bulgar,' 'Thracian,' or 'Tartar' roots revealed the importance these studies had for the forging of Bulgaria's political identity as European.[39]

Bulgarian Russophilia thus initially served as a powerful unifying force in the name of Bulgarian identity creation, allowing for the emphasis of Bulgarian national traits including language, alphabet, religion, and ethnicity. The emphasis of these traits allowed for greater proximity not only with Russia but with all of Europe. These social and cultural movements motivated and were reinforced by the political aspirations for the creation of a Bulgarian state, and Russia's key role in that process.

The Emergence of Russophobia as Opposition

The attitude of Russophobia begins to develop during the late years of the National Revival and solidifies during the first decades after the Bulgarian state was established in 1878.[40] The nature of the Russian presence in Bulgaria aroused feelings of doubt and suspicion amongst various Bulgarian revolutionaries and emerging politicians who feared that Russia might engulf the new country both physically and ideationally.[41] Although some of these Bulgarian political figures were Russophiles to begin with, their desire to maintain Bulgarian independence, not

[37] Detchev, "Who Are the Bulgarians?" 251.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Detchev, "Who Are the Bulgarians?" 256.
[40] Anchev, "Russophilia and Russophobia in Bulgaria."
[41] Anchev, "Russophilia and Russophobia in Bulgaria."

only from the Ottomans but from the Russians as well, led them to take a more cautious approach in maintaining Bulgaria's relationship with Russia.[42] Thus, with Russophobia a new conception of the Bulgarian Self is established, which distinguishes itself through the delineation of a Russian political Other from which Bulgaria seeks independence. Yet, these first instances of Russophobia are also illustrative of the fact that Russophobia and Russophilia were not necessarily mutually exclusive, as the political nature of Russophobia does not always negate the cultural and civilizational aspects of Russophilia.[43]

While the emergence of Russophilia was in large part founded in the rising popular sentiment that Russia was Bulgaria's greatest ally, and perhaps only hope, for national liberation, Russophobia began to arise from a suspicion that Russia's intentions may not be as pure as they were initially thought to be. The feeling would grow as Russia became increasingly involved in Bulgaria's internal and external affairs. This suspicion can be recognized in the writings of the revolutionary Georgi Rakovski, who was quick to denounce any anti-Bulgarian Russian behavior.[44] Specifically, in a publication of *Dunavski Lebed* (Danubian Swan) in 1860, Rakovski spoke out against the resettlement of the Bulgarian populations of Vidinsko (in north-eastern Bulgaria) into Ukraine by Russian diplomatic forces.[45] Rakosvski was clear to point out that behind Russian Slavophilia, there was nevertheless imperial might that would always act in its own interests: "She has always watched only her own politics, and given thought only to her plans to conquer, and how to best put these plans to action".[46] Yet, for him and other moderate Russophobes, this expressed caution towards Russia's political intentions did not imply a denial

[42] Dobrev, "Vazov and the juxtaposition between young and old"
[43] Anchev, "Russophilia and Russophobia in Bulgaria."
[44] Radev, *The Builders of Modern Bulgaria*, 251.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Georgi S. Rakovski, *Relocation to Russia or Russia's murderous policies for Bulgarians*, (Bucharest, 1861)

of Bulgaria's shared cultural roots with Russia.[47] Consequently, exhibitions of Russophobia did always not signify an absence of Russophilia and certainly did not imply a hatred of Russia.

Concern over the liberties that Russia was taking on Bulgarian territory was coupled with a second wave of Bulgarian nationalism that wanted to separate the Bulgarian Self from that of Russia. During the Russo-Turkish war, a provisional Russian administration was established in Bulgaria which was charged with the preparation of governmental structures for the peaceful self-management of the future state. The all-encompassing, and even corrupt, nature of Russia's administration informed the sentiments of Russophobes who began to feel that Bulgaria had simply exchanged one slavery for another. [48] For disappointed Russophiles, this realization comes with a note of wounded faith and the sense of a friendship betrayed. This is the case for Vazov, who wrote in one of his last poems on Russian presence in Bulgaria, "We wish to embrace you/once again warmly, from the heart/but in your appearance there is an ominous glow/how can we open our arms?"[49] Other, more ardent Russophobes, such as the revolutionary and politician Zahari Stoyanov, were less nostalgic. Stoyanov held in deep contempt the naivety of those who looked upon Russia as a savior, liberator, or believed in Russia's pure and brotherly intentions. In his notable article 'Who?' Stoyanov asks who is responsible for Bulgaria's territorial division and anarchic state of affairs after liberation, and answers his own question with deep sarcasm: "Russia, our 'liberator fatale,' our patron, the Slavic, brotherly, Christian and powerful Russia, with whom we are one blood!"[50] The qualities that Russophiles claim are the

[47] Anchev, "Russophilia and Russophobia in Bulgaria."
[48] Zahari Stoyanov, *Notes on the Bulgarian Uprisings* (Plovdiv, Bulgaria, 1884)
[49] Dobrev, "Vazov and the juxtaposition between young and old."
[50]Zahari Stoyanov, "Who?" 1886.

foundations of Bulgarian-Russian relations thus become the objects of cynicism for the extreme Russophobes of the late 19th century.[51]

The criticisms of early Russophobes were directed not only towards Russia, but towards the goodwill with which Bulgarians accepted the Russian presence. Concern arose that loyalty towards Russia was developing at the cost of Bulgarian patriotism.[52] Instead, Russophobes argued that the future of the Bulgarian state ought to be put at the forefront of the national consciousness, without being jeopardized by allegiances to Russia. Stoyanov, again, made one of the more biting critiques of the mass mentality with which Bulgarians accepted Russophilia while invoking the corruption of the ideology's religious connections: "…a monk depraved to the depths of his black soul comes out boldly in front of everyone and says that the nation is grateful to her liberator! It is not he who is in the wrong. It is the herd, who stood bareheaded in front of him."[53]

The final concern evoked by Russophobes was that excessive Russian involvement in domestic affairs would serve to halter Bulgaria's political and economic development by way of Russians' corrupt institutional habits and behaviors. Stoyanov, in particular, is scornful of the undemocratic nature of Russian governance: "The rule of the Mongol yoke, Tatarship, and the presence of 'fortress' law may be the strongest factors that have made beasts and idiots out of Russian statesmen."[54] As a believer in liberal European ideals, Stoyanov argued that Bulgaria ought to embrace a European style of development and modernization.[55] It is through the emergence of Russophobia that a division is created in the visions for Bulgaria's development. While initial Russophilia embodied both kinship with Russia and thus movement towards Europe

[51] Detchev, "Mapping Russia in the Bulgarian Press," 142.
[52] Stoyanov, *Notes on the Bulgarian Uprisings*.
[53] Stoyanov, "Who?"
[54] Stoyanov, "Who?"
[55] Anchev, "Russophilia and Russophobia in Bulgaria."

as a whole, certain expressions of Russophobia created the distinction between European-directed development and Russian-directed development.

The emergence of Russophobia in Bulgaria during the latter half of the 19th century was primarily founded in concern over the penetrating Russian presence and the potential that this presence could have results contrary to the interests of the Bulgarian nation. Thus the construction of a Russian Other was primarily founded on the divergence of Bulgarian and Russian political interests during the period. On the other hand, there were passionate expressions of Russophobia which critiqued Russian presence, Russia's influence on Bulgarian development, and the popularity of Russophilia.

III. Continuity and Transformation from 1878 to the Present

Political ties between Russia and Bulgaria began to deteriorate as a result of Bulgaria's participation in the Serbo-Bulgarian war in 1885 and the coup d'etat in 1886 in which pro-Russian Bulgarian officers kidnapped the Bulgarian Monarch.[56] In line with the rising concern over excessive Russian influence in Bulgaria's political affairs, the revolutionary Stefan Stambolov turned Bulgaria's politics categorically away from Russia during his term as Prime Minister from 1887 to 1894.[57] Political ties with Russia were re-established after Stambolov's assassination in 1895, but remained lukewarm for the first half of the 20th century.[58] Nevertheless, Russophilia tended to dominate the popular discourse throughout this period.[59]

The Russian Revolution signaled changes both in the contents and the political nature of Russophilic and Russophobic discourses, revealing both the structural importance of traditional Russophilia and its capacity for transformation. After 1917, the question of Russophilia and

[56] Detchev, "Mapping Russia in the Bulgarian Press," 136.
[57] Anchev, "Russophilia and Russophobia in Bulgaria."
[58] Detchev, interview.
[59] Ibid.

Russophobia became divisive amongst the Bulgarian population due to the new ideological affiliations that were attached to Russophilia.[60] As a result of the ideological pull of communism, Russophilia begins to represent an alternative to Western and/or European development at this time. Initially, pro-communist sentiments were not compatible with traditional Russophilia as a result of their anti-imperialist stance.[61] However, as a result of efforts made by Stalin in the mid-1930s to incorporate the legacy of Tsarist Russia into the identity of the new regime, pro-communist sentiments in Bulgaria were also eventually able to incorporate traditional Russophilia into their discourse.[62]

Russia's role as a liberator and a catalyst for revolution re-emerged discursively thanks to revolutionary-minded poets such as Hristo Smirnenski. His ode to Moscow in 1922 evokes once again the idealism and brotherhood of Bulgarian Russophilia: "You [Moscow] are once again a fiery heart/and with a clear crimson smile you gaze/over a brotherly handshake."[63] In this case, Russia's liberating power did not only affect Bulgaria, but shone "over every forested country/where the slave plows all his life/and dies denied a scrap of bread,/ where the proletarian sea/resurrects from the fierce flame/of a devilish five-year war."[64] In Smirnenski's poetry, Russia became the liberator of the entire international proletariat.

Only the element of orthodoxy remained suppressed in communist Russphilia, in order to align with the atheistic vision of the communist ideology.[65] The effort made to incorporate traditional Russophilic discourses into communist discourse revealed the strength and mobilizing

[60] Anchev, "Russophilia and Russophobia in Bulgaria."
[61] Alexander Vezenkov, *9 September 1944* (Sofia, Bulgaria: Ciela, 2014), 132.
[62] Vezenkov, *9 September 1944*, 137.
[63] Hristo Smirnenski, "Moscow," In *Let it be day*, 1922.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Detchev, interview.

power of the pre-existing motifs, however the suppressing of the orthodox theme demonstrated the malleability of Russophilia as well.

Although Bulgaria's official politics continued to lean away from Russia through to the Second World War, the traditional connections binding Bulgarian culture and nationalism to its relations with Russia remained potent enough for the Bulgarian population and amongst certain members of Bulgaria's political elite to effect important political decisions.[66] The arguments of these members of the elite centered on the need for a nationalist approach that would strengthen ties with Russia on the basis of shared values. Bulgarian historian Petur Mutafchiev, for instance, argued that Western Europe's impact on Bulgaria came at the cost of the country's national character which ought to be preserved.[67] Ultimately, the high levels of popular Russophilia were cited by Bulgarian politicians as the reason why they could not declare war against Russia and participate on the Eastern front in World War II.[68]

After World War II, Bulgaria entered into the political and economic sphere of the USSR as a part of the Eastern bloc; Russophilia became the national political stance. Apart from the coordination and melding of political and economic structures, the Communist period led to intense cultural, academic, and educational interchanges.[69] Students in Bulgaria were required to study Russian starting in grade school; many Bulgarians went to university in Russia and continue to refer to themselves as 'Russian alumni.'[70] In the realm of academia, it was impossible to publish any work that might be critical of Russia - Bulgarian-Soviet/Russian

[66]Stefanos Katsikas and Peter Siani-Davies, "The Europeanization of Bulgarian Society: A Long-lasting Political Project," In *Bulgaria and Europe: Shifting Identities*, edited by Stefanos Katsikas (London: Anthem Press, 2011): 6.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Katsikas and Siani-Davies, "The Europeanization of Bulgarian Society," 7.
[69] Detchev, interview.
[70] Maria Pirgova, Interview by author, Sofia, Bulgaria, April 16, 2018.

relations became a 'zone of silence' in historical and historiographical research.[71] As such it can be difficult to tell where academics and the intelligentsia stood on these issues in private.[72]

Europe and the West had far from disappeared from the Bulgarian consciousness during this period. The West came to represent wealth and a much higher quality of life. The typical characterization of Winston Churchill as a traitor for having given Bulgaria up to the Soviet Union after WWII serves as an apt representation of the general discontent at being on the Eastern side of the Iron Curtain. The popular knowledge that is repeated until now that Bulgaria was the Switzerland of Eastern Europe, in comparison to the poverty that pervaded the USSR, demonstrates the type of developmental connotations that came with the idea of the West.[73]

The overwhelming popular support that backed the call to 'return to Europe' once the USSR collapsed is another demonstration of the pro-European sentiments that brewed in Bulgaria during the communist period.[74] The first two decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union were thus devoted to the development of closer ties with the West through the pursuit of membership in NATO and the EU. As a result, the topic of Bulgarian-Russian relations was relatively quiet for this period.

The question of Bulgaria's current and historical ties to Russia gained prominence once again with the events in Ukraine during 2013 and 2014. It was at this time that the terms Russophilia and Russophobia became commonly used in Bulgarian media and by political analysts. To some extent, these terms may have served to distinguish between those who disapproved of Russia's actions in Ukraine (Russophobes) and those who approved or were indifferent (Russophiles). However, precisely due to the complexity of the connotations which

[71] Maria Todorova, "Histiography of the Countries of Eastern Europe: Bulgaria," *American Historical Review* (1992): 1111.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Pirgova, interview.
[74] Ibid.

the two categories carry as a result of the history provided above, the meaning of these terms was muddled and their use imprecise from the start. As a result, it is more useful for the analysis of contemporary discourses of Russophilia and Russophobia to study the way these categories are used and in what situations, rather than attempting to pin down the shifting meanings they supposedly designate.

IV. Conclusion

Over the course of the history of the Bulgarian state, Russophilia could be distinguished as the tendency to construct the Bulgarian Self as one that is compatible and even melded with the image of Russia and the Russian Self. This construction was founded upon linguistic, religious, and ethnic affiliations with Russia which were constitutive of Bulgarian nationalism and were further infused with meaning as a result of the role Russia played in Bulgaria's separation from the Ottoman Empire. Russophobia, on the other hand, separated the image of Russia as an Other for the Bulgarian Self. This construction of Self developed in tandem with a different nationalism which feared political interference from Russia. Thus Russophobia was primarily expressed through political distancing from Russia in order to maintain Bulgarian autonomy. This allowed for a spectrum of Russophobia, where moderate Russophobes still valued Bulgaria's cultural connections with Russia, while extreme Russophobes denounced Russia and Russophilia in their entirety.

Chapter 3: Russophilia, Russophobia, and Bulgarian Educational Reform

I. Introduction

Over the last four years, a group of Bulgarian academics along with the NGOs backing them, have struggled to realize a set of educational reforms that would make the study of the communist period mandatory in Bulgarian secondary schools. The reforms also aimed to develop an adequate approach to teaching this recent and contested period in Bulgarian history. The discourses that have appeared on both sides of the debate reveal poignant and diverging attempts to renegotiate Bulgarian identity in light of the country's communist past. The pre-existing discourses of Russophilia and Russophobia reveal their structuring power through the ways in which both sides of the debate construct the Bulgarian Self and its Russian Other spatially, ethically, and temporally. However, this case also demonstrates the ways in which the pre-existing discourses of Russophilia and Russophobia are themselves acted upon by the rhetorical needs of the debate and the realities surrounding it. The result is that Russophilic and Russophobic discourses have become more polarizing - a situation augmented by the increasing use of the two terms as political designations.

The chapter will begin by providing background on the process undergone to pass the educational reform and an explanation of what the reform entailed. The chapter proceeds with an analysis of the arguments of the advocates and opponents of the reform with an eye to revealing the ways in which they are informed by the pre-existing discourses of Russophilia and Russophobia as well as the way in which they have transformed those discourses. As the process of reform was driven by its advocates, the chapter will proceed by first assessing the advocacy discourse and then the discourse of the reform's opponents.

II. The Process and Results of Bulgaria's Education Reform

The first decade of the 21st century saw several attempts at addressing the totalitarian communist legacies of the previous century on a European scale. The most comprehensive of these attempts was the Prague Declaration on European Consciousness and Communism, written in 2008 at the initiative of the Czech government and subsequently endorsed by the European Parliament.[75] The declaration calls for recognition of the destruction and terror that took place as a direct result of communist totalitarianism and requires pan-European acceptance of responsibility for these crimes which, along with Nazism, represent "the main disasters which blighted the 20th century."[76] In line with these goals, the Prague declaration stipulates the "adjustment and overhaul of European history textbooks so that children could learn and be warned about Communism and its crimes…"[77]

The Bulgarian government endorsed the Prague Declaration as well as the European Parliament's Resolution European Conscience and Totalitarianism in 2009; this demonstration of support for the goals of the declaration was understood as a commitment to the reforms they required, particularly in relation to the clause on history textbooks and education.[78] In addition to the incentive created by these resolutions, various sociological studies conducted throughout the 2000s revealed a lack of knowledge and understanding of the communist period amongst younger generations of Bulgarians.[79]

[75] Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic, *Prague Declaration on European Conscience and Communism*, June 3, 2008, Accessed April 30, 2018, http://www.praguedeclaration.eu/
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Evelina Kelbecheva, interview by author, Sofia, Bulgaria, April 15, 2018.
[79] BTV, "Prof. Evelina Kelbecheva: Incorporating the history of communism into the textbooks is a long process," Interview, 14:35. Published January 19, 2018, Accessed April 14, 2018, https://www.btv.bg/video/shows/lice-v-lice/videos/prof-evelina-kelbecheva-da-se-slozhi-istorijata-na-komunizma-v-uchebnika-e-edin-proces-kojto-teche-dalgo-vreme.html

In 2014, driven by the motivating force of these two factors, Professor Evelina Kelbetcheva of the American University in Blagoevgrad initiated the first petition for the reform of the Bulgarian education system in order to better present the realities of the communist period in secondary school curricula.[80] The petition gathered over 2000 signatures, including those of two previous presidents.[81] This civilian petition was matched by parliamentary petition for education reform initiated by MP Metodi Andreev, which received over a 100 signatures within a parliament of 240 members.[82]

The petitions triggered a negotiation process driven by advocates that took place through discussions and conferences in the European Parliament, Bulgarian Parliament, and Ministry of Education.[83] Academic advocates of the reform, including Kelbecheva, developed a list of reforms to be incorporated in the new curriculum after finally gaining the support of the center right ruling party, Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB). [84] Finally, on January 15, 2018 the Ministry of Education published the reformed curricula for history classes in secondary school which will be implemented starting Fall 2018.[85] Several days later, the Bulgarian Socialist Party put out a declaration requesting the rejection of these reforms based on their subjective and selective representation of Bulgarian history.[86] The request has been denied, cementing for the moment this action taken in the name of educational reform.[87]

[80] Kelbecheva, interview.
[81] Ibid.
[82] "Chronology of the great battle for teaching the communist period in schools," *State Security*, January 19, 2018. Accessed April 28, 2018. http://desebg.com/obrazovaniekomunizum/3439-2018-01-19-11-05-29
[83] *State Security*, "Chronology"
[84] Kelbecheva, Interview.
[85] Ivan Vedrov, "It was about time: the atrocities of communism will be in the textbooks," *DW*, January 19, 2018.
[86] "BSP wants the curricula for 10th grade history to be cancelled," *Voices*, January 19, 2018, Accessed April 29, 2018. http://www.glasove.com/categories/vytreshni-glasove/news/bsp-nastoyavada-bydat-otmeneni-novite-uchebni-programi-po-istoriya-za-h-klas
[87] "MoE: We will not be cancelling the curricula for 10th grade history," *Voices*, January 19, 2018. Accessed April 29, 2018. http://glasove.com/categories/zhivot/news/mon-nyama-da-otmenyame-programata-po-istoriya-za-x-klas

The reform has made the study of the communist period mandatory through its addition to the curriculum of the 10th grade history course 'History and Civilization.'[88] However, it was not simply the lack of information about the communist period in secondary school curricula and textbooks that was put to scrutiny, but what aspects of the period were being taught and the terms that would be used to study them. The lack of information in previous curricula about Bulgaria's labor camps and the many Bulgarians sentenced to death by the People's Court in the first days of the communist period came under criticism.[89] Some of the phrases that have now been incorporated into the curriculum are: 'dictatorship of the proletariat,' 'forced cooperation,' 'repressive apparatus,' 'political terror and repression,' 'cult of personality,' 'forced migration,' 'the role of the USSR in enforcing the communist regime,' and 'the technological stagnation of Bulgaria in comparison to the West.'[90]

III. Advocating for Education Reform and Russophobia

The discourse of the academics and NGOs advocating for educational reform renegotiates Bulgarian identity in light of the communist period by contesting Russia's role as a liberator in favor of Russia as a destructive, occupying force. Furthermore, advocates of the reform blame popular Russophilia and its official proponents for the perpetuation of ignorance and communist nostalgia which they portray as a developmental obstruction. The advocacy discourse re-evoked Russophobic motifs and logics while carving out a relatable subject position in this debate. However, the re-emergence of the categories of Russophilia and Russophobia as political labels reveals that the terms have been remobilized for the purposes of rhetoric,

[88] Vedrov, "It was about time."
[89] Kelbecheva, interview.
[90] Vedrov, "It was about time."

allowing further polarization both within the policy debate and over the issue of Russophilia and Russophobia itself.

Advocates for the reform of history curricula in secondary schools emphasized the importance of the study of history for the formation of Bulgarian identity amongst students while concretely delineating the Bulgarian Self in contrast to a spatially, ethically, and temporally constructed Russian Other.[91] The necessity of educational reform, as explained by advocates professors Kelbetcheva and Lachazar Stoyanov, stems from the importance which the study of history has for the development of one's self-awareness and of one's citizenship within a national community.[92] Thus, advocacy for education reform was consciously based on the importance of identity creation.

The interpretation of the communist period proffered by the advocates of reform and to an extent incorporated into the new curricula emphasizes the destructive role that the USSR played in the installation and maintenance of the communist regime in Bulgaria, often directly contesting the narratives of Russia as Europe's liberator in the context of WWII. The Soviet Union is distanced radically from the Bulgarian Self spatially by being presented as an occupying force, and ethically as being the purveyor of violence and persecution in Bulgaria. Russia's role in the bloodshed that occurred during the establishment of Bulgaria's communist regime through the trials of the People's Court, extra-legal executions, and forced migrations is fore-grounded through emphasis of the fact that de facto Bulgaria was an occupied state when these events occurred.[93] "The trials of the People's Court were political acts that were directed from Moscow," stated Kelbecheva, implicating the USSR in the anarchic state of affairs that

[91] Kelbecheva, interview.
[92] BiTelevision, "Communism enters the textbooks – 'For' and 'Against' explained by experts," Interview: 21.41, Published January 17, 2018, Accessed April 14, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gpxWUgimeBc
[93] Kelbecheva, interview.

existed in Bulgaria after WWII, similarly to the way revolutionary Zahari Stoyanov implicated Russia after the Russo-Turkish war: "Who prompted the vagabonds [in Bulgaria] to let blood and sow anarchy, so as to open the way for foreign occupation?"[94] Kelbecheva furthermore points out the paradox of calling the thieving Soviet troops Bulgaria's liberators: "Soviet soldiers that supposedly liberated Bulgaria from fascism would send home packages every week that were comprised entirely of the personal belongings of Bulgarian citizens… the historical archives that they took remain in Moscow to this day."[95] The emotive portrayal of a Bulgaria overrun by Russian soldiers creating anarchy during Bulgaria's liberation was a popular image in the Russophobic newspapers of the 19th century as well.[96] In the vein of Russophobic discourses from Bulgaria's National revival, the discourse advocating for reform vies for emotive nationalist memory by contesting the Russophilic image of 'Russian blood' spilt for Bulgaria and for Europe, replacing it with the Russophobic image of Bulgarian blood spilt by the Soviet army and the communist totalitarianism it imposed.

In light of this most recent Russian legacy in Bulgaria, advocates for the education reform insist upon the consistency of Russia's negative impact upon the country and once again put to question the absurdity of Bulgarians' popular belief in Russia's good intentions. Echoing Rakovski's claim in 1860 that Russia's "purpose has always been to impoverish our dear Fatherland," and Stoyanov's proclamation cursing "the minute that a Russian foot stepped on our land," Kelbecheva has stated that "all of Russia's political, economic, and social legacies have resulted in a net-negative for Bulgaria."[97] In this way, Russia's legacy in Bulgaria is subsumed under a single logic, embodied by the image of Russian occupation and destruction, no matter in

[94] Kelbecheva, interview. ; Stoyanov, "Who?"
[95] Kelbecheva, interview.
[96] Detchev, "Mapping Russia in the Bulgarian Press," 136.
[97] Rakovski, *Relocation to Russia;* "Stoyanov, "Who?"; Kelbecheva, Interview.

what political form. Furthermore, Kelbecheva observes that "Bulgarians are the only people in Eastern Europe who are naïve enough to believe that Russia's actions have been motivated by altruism."[98] Her critique of Bulgarian naivety in regards to Russia's occupations echoes the revolutionary Zahari Stoyanov's claim that "We [Bulgarians] will be the laughing stock of the Tashkins, the Bukhari and the Armenians, for whom the same Russia has shed no less blood."[99]

Advocates of the education reform evoke the temporal construction of the Bulgarian Self within their discourse by claiming that this naivety towards Russia's role in Bulgaria's history is a direct result of institutionalized Russophilia which has led to the stagnation of Bulgaria's education system.[100] To make this claim, advocates reiterate the Russophobic logic that blamed the mass acceptance of Russophilic propaganda for Bulgaria's troubles with the same fervor that they blamed direct Russian interference. Advocates claim that the pervasiveness of Russophilia within the old curriculum and amongst school teachers facilitates widespread ignorance with reference to the history of the communist period, and the replacing of objective history with nostalgia. A familiar video clip that was aired on a Bulgarian news channel, BTV, is often referred to with regards to the general state of children's knowledge of the communist period. In the clip a news reporter asks a 10th grader what he knows about the communist period, to which the student replies, "It was a more just time than today – there was no such thing as private property."[101] When asked where he got this information, the student says his that grandmother had told him.[102] This and other examples have led to the disparagement of the education system on the behalf of advocates who decry the fact that children are learning Bulgarian history from the nostalgic reminiscing of their grandparents rather than from the latest conclusions of

[98] Kelbecheva, Interview.
[99] Stoyanov, "Who?"
[100] Kelbecheva, Interview.
[101] BTV, "Prof. Evelina Kelbecheva"
[102] Ibid.

Bulgarian historiographers. [103] In this way, advocates of the education reform re-evoke Zahari Stoyanov's image of the "bareheaded herd" that listens eagerly to the romanticized Russophilic depictions of Russia's legacy in Bulgaria and thus allows the country to fall into ruin. This time, the herd is passing on these depictions to its descendants as well.

Ultimately, the popularity of these Russophilic depictions of the communist period is ascribed to the goals of the current political elite of BSP who rely on these narratives to legitimize their power.[104] The political utility of Russophilia for Russian-backed politicians in Bulgaria has been addressed previously in Russophobic texts. Yet its use in the advocacy discourse also activates contemporary political divisions into the rhetoric of the debate, thus mobilizing the category of Russophilia to legitimize the defaming of a current political party. Stoyanov's 'depraved monk' who proclaimed Russia a liberator in front of the 'bareheaded herd' was a Russian-sent statesman.[105] Kelbecheva invoked a similar formulation by claiming that BSP, as a continuation of the Bulgarian Communist Party, relies on the proliferation of Russophilia, and in that vein communist nostalgia, in order to cling to power.[106] Within the context of this policy debate, Russophilia is depicted as a category that is defined by specific political motivations that structure the division within the debate. Thus, the term gets co-opted in order to be used as a rhetorical device that serves to increase polarization on the issue of reform between the discourses of Russophilia and Russophobia.

The discourse that developed to advocate for education reform was based on a construction of the Bulgarian Self and a Russian Other that built off of the Russophobic motifs of Russia as an occupier, and Russophilia as an ignorant mass mentality with degenerative

[103] BTV, "Prof. Evelina Kelbecheva"
[104] Ibid.
[105] Stoyanov, "Who?"
[106] Kelbecheva, interview.

consequences for Bulgaria. The contemporary political associations that were implicated in the perpetuation of popular Russophilia and communist nostalgia continue to resemble previous Russophobic discourses, but also serve to infuse the debate with a mobilizing contemporary political division. Thus, within this policy debate, the term 'Russophilia' functions as a political category which seeds division with reference to the reform as well as the pre-existing discourses of Russophilia and Russophobia to which it refers.

IV. Opposing Education Reform and Russophilia

While the length of time it took for the education reform to be passed can to a certain extent be attributed to institutional inertia, there was a distinct discourse that emerged in opposition to the reform that provides a different renegotiation of the Bulgarian identity in light of the communist past. Once the new curriculum for history was made official, this discourse amplified in an expression of disappointment at the selectivity and subjectivity with which the curriculum presented the events of the communist period, and their meaning in the context of the 20th century. This disappointment demonstrated an ethical construction of Russia's role in WWII which was amplified through its recalling of similar ethical constructions found in the pre-existing Russophilic discourse. The aspects of Bulgaria's communist history that opponents to the reform claim were not included or properly represented in the new curriculum invoked the spatial and temporal dimensions with which the discourse of opposition formulated a Bulgarian Self that benefitted from its relationship with the Russian/Soviet Other. Ultimately, opponents' claim that the new curriculum serves an ideological and indoctrinating purpose informed by Russophobia reveals the way in which the opposition discourse also mobilizes the categories of Russophilia and Russophobia in order to delineate contemporary political stances which increase division over the reform.

The main argument that encompassed the majority of the opposition, the major actors of which were BSP and opposed academics and teachers, claimed that the reformed curricula's emphasis on the communist legacy resulted in a selective representation of Bulgaria's 20th century history.[107] Specifically, opponents such as teacher and MP to BSP Irena Anastasova, claimed that information about the communist period was not being supplemented with a similar emphasis on the fascist period that preceded it.[108] Information about Bulgaria's anti-Semitic policies and alliance with Axis Germany are underrepresented within the curriculum in comparison to information on the persecution that took place during the Communist period, creating a misrepresentation that falsely demonizes the role of the Soviet Union at the end of WWII.[109] Opponents thus pick up and reinvigorate the established Russophilic motif of Russia as the liberator from a much more dangerous evil.

The appeal to Bulgaria's experience with fascism during WWII serves as a foundation for the ethical and spatial construction of the USSR as a positive influence on the Bulgarian Self specifically at the end of the war. In this formulation, the entrance of the Soviet army in Bulgaria in September 1944 represents the defeat of fascism both in Bulgaria and in the wider context of Europe during WWII. Dobreva's explanation of the significance of Bulgaria's fascist legacy highlights both its importance for the factual continuity of Bulgarian history, and for its moral interpretation: "It is perhaps necessary to remind Bulgarian citizens at this point that Bulgaria was not on the side of the good guys in WWII, that Bulgaria loses the war."[110] Furthermore it is thanks to anti-fascist forces and the arrival of the Soviet army, that Bulgaria, as a defeated

[107] Pogled Info, "Irena Anastasova: The curriculum for history isn't an educational program, it's brainwashing," Interview, 21:38, Published January 31, 2018, Accessed April 30, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xrpo-heil-E
[108] Ibid.
[109] Pogled Info, "Prof. Vania Dobreva: In the curriculum for 10th grade there is no mention of fascism, but it will be known how bad communism is," Interview, 19:36, Posted January 23, 2018, Accessed April 30, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6O6eEmiPjKw
[110] Ibid.

country in WWII, did not lose any of its territory.[111] As such, the USSR's actions preserved Bulgaria spatially, as with the liberation from the Ottomans, and brought Bulgaria back on the right side of the war ethically.

The discourse opposing the reform often re-evoked and was given greater significance through the pre-existing images of Russia as a moral beacon, a liberator, and a savior from previous iterations of Russophilic discourses. These connotations were often conjured so fluidly as to suggest continuity within Bulgarian history that Russia's role is portrayed as always being a positive moral influence, much the way advocates of the reform established a historical continuity which conveyed the opposite. Angel Wagenstein, a Jewish-Bulgarian film director and author, gave an interview with regards to the interpretation of communism that was presented in the new curricula in which he demonstrated the emotion which these images of Russia continue to evoke.[112] In light of the blood that was shed by fascists in Bulgaria, Wagenstein proclaimed, "what is scary, is to name one's liberators one's enslavers, and to erase the true enslavers from history. To call the Soviet army an occupying army is to forget that the 1st and 2nd Bulgarian armies had occupied almost all of Serbia… we were the occupiers!"[113] Wagenstein's words reinvigorate the image of Russia as a liberator while his depiction of Bulgaria as an occupying force during WWII sets in relief the moral primacy of the USSR and brings to the fore once again the debt and obligation Bulgaria owes the Russian Other.

Opponents to the education reform also argue that the portrayal of the communist period itself is selective – their contestation of the facts that are chosen to characterize this period in the curricula reveal a temporal construction that attempts to emphasize the positive developmental

[111] Pogled Info, "Prof. Vania Dobreva"
[112] Pogled Info, "Angel Vagenstein, Vesislava Dureva: The Stalingrad battle for our memory has begun," Interview, 19:27, Published February 6, 2018, Accessed April 21, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fTNL-ERawAg
[113] Ibid.

influences that the Bulgarian Self once again owes to Russia, this time in the form of the USSR. While in the 19th century, association with Russia through Slavic ethnicity brought Bulgaria closer to Europe, the argument made today is that the modernization that took place in Bulgaria through its association with the Soviet Union brought Bulgaria into the rankings of a developed country. MPs of BSP, such as Professor Ivo Hristov and Irena Anastasova, reveal this logic when they argue for all of the facts of the communist period to be put side by side: "teach students about the labor camps in Belene, but mention also that Bulgaria ranked 27th in the Human Development index…" In a personal interview, Professor Ivo Hristov stated that "it should be acknowledged that the Soviet model of industrialization is responsible for bringing Bulgaria to the height of her technological might during the communist period."[114] Before the communist period, he explained, Bulgaria represented a provincial and underdeveloped country, and currently Bulgaria is once again stagnating economically in spite of its supposed transition to a market economy.[115] The successes of industrialization that are attributed to the communist period thus not only affirm the benefits of aligning Bulgaria's Self to a compatible Russian Other, but bestow a negative connotation to Bulgaria's current European model of development.

The final argument of the opponents claimed that the new history curriculum is motivated by an imported ideological agenda that aims to demonize the communist period and by proxy the image of Russia.[116] This argument, brought forth again by representatives of BSP, both draws upon pre-existing Russophilia and mobilizes the current political designation of Russophobia. The referred to ideological agenda is said to be based on foreign values and is seen to be eroding Bulgarian history and culture by reforming the ways in which they are allowed to be

[114] Ivo Hristov, interview by author, Sofia, Bulgaria, April 15, 2018.
[115] Ibid.
[116] *Voices,* "BSP wants the curricula for 10th grade history to be cancelled."

expressed.[117] Such a representation aligns with the nationalism of previous iterations of Russophilia, like that of Mutafchiev, which insist on the civilizational similarities and distinctiveness Bulgaria and Russia share and which ought to be preserved.

However, this discourse on the ideological nature of the education reforms is coupled with a political caricaturization of the advocates of the reform which is adapted specifically to contemporary circumstances. The academic advocates of the reform, especially those from the American University in Blagoevgrad, are characterized under the term 'grant-getters,' meaning professors that benefit from grants provided by Western institutions and thus support Western agendas.[118] Furthermore, the educational mission of these 'grant-getters' is portrayed as being deeply hypocritical, as is most succinctly expressed by Hristov: "I'm tired of listening to communists fighting communism in Bulgaria."[119] The opponents of the reform ascribe a new political characterization to advocates that becomes incorporated into the connotations of 'Russophobia.' This development can be interpreted as an example of the current political functions of the categories of Russophilia and Russophobia, which serve to divide opinions, as well as perhaps representing a new quality of Western or Euro-skepticism in Russophilia motivated by the current political environment.

The discourse of Russophilia acts as a structuring force for the arguments developed in opposition to the reform through the pre-existing images of Russia which help predetermine the characterization of the USSR in light of WWII and the communist regime, and provide both cognitive and emotive connotations reinforcing these characterizations. This is done spatially, ethically, and temporally while drawing upon the underlying themes of liberation, moral obligation, and development which have previously informed Russophilia. However, the

[117] Pogled Info, "Prof. Vania Dobreva."
[118] Pogled Info, "Valentin Vatsev"; Pogled Info "Prof. Vania Dobreva."
[119] BTV, "Ivo Hristov: Catastrophe for Bulgarians in Bulgaria."

political characterization of advocates of the reform as being bought off, hypocritical, and Russophobic, reveals an adaptation of the latter term to a contemporary political scenario unlike those in which discourses of Russophilia and Russophobia were previously used. The use of the term 'Russophobia' as a political category thus draws upon the prevalence of these discourses in order delineate division within the current debate.

V. Conclusion

An analysis of the discourses opposing and advocating for education reform in Bulgaria has revealed some of the ways in which they are informed by the themes of the pre-existing discourses of Russophilia and Russophobia with regards to their formulation of the Bulgarian Self and its relationship to Russia. The reoccurrence of these themes within this domestic and relatively un-publicized event suggests that the discourses of Russophilia and Russophobia have a structuring power of their own within Bulgarian policy debates. However, the application of these themes to the current debate also allows for the mobilization of the terms 'Russophilia' and 'Russophobia' for the purpose of divisive political rhetoric. While the contents of the terms 'Russophilia' and 'Russophobia' as political designations are themselves to an extent informed by original discourses of Russophilia and Russophobia, they also demonstrate a process in which pre-existing discourses are being mobilized in order to legitimize contemporary political divisions.

Chapter 4: Russophilia, Russophobia, and the Istanbul Convention

I. Introduction

During the first two months of 2018, Bulgarian media was dominated by a public debate that arose over whether the Bulgarian government would ratify a Convention developed by the Council of Europe (CoE) on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, popularly known as the Istanbul Convention. While the previous case study demonstrated how Russophilia and Russophobia determine how contemporary debates renegotiate Bulgarian identity with reference to its communist past, the case of the Istanbul Convention demonstrates how these discourses influence debates negotiating Bulgaria's identity with reference to its relationship with the EU. Russophilia and Russophobia reveal themselves as conditions of possibility with structuring power through the ways in which the two sides of the debate construct the Bulgarian Self with reference to a European Other spatially, ethically, and temporally. Juxtaposing the ways in which Russophilia and Russophobia inform the formulation of the Bulgarian Self in relation to a Russian versus European Other reveals the part that the discourses play in polarizing these two political entities within Bulgaria's identity negotiation. The highly publicized nature of this debate demonstrates again how the content of Russophilic and Russophobic discourses not only shapes current debates, but is being used in order to incite political division through its mobilizing potential.

As with the previous chapter, this one will begin by providing background on the Istanbul Convention and the process of its negotiation and rejection in the Bulgarian government. Then both sides of the debate on the ratification of the Convention will be assessed for the motifs and logics of Russophilia and Russophobia which structured them, as well as for the effects of the debate upon the discourses themselves. As the controversy began when opponents rose to

counter the ratification of the Convention, the chapter will first assess the discourse of the opponents and then of the advocates of the Convention.

II. The Istanbul Convention and its Reception in Bulgaria

The CoE's Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence is the latest in a series of efforts to promote the protection of women on an international scale. In light of extensive studies conducted in Europe that revealed both the poignancy of this issue and the degree to which states' national responses differed towards it, the Council concluded there was a need for "harmonized legal standards to ensure that victims benefit from the same level of legal protection everywhere in Europe."[120] In December 2008, the Council's Committee of Ministers set up an expert group to draft a Convention that would outline these comprehensive standards.[121] The draft was finished in December of 2010, and the Convention was adopted and opened for signature by May 2011, on the occasion of the 121st Session of the Committee of Ministers in Istanbul.[122]

The Convention was signed on Bulgaria's behalf by then Minister of Justice, Ekaterina Zaharieva on 21 April 2016, a year before the Convention was signed on the part of the entire EU.[123] On 3 January 2018, the Convention had been accepted by the Bulgarian government, headed by GERB, but was then contested that same day by their coalition partners, the United Patriots.[124] The contestation emerged on the grounds of the definition of the term 'gender' as being socially constructed, which the United Patriots claimed could lead to contradiction with

[120] Council of Europe, "Historical Background," Accessed March 29, 2018, https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-Convention/historical-background
[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Council of Europe, "Bulgaria signs the Istanbul Convention," Published April 21, 2016, Accessed March 30, 2016, https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-Convention/newsroom/-/asset_publisher/anlInZ5mw6yX/content/bulgaria-signs-the-istanbul-Convention?_101_INSTANCE_anlInZ5mw6yX_viewMode=view/&desktop=false
[124] "A new schism in the cabinet, this time because of a Convention against domestic violence," *Dnevnik*, January 3, 2018, https://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2018/01/03/3106472_nov_razkol_v_kabineta_tozi_put_zaradi_konvenciia/

article 46 of the constitution which established marriage as being the union between a man and a woman.[125] Ratification was consequently postponed in order to allow for further debate on the meaning of the Convention and the consequences of its ratification. Subsequently, the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) also declared itself in opposition to the Convention and its ratification in the National Assembly.[126] They proposed a referendum be held so the popular consensus could be known, but this appeal was denied on the 7 March. Following an explosion of public debate in which, additionally, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church voiced its opposition to the Convention, Prime Minister Boiko Borisov announced in mid-February that the government would no longer pursue ratification. However, GERB had already petitioned the Constitutional Court to review the Convention in order to determine whether it was at odds with the constitution. The court agreed and the results are expected before the summer of 2018.[127]

III. Opposition to the Convention and Russophilia

The most visible opposition to the ratification of the Istanbul Convention was presented by the United Patriots, BSP, and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. These three opponents also provide productive categorizations by which to explore the main arguments that were brought up in the debate. The initial points of contention appear to be firmly grounded in perceptions of ethicality. Yet by putting to scrutiny the sources of the norms underlying the Convention and the effects these norms would have on society, the opponents of the Convention implicated spatial and temporal dimensions to the debate. By suggesting that the norms underpinning a Convention developed by the Council of Europe were foreign to the Bulgarian mentality, the opponents

[125] *Dnevnik*, "A new schism."
[126] "BSP decided not to support the ratification of the Istanbul Convention," Bulgarian Socialist Party, January 13, 2018, http://bsp.bg/news/view/13541-bsp_vze_reshenie_za_nepodkrepa_na_ratifikatsiyata_na_istanbulskata_konventsiya.html
[127] Georgi A. Angelov, "GERB will ask the Constitutional Court if there is a problem with the Istanbul Convention," *Dnevnik*, January 31, 2018. https://www.dnevnik.bg/politika/2018/01/31/3121654_gerb_shte_pita_konstitucionniia_sud_ima_li_problem_s/

constituted a Self founded upon Bulgarian, Orthodox, Slavic values and traditions versus an ironically labeled 'progressive' European Other. The pre-existing discourse of Russophilia acts as a condition of possibility for this formulation of the Bulgarian Self, with the notable re-emergence of the theme of Orthodoxy. The emphasis on the cultural and ideological motifs of Russophilia in juxtaposition to a European Other reveals the ways in which this pre-existing discourse is being mobilized and adapted to current debates in order to delineate new divisions.

The first resistance against the Convention came from the United Patriots, a coalition of three nationalist parties, and was predicated on an ethically based concern over the concept of socially constructed gender roles which is explicitly referred to in the text. From a technical standpoint there was an issue of translation as the Bulgarian language does not have separate words for 'sex' and 'gender,' but uses 'пол' (pɔ:l) which encompasses the meaning of both words. The concept of socially constructed gender roles then became commonly referred to as that of the 'social sex' or the 'third gender' in political and public debates (the former representing the translation of 'gender' in the Convention, and the latter not being found in the text). The question raised by the United Patriots to the Council of Ministers was whether this new concept of gender would lead to further legislative changes, particularly in reference to the constitution's definition of marriage.[128] The question of the 'third gender' and the threat of the legalization of same-sex marriage became particularly salient within the media debate about the Convention and often overshadowed the question of violence against women and domestic violence, which all opponents publicly declared was a just cause.[129]

[128] Bulgarian National Assembly, "Question from Nikolai Alexandrov, MP of United Patriots," October 26, 2017, http://parliament.bg/bg/topical_nature/28533

[129] National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria, "Public discussion on the ratification of the Council of Europe's Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence," Public Discussion, 3:43:21, Posted January 23, 2018, http://parliament.bg/bg/discussion

The issue of the 'third gender' provided the ethical dimension with which the Bulgarian Self was constructed in contrast to a European Other within the opposition presented by the United Patriots and its constituent parties, as well as by the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and numerous other religious denominations within the country. For the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, the Convention presented a new, arrogant understanding of the role of man – of man that knows no higher power and has the ability even to determine his sex.[130] Such a state of affairs would "open the doors to moral degradation."[131] Ataka, perhaps the most well known of the nationalist parties in the United Patriots coalition, allotted generous time on their television channel, Alfa, to the discussion and dissection of the Convention. Volen Siderov, the party leader, explained deliberately to his audience that the term 'gender' opened the door to a variety of legislative changes that would normalize all sorts of perversions in society.[132]

The moral corruption represented in the construction of the European Other served to put in relief the Bulgarian Self, reaffirming its ethical and cultural foundations within Orthodoxy and Bulgarian national values – characteristics that both inform and connote Russophilia. That the Other was apposed to a geographically designated 'Bulgarian' Self begins to implicate the spatial dimensions outlined within the debate. Representatives of the Orthodox Church invoked the 'values of the Bulgarian people' in order to argue that those expressed by the Convention are unnatural and contradictory to the popular will.[133] That representatives of the Church were speaking on the behalf of the Bulgarian people implied that the referenced values were conservative in nature and founded in Bulgarian Orthodoxy, but this was also stated explicitly by opponents such as Volen Siderov. The references to Orthodoxy and to the existence of a

[130] Ibid
[131] Ibid
[132] TV Alfa, "The trap 'Istanbul Convention'," Statement by Volen Siderov, 18:50, Posted January 15, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nunVGpQMLPI
[133] National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria, "Public Discussion."

historically constituted national character speak directly to the traditional discourse of Russophilia which was predicated upon the commonality of these characteristics between Bulgaria and Russia. This commonality was reaffirmed in the current debate when the Russian Patriarch openly supported Bulgaria's rejection of the Convention on his visit in March, thus also recalling the ethical and spatial alignment between Bulgaria and Russia.[134]

The mobilization of the values of Orthodoxy in the debate can be interpreted as a re-emergence of this motif within the underlying discourse of Russophilia and its role in the negotiation of Bulgarian identity. As mentioned before, this motif became dormant for the most part during the atheist communist period.[135] That its re-emergence in the case of this particular policy debate is noteworthy is confirmed by several political analysts and opponents of the Convention who mentioned in interviews that they were pleasantly surprised by the Church's decision to take a stance.[136]

The opposition presented by BSP is less of a moral character, but continues to evoke the cultural themes of Russophilia in order to further bring out the spatial dimensions of both the Bulgarian Self and the European Other. The party's resistance rested on similar foundations as those already described – the lack of clarity in the document as to certain concepts as well as its underlying motivations, as stated by President Rumen Radev – yet the logic that underpinned it played more on the ideological nature of the document than its moral foundations. MP Pencho Milkov of BSP declared that the choice over whether to ratify the Convention or not was a

[134] "How the Church went from defendant of the Istanbul Convention to its firm opponent," *Kapital*, January 23, 2018. https://www.capital.bg/politika_i_ikonomika/bulgaria/2018/01/23/3116939_kak_ot_zashtitnik_na_istanbulskata_konvenciia_curkvata/

[135] Detchev, interview.

[136] Pogled Info, "Valentin Vatsev on the Istanbul Convention: Today in Bulgaria the moral majority is winning," Interview, 20:00, Published January 23, 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6gT-TogM_g

civilizational one.[137] The use of the term 'civilization' with regards to Bulgarian identity evokes Bulgaria's connection to the Slavic civilization – a connotation that has been forged and reproduced thanks to Russophilic discourses. Thus, the concept of a 'civilizational choice' makes use of this connotation for the divisive rhetorical purpose of suggesting the debate represents a choice between European and Slavic civilization.

The theme of civilization is further expanded on in order to formulate the temporal dimension of the construction of Self and Other within the context of the Istanbul Convention by evoking the concept of decadence. Academic, MP to BSP, and self-declared Russophile, Prof. Ivo Hristov, explains on several occasions that the formulation of gender in the Convention is a deeply ideological one informed by post-modernism. Post-modernism he describes as a decadent ideology that encourages the dissolution of categories of identity in order to create a more easily manipulated society.[138] The civilizational choice becomes one between the decadence and degradation evoked by the Convention and those that support it versus vitality of those that don't. While the EU as an institution seems to have gone the way of decadence, opponents like Rumen Radev and Ivo Hristov are grateful that the Bulgarians had the 'common sense' not to do so as well.[139] The invocation of post-modernism as a degenerative ideology embraced by the EU creates a new line of division within the debate which carries through to the division between Russophiles and Russophobes.

The moral, civilizational, and ideological contentions against the ratification of the Istanbul Convention mobilize religious and cultural categories of identity which are familiar and compelling to the Bulgarian population due to their implicit and explicit correlation to

[137] "Pencho Milkov: The choice 'for' or 'against' the Istanbul Convention is a civilizational one," Bulgarian Socialist Party, January 26, 2018, http://bsp.bg/news/view/13609-pencho_milkov__izboryt_za__i__protiv__istanbulskata_konventsiya_e_tsivilizatsionen.html
[138] Radoslava Rasheva, "Prof. Ivo Hristov, sociologist, MP from BSP: 'We find ourselves in the gap'," *News Business Policy*, April 1, 2018, http://www.nbp.bg/nbp/проф-иво-хрицтоб-социолог-народен-пре/
[139] Rasheva, "Prof. Ivo Hristov."

Russophilia. The re-emphasis of religious and civilizational motifs highlights a construction of Bulgarian identity in which a Bulgarian/Slavic/Orthodox Self is juxtaposed against a decadent, unnatural European Other. Thus, the debate on the Convention reveals both the way in which Russophilia can determine the development of contemporary debates through the continued salience of its motifs and connotations, as well as the way in which these motifs are mobilized to construct new oppositions of Self and Other that inherently change the function and quality of Russophilia.

IV. Defense of the Convention and Russophobia

The public defense of the Istanbul Convention was conducted primarily by members of the ruling party GERB, including the president, the minister of justice, and the foreign minister, and a variety of NGOs and academics. While the opposition's resistance was somewhat diverse depending on the party in question, the defense from each of the groups named above was relatively homogenous, centering on a reassertion of the true purpose and meaning of the Convention and emphasizing its importance for the Bulgarian society.[140] The case made in defense of ratification, while seemingly centered on the ethicality of the Convention, encompassed spatial and temporal dimensions which served to align the defendants with a particular vision of Europe and European development. The constitution of a Bulgarian Self oriented towards European values is then juxtaposed against the manipulations of the conservative and Russophilic opponents that insist upon keeping the country in backwardness – a formulation coinciding with pre-existing Russophobic discourses. As with the debate on education reform, the debate on the Convention mobilizes the temporal dimension of development in such a way as to portray European development and Bulgarian/Slavic/Russian

[140] National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria. "Public discussion."

lack of development as mutually exclusive categories, thus polarizing and even caricaturing the opponents to the Convention, and the Russophilic/Russophobic divide.

As the potential ratification of the Istanbul Convention came under attack by a growing number of opponents, the Bulgarian government was called on numerous times to defend the position of ratification. The defense generally centered on calling to attention and attempting to resolve the misunderstandings that have emerged in relation to the Convention. This was done through public statements by Minister of Justice Tsetska Tsacheva and Foreign Minister Ekaterina Zaharieva, as well as through letters of petition addressed to the National Assembly by NGOs such as the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee. Each of these reiterated that the primary issue at stake in the referendum was that of violence against women and domestic violence, while drawing attention to the gravity of this issue throughout Europe and in Bulgaria specifically.[141] Furthermore, they insisted that the Convention has no mention of a third gender or the legalization of same-sex marriages.[142] Finally, many of the texts endeavored to resolve the confusion as to the difference between 'sex' and 'gender,' by pointing out that the latter referred not to biological differentiation, but to socially constructed roles and stereotypes that can be the basis of violence against women.[143]

The supporters of the Convention formulated an ethical construction of Self and Other through the assertion that by construing the Convention as an issue of gender ideology, opponents were, willfully or not, diverting attention from the true motive of the treaty which is the protection of human rights. Statistics quoting the extent of the problem of violence against women were presented both by the government and by NGOs in order to emphasize the urgency of this issue which ought to get the attention of both the government and the population. By way

[141] National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria. "Public discussion."
[142] Ibid.
[143] Ibid.

of a letter of petition, over a hundred university professors called on the National Assembly to address this issue on the basis of 'rational arguments' and not of 'fear and misunderstandings,' stating that until the Convention is signed the Bulgarian population would "be responsible to every victim of gender-based violence, by having allowed it to take place through inaction."[144] Thus, the mentality of the opposition is presented as being particularly harmful to Bulgarian society.

On the basis of the opponents' association with Orthodox and Slavic values, this depiction of subversion resembles previous iterations of Russophobia which described the influence of Russian and Slavic mentalities and practices as detrimental to Bulgaria. The emergence of this formulation within the context of the Istanbul Convention represents a new level of subversion on behalf of the Russian/Slavic influence, because in this case it is not simply the Other's mentalities of politics and governance but cultural values that promote negative practices in Bulgaria. The negative depiction of Slavic and Orthodox values further polarizes Russophilia and Russophobia by eroding the cultural compatibility that originally existed between the two.

As with the opponents to the Convention, the ethical dimension of the defendants construction of Self and Other came with spatial and temporal dimensions as well, in their case as a result of the connection that was made between ratifying the Convention and Bulgaria's belonging within a European identity. The ratification of the Istanbul Convention came to symbolize a spatial alignment of the Bulgarian Self with the image of Europe and European development. As early as 2014, MP Tuncher Kurdjaliev presented the issue of Convention to the Council of Ministers as the most important European agreement for addressing transgressions on

[144] "More than 100 university professors declared themselves in support of the Istanbul Convention," *Dnevnik*, January 26, 2018, https://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2018/01/26/3119666_poveche_ot_100_universitetski_prepodavateli_se/

human rights and by insisting on the need for Bulgaria to demonstrate its solidarity with this cause.[145] The Bulgarian Helsinki committee stated that Bulgaria's ratification of the Convention would "undoubtedly raise the country's transnational prestige" while failure to ratify would certainly come at a cost to the country's international reputation.[146] Thus the defense often formulated ratification of the Convention as another precondition of 'Europeanness'.

The spatial divide between European and non-European was infused with the temporal dimension provided by the terms 'developed' and 'undeveloped,' which reaffirms the Russophobic theme that association with a Russophilic identity impedes Bulgarian development. A common issue that was brought up, including by the Prime Minister himself, was the number of countries, more conservative than Bulgaria, that have already ratified the Convention - including Albania and Turkey, and Poland.[147] The implication being that the ratification of the Convention represented a level of moral development. Thus, if these countries, portrayed as being more backwards than Bulgaria, had ratified the Convention, it would be shameful for Bulgaria to fail to do so. Russia has not ratified the Convention, placing it outside of this conception of development, as was at times happily pointed out by opponents of the Convention. By formulating the stance taken on the Convention in terms of 'developed' versus 'undeveloped,' and making the 'Europeanness' of the Bulgarian Self hang upon this issue, the cultural/ideological stances on either side of the debate are portrayed as incompatible. The underlying Russophobic and Russophilic discourses on the respective sides of the debate are also polarized.

[145] Bulgarian National Assembly, "Question from Turcher Kurdjaliev, MP of Movements for Rights and Freedoms," March 27, 2014, http://parliament.bg/bg/topical_nature/28533

[146] Krasimir Kunev, "Address to the National Assembly in relation to the ratification of the Istanbul Convention," Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, January 17, 2018, http://www.bghelsinki.org/bg/novini/press/single/obrshenie-istanbulskata-konvenciya/

[147] BiTelevision, "Boiko Borisov explains why he put the Istanbul Convention in 'second gear'," Interview, 5:42, Posted January 25, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6rMuCN2tjGk

The primary Russophobic motif that reverberated within the discourse of the supporters of the Istanbul Convention was that of portraying Russian influence as detrimental to Bulgarian development while on the other hand presenting European values and approaches to development as desirable. This was done not only by presenting the Russophilic position on the Convention as backwards, but by implying that their interpretation of the Convention subverted the progress that it actually stood for. The cultural values that were at stake in the Convention allow for Russophobic logic to extend not only to issues of governance, but to issues of culture. The divisiveness of the debate thus polarizes the Russophilic and Russophobic discourses underlying the two positions by making them incompatible not only politically but culturally.

V. Conclusion

Within the public debate that occurred over the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, the discourse forged by the opposition to its ratification relied on a pre-existing ethical construction of the Bulgarian Self as being founded upon Slavic, Orthodox, and thus Russophilic, values in order to assert its position while distancing an unnatural, decadent European Other. Advocates of the Convention on the other hand, reasserted the European values of human rights in order to forge a Bulgarian Self that ought to align with progressive European standards rather than being led astray by the backwardness of Russophilic mentalities, a logic previously observed in Russophobic discourses. The cultural nature of the Convention led to the polarization of Russophilic and Russophobic discourses not only on the level of politics but culture as well, as was demonstrated in the strong emphasis of the Orthodox motif on the part of the opponents, and of the incompatibility of European and Russophilic development models on the part of supporters.

Conclusion

This thesis aimed to unveil the ways in which Bulgaria's identity construction with regards to its historical relationship with Russia continues to influence the discursive negotiation of its foreign and domestic policies. In order to do this, the project delineated the historical discourses of Russophilia and Russophobia by presenting the main motifs and logics that they encompassed, while highlighting the way in which they developed over time. Subsequently, through the analysis of two case studies, this thesis demonstrates the continued power of these discourses to act as conditions of possibility and structuring agents within two separate policy debates in Bulgaria. Within the two case studies, the motifs and logics of Russophilia and Russophobia participated in carving out subject positions as well as invigorating those positions with arguments that Bulgarians recognize themselves in through their familiar cognitive and emotive appeals. Thus, the positions that emerged in the analyzed policy debates represent condensations of previous historical discourses while at the same time evoking their own logic which resulted in the emphasis of a particular motif that may have until recently been dormant, or the transformation of a theme in order to accommodate contemporary circumstances.

The transformations that could be noted in particular were the re-emergence of Orthodoxy as a mobilizing cultural motif within Russophilic discourse in the case of the Istanbul Convention. In addition, the characterization of the academics that supported the education reform as Western benefactors and the portrayal of European values and ideologies as decadent reveal a note of Euroskepticism within contemporary Russophilia. On the other hand, the emphasis on the incompatibility of progressive European standards and backwards Slavic/Orthodox values revealed a heightened level of Othering of Russia and Russophilia in Russophobic discourses. The heightened polarization between the discourses of Russophilia and

Russophobia can be in part attributed to the rhetorical functions that these categories served in the debates. However, the mobilizing capacity of Russophilia and Russophobia within the context of these debates may signal another phase in Bulgaria's history in which these discourses actively divide the population and thus serve specific political functions. If this is the case, tracking the developments of these discourses and their uses in policy debates will become an important dimension in the analysis of Bulgarian politics.

These findings reveal the added value that the evaluation of Bulgaria's identity construction with relation to Russia can have in the analysis of Bulgarian politics. As such the thesis has gestured towards the wider purpose of adding another dimension to and thus enriching the framework with which researchers approach analyses of domestic and foreign politics within Bulgaria. While much of the current research conducted on Bulgaria focuses on the geopolitical factors that affect Bulgaria's foreign and domestic policy negotiation, the research of this thesis suggests that ideational factors such as Russophilia and Russophobia can have observable effects on these policy debates. Having demonstrated the manner in which these discourses inform policies relatively unrelated to highly publicized geopolitical questions and issues concerning Russia, it is likely that these latter issues will also be affected by Russophilia and Russophobia. Future studies can be aimed at uncovering the ways in which the public debates over salient geopolitical issues are informed by discourses of Russophilia and Russophobia. Furthermore, future research can seek to uncover the discourses of Russophilia and Russophobia that likely exist in other Eastern European countries for the purpose of comparative analyses that may reveal why different countries in Eastern Europe might respond differently to similar international pressure.

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