

Moderation of Nationalist Parties in Bulgaria

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Abstract

During the previous Bulgarian parliamentary election in 2017, the leading center right party, GERB, has entered a governing coalition with the United Patriots. The United Patriots are an electoral coalition of three nationalist parties with radical pasts and are led by personalistic leaders raising concerns of a highly nationalist government in Bulgaria. This thesis aims to discover whether these three parties have moderated while they have been part of the governing coalition and under the watchful eye of the European Union. The hypothesis is that these three parties have moderated under the presence of both the European Union and GERB. By utilizing a Likert scale that investigates each of the individual three members of the United Patriots to see if they have moderated in the period between 2007 and 2018. The results show that these three parties have moderated and there are indications that pressure from both the European Union and GERB was responsible for this moderation in these three Bulgarian ultranationalist parties.

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Introduction

Europe is at a crossroads: populists and nationalists are dictating the tone of policy and rhetoric in many European nations including Austria, Hungary, Italy, and Poland. Political parties such as Freedom Party of Austria, Fidez in Hungary, Lega Nord in Italy, and Law and Justice in Poland, are dictating the tone and rhetoric of their national governments. This is appropriate considering that they are either part of the governing coalition or are the governing party. Their actions, such as questioning important European institutions such as the Euro, are alarming to many in European institutions as well as global markets (Watts, 2017). This suggests that many parties within the European Union framework can brazenly shake the status quo of faith in the EU's institutions.

This raises an important issue. Nationalist parties that operate within government frameworks either as ruling parties or in governing coalitions have the power and ability to shake the European framework of cooperation. There are differences in terms of policy to encourage democratic norms depending upon the state in question. If the state is actively in the process of accession, the European Union can react preemptively to overtly nationalist rhetoric and action by influencing their actions through the process of acceding to the union such as the two Republics of Serbia and Montenegro. These two nations must undergo rigorous screening and political action checks such as neighborhood agreements alongside constant supervision that underlies the amount of influence that the European Union has (Emmott, 2018). Of concern to these countries are their reactions to the Republic of Kosovo, which remains highly controversial in Serbia (Friedman, 2018). This demonstrates that the European Union possesses a large amount of leverage over countries that are attempting to accede to the Union, including the nationalist parties within these very nations.

For states that have just joined the EU, there is a considerable amount of adjustment for the political system to adopt in accordance with the framework of the EU. As a natural

progression, political parties that are transitioning join with their likeminded compatriots in the European Parliament. Political parties such as the Bulgarian Socialist Party building a European affiliation with the Party of European Socialists. But, there are disputes over whether this European leverage continues to extend to states that have already joined the union.

In addition to this, the literature is quite diverse on acceded party systems that have more recently joined the European Union. Much of the literature regarding these parties and their adaptation comes from the mid 2000's to the early 2010's when the central and eastern European EU expansions occurred. Lewis and Markowski compile papers regarding the attitudes and movements of party systems within post-communist European States in their transition into being fully European states (Lewis, 2011). In addition to this, Lewis and Mansfeldova illuminate how each of the party systems within central and eastern Europe have adapted to becoming parties within the European Union framework. They disseminate various targeted overviews of party systems with anecdotes and individual sections within the papers on nationalist/radical parties in the region (Lewis, et. al, 2006).

However, if one wishes to look within the nationalist tides of the European Union, there are other authors who give a more in-depth look into the nationalist parties of Europe where many of the problems arise. Two works provide an effective overview of the dynamics of populist and nationalist parties in Europe, hereby setting a greater foundation to the effects that these parties have on the European context. One is Pytlas's work involving a variety of issues integral to the radical right in the region. He examines the issues that worry the EU including: irredentism, anti-Roma debates and radical policy since they go against basic European norms (Pytlas, 2016). In addition to these different worrying topics and policies issues such as immigration, chauvinism, and Russophilia need to be taken seriously as they attempt to become part of the mainstream political framework within central and eastern Europe.

In the current political climate, the term Russophilia raises many different questions and contexts. In standard lexicon the word Russophilia indicates a strong affection for the Russian people, it's land, it's culture and other relevant connotations; most of them positive. However, in the context of Bulgaria, Russophilia is defined as definite encouragement, advocacy and implementation of authoritarian policy and, encouragement of regression from the European sphere of influence into the Russian sphere of influence. It is also an encouragement of one of Russia's strategic goals, primacy in the Slavic world. Thus, whenever the term Russophilia is raised within the context of this paper and Bulgarian politics, it is an indication of the influence of Russia within Bulgarian domestic politics. However, one must look to a more broad-based framework when it comes to far-right populism within politics in Europe.

Mudde offers a more broad-based framework on populist far right parties in Europe to draw on concepts, themes, ideas and reasons for failure and success in the political sphere. He identifies the strategies of the various radical right-wing parties within the European framework and their various commonalities (Mudde, 2009). Yet, when we concentrate upon the context of these radical right parties gaining power in multiple member states and these states beginning to act against the wishes of the European Union, there is an important distinction that must be made: are the nationalists the sole governing party or part of the governing coalition?

The Italian government features a similar governmental coalition to Bulgaria: nationalist parties are prominent coalition partners to the larger center right senior coalition party. This raises many questions about how this format of government will react to the European Union. In Hungary and Poland, the governments that are comprised of nationalist parties act aggressively against the European Union. It seems that the EU either sanctions poorly or not at all regarding member states who are run by sole nationalist parties. These nations are run by these sole parties and can directly contravene the greatest weapon that the

EU has against noncompliant states: Article 7 from the Treaty on the European Union (Martin, 2018). This would strip a noncompliant state of its voting rights and opens sanctions against the state, but it requires a high threshold within the EU to activate¹. Yet, if enough of these individual parties take control of their constituent countries, this “nuclear option” fails. If these cases are taken alone, it seems that once the parties are part of the European framework they have free reign.

The situation, however, is different if we look at centrist nationalist coalitions in member states. Much of the recent literature regarding the presence of nationalist parties in governing coalitions comes from the Italian example of the Berlusconi government, as Lega Nord possessed the ability to dictate foreign policy, regarding immigration (Verbeek and Zaslove, 2015; Coticchia and Davidson, 2018). The literature concludes that even radical parties that exist within governmental coalitions present risk to European values (Sikk, 2018). Berlusconi’s Forza Italia and Lega Nord governing coalition make poor subjects for such conclusions due to the subsequent reversals on the previous populist rhetoric made by Forza Italia. Forza Italia had a strong populist streak, which was indicated by Verbeek and Zaslove and is one of the major reasons that Lega Nord was allowed such a free reign in the coalition (Verbeek and Zaslove, 2015). If the behaviors by the Italian, Hungarian, and Polish governments are baselines for action by nationalist parties in positions of power, two behavioral trends emerge. First, nationalist parties that are the sole governing party, as is the case in Hungary and Poland, will act in accordance with their manifesto due to this being perceived as their mandate. Second, if the nationalist party is in government, yet part of a governing coalition, its behavior can be influenced by a senior partner, as seen in Berlusconi’s

¹ Article 7.3 of the Treaty on the European Union states that “Where a determination under paragraph 2 has been made, the Council, acting by a qualified majority, may decide to suspend certain of the rights deriving from the application of the Treaties to the Member State in question, including the voting rights of the representative of the government of that Member State in the Council. In doing so, the Council shall take into account the possible consequences of such a suspension on the rights and obligations of natural and legal persons.”

Italy (Verbeek and Zaslove, 2015). Third: what would happen if a nationalist party or parties are in coalition with a staunchly center right party? There exists a gap in the literature where we can determine if nationalist parties are able to temper their radical tendencies in the presence of an exterior or interior political moderator.

Given the environment of nationalist parties in central and eastern Europe, it seems that whenever there is the presence of nationalist parties in government, radical policy is soon to follow in earnest. One case stands out: Bulgaria. Bulgaria is a member state of the European Union and is governed by a coalition made up of a center right party, known as Citizens for European Development of Bulgarian: GERB for short, as the senior member. The radical aspect of the government is a nationalist electoral coalition within the governing coalition called the United Patriots that is made up of three nationalist parties. These parties are Ataka, the National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria and the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization. Over the past two years, I have observed behavior within these three parties that contradicts the idea of the presence of nationalist policy passing and becoming law in the presence of the nationalists. This speaks to the fact that the European Union or the senior governing coalition member influences, the actions and rhetoric of nationalist parties in prominent positions.

This thesis will examine these three parties and argue that they have shifted from being openly radical parties into parties that have moderated themselves from their radical roots in terms of rhetoric and action. I do this by examining their rhetoric and actions between 2005 and 2018 in the news, party publications, and in academic literature. For the purposes of this thesis, the definition of moderation is that these parties actively seek to avoid extreme behavior. In the case they do say or act in such a way, they contain it promptly and sanction the persons responsible. How can one measure moderation? I have developed a Likert scale model called for the purposes of this thesis, “the five-point scale” that displays the progress to moderation for an individual party. The five-point scale is ranked on a sliding scale of zero to five. Zero

being the most moderate/least extreme to five being the most extreme/least moderate. The weighting of values is differentiated based upon how severe the movement is away from the definition of moderation. For example, rhetoric such as open statements made by party leaders are not weighed as heavily as open violence against political opponents or minorities.

The five-point moderation scale uses five aspects of radical nationalism in Bulgarian nationalism. First, islamophobia and xenophobia is defined as the display of revulsion, utilization of rhetoric or action taken against either foreigners, Muslims, or native Bulgarian Turks. Second, Euroscepticism is defined as open criticism of the European Union and/or European integration that involve the violent or abrupt dissolution of the current status quo to reflect the status quo of “previous eras”. Third, respect for democratic norms is defined as the ability of the individual party acting within the framework of the National Assembly and political discourse without resorting to political violence or direct action such as marches, or extrajudicial action. Fourth, this paper defines chauvinism as excessive patriotism or jingoism that distances a party away from cosmopolitan ideals to more nationalist action such as the advancing of Bulgarian nationalist goals. These include promotion of the irredentist attitudes regarding the expansion of Bulgaria into the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Fifth and finally, the ability of these parties to cooperate with their moderate counterparts in the period between 2005 and 2018. This will be measured based upon frequency of cooperation with moderate counterparts.

The amount of change observed over time will determine progression to becoming more moderate. The data is drawn from historical dataset by utilizing the Bulgarian and Balkan media on top of historical statements by their party leaders and academic literature that studies the Bulgarian political environment. The data regarding the current time dataset is drawn from the manifestos of the parties, Bulgarian news, as well as official governmental releases from during their time as junior coalition partners including statements by political leaders and

policies put forth. This thesis is critical to understanding this case study by investigating the political movements of a party in the presence of a moderate senior coalition partner within a liberal influencing framework such as the European Union.

One of the main avenues of engaging change is utilizing a metric that displays change over time. Unfortunately, the study lacks the volume of data to utilize a quantitative analysis. This is seen within several articles in the political science literature. However, there are two reasons why an algorithm and a regression equation are not utilized. First, the fact that the transition over time is not constant. It is variable depending on the party that is being examined. More precisely, one of the parties that is being examined has only existed for a few years and has not built a record equal to that of the other two parties that have existed for at least a decade. The second reason is due to the constraints of the data being gathered. Due to my lack of fluency in the Bulgarian language, I am unable to fully utilize the existing media to its fullest extent. On occasion two colleagues were able to assist in translating government documents and party manifestos, however, I relied primarily upon English language media that operated within Bulgaria as the primary source for my data. Thus, the simultaneous lack of data and time progression in the party's history is the primary reason why I have chosen not to utilize the standard regression equation or construct a quantitative algorithm.

This thesis is an examination of the progress of moderation among the nationalist parties and what is the most likely source of moderation. Examples of this moderation include the presence and reduction of aspects of Bulgarian nationalistic politics that is considered an improvement from their prior radical state. This thesis is structured by delving into the various relevant theories that can be applied to party politics of the Bulgarian political sphere and the ability of European institutions to exert influence and moderation on Bulgarian nationalist politics. In the analysis section, I examine the moderation of the United Patriots by utilizing the five-point test and displaying that European institutions and policies along with the

presence of their senior governmental coalition partner GERB have an impact on the moderation. This was done by cross-referencing Bulgarian media and the academic literature regarding Bulgarian politics. This indicates that the presence of the European framework alongside a moderate governmental leader will moderate for rhetoric and action is possible within the EU framework for nationalist parties.

Chapter II: Theory

One of the primary areas of understanding party politics, moderation and their actions is by utilizing theory. However, which theory can be best applied to the question at hand: are Bulgarian nationalist parties within the United Patriots coalition moderating? If they are, why are they moderating? By utilizing a comparison between spatial logic and institutionalist logic to compare spatial theories and institutionalist based theories on usefulness, we can determine which one to utilize in the application of the theories to this study. First, what makes a theory useful to this study?

2-1 Internal Party Politics and other Spatial Logic Theories

Whenever one sees parties acting in a manner that makes news, one must assume that it is acting in such a way to gain votes and recognition. This is the purpose for which political parties even exist. Political parties do not coalesce under their own power or ideology. They form around voting blocs within the population in democracies for which political parties live. Consequently, political parties come and go with the whims of the populace voting for them.

Democracy forms in a variety of ways. Bulgaria conducts elections based upon a closed list proportional system which encourages hierarchical organizational structures within their political parties. Therefore, key aspects of internal party politics in such a system encourage party members to cooperate with party leaders, and if that party is still in the parliament, to vote with the party. Otherwise the respective politicians' position on the list for the next election will be lowered. Therefore, if the party suffers a lower percentage of the vote, the individual candidate would suffer the likelihood that their position in parliament not be guaranteed (Poguntke, 2007). By manipulating job insecurity, party leaders compel obedience in lower ranking party members and encourage compromise with mid to upper level party members by offering incentives such as potential ministerial positions.

Such promises are key to ensuring compliance. Yet, two other factors also determine the mood or overall competence of a party: institutional constraints and ideological red lines. Bulgarian parties need to meet a 4% popular vote threshold to be admitted to the National Assembly. This is a median threshold which it can range from one in the Netherlands that only covers the bare minimum to gain a seat (0.67%) to as high as a 10% vote threshold in Turkey. Thus, an enterprising politician could induce the ideological shifts within political parties and strike out with their own party if they have the funds, apparatus, and media exposure to do so (Karasimeonov and Lyubenov, 2013). This was seen with the National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria. Yet, the overall movement away is a display of fracturing within the party system that is endemic to Bulgaria.

Another potential cause of the internal party breakdown and potential moderation is the ideological red line. These are the ideological or policy obstacles that can cause individuals within the party to either refuse to cooperate further or refrain from their cooperation that would overall cause the support of the policy to break down. This indicates that ideological politicians tend to be more radical due to the constraints placed upon compromise. This was seen frequently after 2005 with the breakdown of the Union of Democratic Forces. Ideological constraints and personal ambitions divided the center right party into multiple parties including ones that occupied the far right.

Until recent years, the center right was a frequent mess of various political parties all throughout Bulgaria including the Reformist Bloc and early incarnations of GERB led by Prime Minister Borisov. In addition, a party formed by Bulgarian Prince Simeon organized his own government through a grand coalition with a various group of parties and MP's (Karasimeonov and Lyubenov, 2013). This indicates that internal party politics are key to understanding the overall direction and trajectory of a party. While these are contributing factors to moderation and European influence, they are not the root cause of the movement.

Ideologies are certainly a central aspect in terms of the overall formation and forwarding of political parties throughout history. The central figures that bring these forth have brought significant amounts of history at their disposal. Figures such as Vladimir Lenin within Communism and the combination of Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini in terms of the grand figures of Fascism define their individual ideologies and forward the beliefs in such a way that it makes them central to the ideal. This suggests that nationalism movements within individual countries tend to have figures that define the movement or at least direct their overall policy, branding, and direction.

There are various influential figures that rise within individual nationalist movements, but I strongly doubt that given the fall of those individuals the political party or broader nationalist movement would degrade. Thus, while it is important to understand to perceive the ideals, goals, and objectives of voters within the nationalist sphere, it is not vital to understand the moderation of these very same parties.

By utilizing traditional divisions within society, the party can exploit the openings within society to gain a foothold. This is demonstrated several times throughout Central and Eastern Europe throughout the ages. Various groups exploited divisions that have inherent distinctions within history including the divide between worker and the owner in the case of Marx, or between nationalists and ethnic minorities that is seen in the modern day (Berglund, et. al., 2013; Karasimeonov and Lyubenov, 2013). However, these divisions, while important to the formation and sustainment of the parties within the Bulgarian nationalist sphere, hardly explain why these parties are potentially moving away from their radical roots. One of the greatest potential explanations of why these radical parties are moving away from their radical roots is the presence of the European Union.

2-2 Europeanization of Parties

One of the most fascinating aspects of parties within Eastern Europe is how they adapt to the introduction of the nation to the European Union political reality. Most parties operate within their national framework, yet, once the national interest of the country becomes joining the European Union, parties must adjust their behavior. This is due to the ever-watchful eye of the European Commission. The accession agreement can be tenable based upon the nation meeting certain benchmarks outside of the traditional EU accession *acquis communautaire*. For example, one of the main aspects of Serbia's ongoing accession to the EU is the specific adherence to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (European Union, Title I, Article 2). Thus, the European Union wields considerable influence over any state that wishes to accede to the Union on the political sphere of any state in this area (Lewis, 2006). Yet, what effect has this had on individual members of the Union or on Central and Eastern European states who are aspiring to be part of the Union?

One of the primary effects on Bulgaria is a transition in orientation to the West and a distinct distancing between the core and periphery. Specifically, within Bulgaria, the Ataka Party utilized a voter base made up of less educated, more nationalist, and those feeling disenfranchised by elites at the national and supranational level (Stoyanov, 2006). Ataka centers around a populist message encouraging Bulgarian nationalism, ethnocentrism and strongman politics that continues into their prominent role within the United Patriots; their nationalist electoral partners (Sakk, 2018). However, the effects that the European Union has on these nationalist parties is quite different from the effect that the EU has on the broader political spectrum.

Ataka and the Bulgarian far right emerged as a prominent force in Bulgarian politics following the exploitation of a gap left by the dissolution of the United Democratic Forces as well as the shift of tone by the Bulgarian Socialist Party. Following the movement of many of

the elites within the Bulgarian National Assembly, the Bulgarian Socialist Party transitioned away from a position of remaining in the Russian sphere of influence to a position of advancing Bulgaria towards joining the European Union. This was predicated on many within the Bulgarian Socialist Party distancing themselves from their chauvinist counterparts in the party (Karasimeonov and Lyubenov, 2013). The absence of a chauvinist and Russian policy centric party allowed Ataka to exploit this (Dawson, 2014). However, the greatest amount of leverage that a party could have on the sphere of politics in Bulgaria is the tweaking of the terms and conditions of accession. This is seen with the requirements placed upon Bulgaria to insure an independent judiciary and to remove corruption from many aspects of Bulgarian governance. During negotiations this much is obvious, yet, how much political pressure and leverage can the European Union bring to bear against noncompliant states and radical parties?

Many pundits and some political scientists are dismayed at the idea that the European Union is powerless in terms of its ability to control and stop non-compliant states and political parties from acting against the Union's political and normative goals. For example, some say that the actions of the European Union in reaction to the migration in Europe displays that there is a social malaise that the various parties in the far right and other radicals can utilize to build their vote count (Guibernau, 2010). Also, there are theorists who believe that Europe should not operate or operates poorly as a normative power (Pollack, 2010). However, as the analysis section of this paper shows, there is a profound impact that the European Union has on the Bulgarian political framework, even within the radical sphere. Thus, the idea that Europe can have a drastic impact on the goings on of Bulgarian politics does have some merit.

2-3 Investment Theory and Moderation Theory

One of the major aspects of theories that concentrate purely on the voter excludes a very critical actor in politics: the elites in the economy. Thomas Ferguson exclaimed that concentrating purely upon the ideologies of the voters is a bit narrow and short-sighted when

we look at the influences of the elites. We must look upon the economy that accompanies the system itself. He primarily draws upon the American system along with the other theorists of the voter realignment theory and median voter theory which primarily rely upon a majoritarian system being in place as it is in the United States. One central unifying idea that pulsates through Thomas Ferguson's investment systems theory is the idea that large masses of voters can be powerful, but lack the ability to dictate direction in the economy and in politics.

Frequently within the system it comes down to a debate between groups of the elites over the direction of the country. It could be said that without these elites providing funds for the different campaigns and politicians we would investigate a different system all together. That is not to say that this theory is without merit. While there are groups of radicals within Bulgaria, they primarily are on the local to countywide level. Most of the nationwide elites are part of the political system. If they truly have the economic weight to toss around, they are either actors who have the interests of either their elites or financial backers and act in accordance with this. In addition, there is the presence and ongoing support of the European Union adding impetus to those in power wishing for the United Patriots to moderate due to the overarching presence and power of the EU and NATO (Bugajski, 2016). That's why the theory does speak towards the influence of such investors implement the debate regarding moderation between competing groups of elites in nationalistic Bulgarian political parties.

One of the most fascinating aspects of the field is when a party famed for their hardline nationalist and orthodox views and polices decides to become far more moderate. One must ask, why? Was it done as a political ploy to gain votes or mainstream recognition? This is one of the most salient questions to ask when examining the ongoing political situation in Bulgaria. Did Ataka, the IMRO, and the NFSB form the United Patriots and moderate their tone to gain more mainstream respect and overall turn more for the moderate crowd? This theory draws largely from the examination of religious parties within the Middle East and India. Multiple

cases of previously radical parties or organizations moderated their tactics and policy wishes to operate with mainstream credibility. This can be predominantly seen with previously radical groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood transitioning into a proper political force by moderating its message and methods away from the illegitimate nonpolitical sphere and into the legitimate political aspects of society (Pahwa, 2017). A European example of this is shown when the Jobbik Party in Hungary moderating its language and expunged extreme members within their ranks who held radical beliefs and are willing to further moderate their language and actions in a bid to gain votes from the radicalizing Fidez (Toka and Popa, 2013). However, within Hungary there is still a nagging sense of mistrust by people to the moderation of Jobbik which previously was a very anti-Semitic party. Yet in France, a much more interesting shift occurred a decade ago.

In France, Front National was considered a radical right party with strong leanings to neo fascist policies while being led by Jean Marie Le Pen. However, after he was deposed by his daughter Marie Le Pen, Front National attempted to move in a much more moderate direction compared to that under her father's leadership. But, Front National are still closely associated with the far right within French politics and their new emblems also disturbingly resemble the concourse used by Nazi sympathetic parties of Vichy France. It speaks to the fact that while parties attempt to moderate, it is difficult to disassociate themselves from their pasts. This also parallels the ongoing attempt by the Bulgarian nationalist coalition United Patriots to be more moderate. They have an added emphasis to do so because they are part of the governing coalition with a center right party. Thus, the added impetus for moderation suggests that the moderation theory for a previously radical group of parties to add to their legitimacy is a valid input.

Discussion

One of the primary aspects of measuring moderation progress in parties is the active positioning of the party in question. For example, is the party considered the majority partner within the framework rather than just filling the necessary seat count? Is the party in a supply and confidence arrangement as part of the majority or minority coalition to form the government? These are the kind of situations that may explain why the individual parties within the United Patriots coalition are interacting with each other in such a way that it may resemble self-moderation.

Throughout the examination of the nationalist bloc, the United Patriots have consistently shown patterns of behavior that indicate that they are making efforts to give the impression that they are moderating. At the very least, these nationalist parties within the governing coalition are attempting to artificially produce the image that they are moderating to appease their coalition partners GERB and their party leader/Prime Minister Boyko Borisov. However, are the various parties within the United Patriots making efforts to moderate themselves within the context of the current administration?

In this first part of the analytical section, we will examine each of the three parties of the coalition responding to the demands of being in power and observing if the parties are making movements to moderate their message or are the old kinds of messaging and actions still being made public, contrary to moderation theory. The three parties that will be examined for moderation progress are Ataka, IMRO, and the National Front; the three parties that make up the United Patriots. Volya, another right-wing populist tactic using party that operates outside the United Patriots but within the National Assembly, deserves mention, however, they are not the focus of this study and thesis. The first party that will be examined within the confines of this study on moderation is one of the major parties that emerged when the Union

of Democratic Forces dissolved after 2004 and founded by a media personality and magnate
Volen Siderov: Ataka.

Chapter III: Analysis

Introduction

Located in South-Eastern Europe, the Republic of Bulgaria is a functional parliamentary republic with slightly over 7 million people and utilizes a proportionally elected parliament called the National Assembly that possesses an unstable yet improving political party framework. The National Assembly is made up of 240 Voting MPs. After the government is formed, Ministers are selected to be part of the Council of Ministers. The respective MPs chosen to be Ministers give up their voting rights while their seats in the National Assembly are given to the respective parties for their replacement as an MP. For example, if an MP is chosen as the Minister of Defense, the party of the new minister selects a fellow party member from down the electoral list and has that person become the new MP in the new Minister's place.

During the latest election, there emerged a snag to the proceedings: the ruling party did not make the 50% of seats necessary to produce a majority government. They needed to organize a governing coalition. The last election was the 27th of March 2017. The current government is known as the 44th National Assembly led by the center-right Prime Minister Boyko Borisov. Within the parameters of the National Assembly the election threshold is a 4% of the vote cutoff centered on a group of parties. The current government is made up of a coalition between two groups to form a governing coalition. The largest party in the coalition is the center right party GERB. They are led by the current Prime Minister Boyko Borisov. The junior partner of the coalition is a coalition of nationalist parties known as the United Patriots.

The junior member of the governing coalition is made up of three nationalist and potentially radical parties: Ataka led by MP Volen Siderov, the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization-Bulgarian National Movement (IMRO) led by the current Minister of Defense Krasimir Karakachanov, and the National Front for the Salvation of

Bulgaria - NFSB led by Valeri Simeonov: The Deputy Prime Minister for Economic and Demographic Policy. There is also a confidence and supply arrangement between the governing coalition and the center right populist party Volya along with a single independent MP. The opposition in the current National Assembly is a little bit more complicated due to the introduction of the prominent center left party and the centrist ethnic party.

The opposition in the National Assembly is made up primarily of center-left to left leaning parties which include a rebranded continuation of the old Bulgarian Communist Party. Operating on the left to center left of the Bulgarian political sphere is the Bulgarian Socialist Party, also known as the BSP. They are in an opposition electoral coalition with a set of other center-left and left based parties that are in the opposition to the government. They are known as the “Coalition for Bulgaria” and comprise of a series of agrarian and other upstart socialist parties that are in line with the BSP’s ideology and goals. Also, in the opposition is the ethnic Turkish party known as the Movement for Rights and Freedom - MRF and is led by Mustafa Karadya. The framework allows for the formation and dissolution of governments and the calling of snap elections while the country is run by expert led commissions. This has happened multiple times over the past few years. This system leaves a lot of wiggle room for instability and has led to multiple governments failing in the space of only a few years. But, it does leave a lot of room for the introduction of new parties centered on popular leaders who proclaim fresh ideals that will help renew the prosperity of Bulgaria and other such rhetoric. This primarily occurs to the right of center due to the nature of Bulgarian politics which are addressed in the following paragraph.

Immediately after the last Grand National Assembly which was presided over by the Bulgarian Socialist Party on the left and the Union of Democratic Forces on the center right and right, a series of internal conflicts within the Union of Democratic Forces forced the party to dissolve into a multitude of different center right parties and some nationalist parties emerged

from it. Among them was Volen Siderov and Valeri Simeonov who joined together in 2005 to form Ataka, the prominent nationalist party in the Bulgarian political sphere for a time. The accession of Bulgaria to the European Union inflamed portions of the population and led to a large groundswell of support for the party. However, Ataka was never in the government and was always on the opposite side of the National Assembly. Over time differences began to grow between members within the Ataka Party and a prominent member, Valeri Simeonov, split off to form his own party: The National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria – NFSB. When one looks forward to the present day, the various parties within the United Patriots appear to be acting more moderate compared to how they did in the past. We will now examine the potential theoretical backgrounds as to why the nationalist United Patriots and their constituent parties either have or have not moderated.

3-1 Ataka

Ataka is a complex party that utilizes a mixture of chauvinism, Russophilia, ultra-nationalism, and soft Euroscepticism while operating within a highly personalized party structure. Its history is one that indicates simultaneous influence, yet instability due to its personalism. Therefore, two questions remain, has this ultranationalist party moderated themselves away from their radical roots? Or will they drop the moderated rhetoric as soon as they are away from power?

3-1-1: History 2005-2018

Under the leadership of MP Volen Siderov, this nationalistic party is considered one of the forerunners of modern Bulgarian nationalist parties. It was founded in the immediate aftermath of the dissolution of the United Democratic Forces, a center-right loose party. It was initially banded together between two prominent personalities: Volen Siderov and Valeri Simeonov. These two provided the platform as a unified Bulgarian nationalist party that lasted for over a decade from 2005. The party consistently earned enough votes to get past the

electoral threshold and was a constant force within the opposition in the National Assembly in the three elections between 2005 till 2013. However, a split developed between the two prominent leaders of the party in the early twenty tens. Siderov continued as the head of the party while Simeonov formed his own party called the National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria. However, over time, it seemed like the two separate parties would grow their own followings that are distinct from one another and could flex their political influence in distinct ways to not feed off each other's voters. In addition, Siderov will not seek a position as a Cabinet Minister (Leviev-Sawyer, 2017). However, the following election proved this assertion to be quite different from what was hypothesized.

According to my interview with the Provost of the American University in Bulgaria: Dr. Emilia Zankina, the initial expectation between these two parties was that they would gain their own respective voting constituencies (Zankina, 2018). However, this did not pan out as originally planned. In the 2014 Parliamentary elections, the National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria ran jointly with IMRO, another nationalist party. Ataka ran as a separate party in that election. The votes and the seats that Ataka had won in the previous parliamentary election were split between the coalition of IMRO and the National Front with Ataka (Zankina, 2018). Thus, no new nationalist voters were gained. The voters had decided to split themselves between two competing nationalist voter blocs.

Immediately following this election, the parties sought to work in alignment with one another and in the following election Ataka and two other nationalist parties joined together in a loose coalition to run on the same ballot as the United Patriots. Fortunately for the United Patriots, the election saw them gaining a solid foothold within the confines of the National Assembly with a total percentage of the vote that translated into seats in the National Assembly (Central Election Commission, 2017). Immediately following this, the negotiations to form a governing coalition began and many possible governing coalitions emerged. GERB emerged

with the largest number of overall seats. However, the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (center ethnic Bulgarian Turk interests party) and the Bulgarian Socialist Party displayed that they are willing to work with the United Patriots to form a governing coalition (Cooper, 2017). GERB approached the United Patriots to have them join a governing coalition with Boyko Borisov becoming the Prime Minister again while sharing many ministerial positions with the United Patriots. For example, Valeri Simeonov was appointed Deputy Prime Minister while several other Ataka, IMRO, and National Front party members were given ranking positions within the various aspects of the Third Borisov Government.

This shocked much of the western media with the center right apparently embracing the “far right”/nationalist side of Bulgarian politics (Cooper, 2017). However, one thing that must be understood is the fact that while chauvinism and Russophilia are certainly large aspects within the United Patriots, they are hardly the only ones to utilize it.

Whenever one has observed the Bulgarian Socialist Party prior to the discussions of Bulgaria joining the European Union, it was frequently described as one of the main gradualist parties within the Bulgarian framework (Zankina, 2018; Karasimeonov and Lyubenov, 2013). This is to say that they prefer to keep within the Russian sphere of influence rather than move to the western sphere. Thus, it comes as little surprise that in the modern day, the BSP is repeating this sentiment to poach off their rival vote counts (Karasimeonov and Lyubenov, 2013; Zankina, 2018). However, when we examine what has happened since the election, is there any movement on the part of the various parties within the governing coalition to moderate themselves now that they are considered part of the government? That is what we intend to find out. The first avenue that we must examine is the utilization of party media and the larger media apparatus available to the United Patriots and its constituent parties.

3-1-2 Ataka Messaging

Whenever we examine the media apparatus of the various parties within the United Patriots we must acknowledge first off that there is no unified media platform for the United Patriots coalition. The individual parties organize their own individual operations in the media including: newspapers, television programs and other means of spreading their message past the very traditional form of policy communication: the manifestos. One of the key elements to examine in terms of how the party presented itself about its moderation is its overall messaging and how it presents the message to the populace.

One of the primary origins of ATAKA is the presence of Volen Siderov, a prominent media personality before his introduction into the political life in Bulgaria. Key to the ongoing success and prominence of Ataka is the usage of both the traditional forms of policy elucidation such as manifestos and the usage of Ataka's own television station/media platform Alfa.

Alfa was launched in the early part of 2011 and can be considered an extension of the party due to the direct messaging from the party and its leaders. Thus, it is a good way to simultaneously elaborate and elucidate on the state of the party messaging/policy aims. However, examining what Ataka intended prior to the movement to the nationalist side of things is critical to show progression over time.

After its founding, Ataka tended to rely on the messaging of nationalism by the lines of Russophiles, soft Euroscepticism, and primarily an Islamophobic/xenophobic message. This included messaging that would have Bulgaria withdrawing from NATO and adopting a purely neutral stance between the west and Russia (Leviev-Sawyer, 2017). While this may be a distancing measure to push Bulgaria into the hands of Russia, it also could be conjecture due to the historical relationship between Russia that stretches back to the First Balkan War which saw Bulgaria get its independence with the help of the Russian Empire. Thus, there is a historical narrative that Russophile parties can draw upon including Ataka. However, this

narrative can be twisted into promoting Russian strategic goals including oil pipelines and the shrinking of NATO and the EU (Poreba, 2016). A far more sinister message had taken hold within Ataka and the Bulgarian nationalists' sphere: outright islamophobia had taken hold.

Despite Siderov's radical messaging, few would know how far his party would be willing to go to express its violent message. Outright islamophobia became a central tenet within the party. This came to a head in 2011 when Volen Siderov protested outside one of the main mosques in Sofia and attacked many of the praying Muslims during Friday prayers (Novinite Staff, 2011). This included assaulting Muslims who were praying and burning prayer rugs in front of the mosque in downtown Sofia. This shocking action drew condemnation throughout the country and prompted an investigation into the party and its leader. This shows that Ataka was a party that demonstrated through actions their commitment to their Islamophobic ideals and policies. However, has this narrative changed over the course of the past few years?

Despite the violent messaging and action, Siderov remained a prominent voice within the party and Bulgarian politics. This had been with the party since its inception and it was assisted by several different factors. Primarily, this was assisted by the messaging that was portrayed by the party leader who was a prominent broadcaster before joining politics in 2005. Prior to being part of the United Patriots coalition, the party explicitly called many others within the modern Bulgarian political sphere traitors to the nation and called for their criminal prosecution. MEPs in the European Parliament provided a written declaration as to the threat they posed to democracy in Bulgaria (European Union, 2009). Thus, the language and policy that had been laid out in these elections when they served as primarily a nationalist party in the opposition, did not speak to either left or right political orientation. It more expresses itself as a form of ultranationalist policy. The further messaging that happened within the party along

with its affiliates in media are displayed and can vary wildly in terms of tone depending on the topic at hand.

3-1-3 Ataka Moderation Progress

Applying Ataka to the moderation dynamic scale provides a great amount of insight and outlook into the ongoing situation. As stated earlier the five-point scale determines moderation in relation to nationalistic tendencies through the examination of extremes within the Bulgarian political system alone. The five points include messaging regarding xenophobia, Euroscepticism, respect for democratic institutions, chauvinism, and willingness to cooperate with moderate parties. When we first observe Ataka regarding xenophobia it is a highly ultranationalist organization and displays a considerable amount of willingness to strongly enforce anti-immigration policy. Thus, on the moderation scale of xenophobia, during the period of the late 2000s to the early 2010s, I would place this party on xenophobia a 4.5 out of 5. However, given the party's still very xenophobic rhetoric in the current environment, only the frequency of such messaging has been reduced. Thus, they receive a 4 out of 5 in terms of a transition (Refer to Figure 3-1-3).

Regarding Euroscepticism, Ataka has a far more interesting progression over time. Ataka was initially strongly Eurosceptic and openly advocated for Bulgaria not joining the European Union (Tomini, 2014). Yet in recent years, it seems that the party has softened in its tone about the European Union. This is displayed by Ataka and its partners actively campaigning to show how much European assistance they can bring in to their respective constituents (Zankina, 2018). This is considerably different from previous statements made by the party and its leader. This moderation of tone should not be mistaken for being in favor of liberal democratic goals within the European Union or the progression of the European Union in a much more federal format. This does show that Ataka has considerably moderated its tone and action regarding the European Union. Thus, it has transitioned from a 4 out of 5 to a 2 out

of 5 in terms of tone regarding the European Union. Respect for democratic institutions is also a main area in which Ataka has considerably softened its tone.

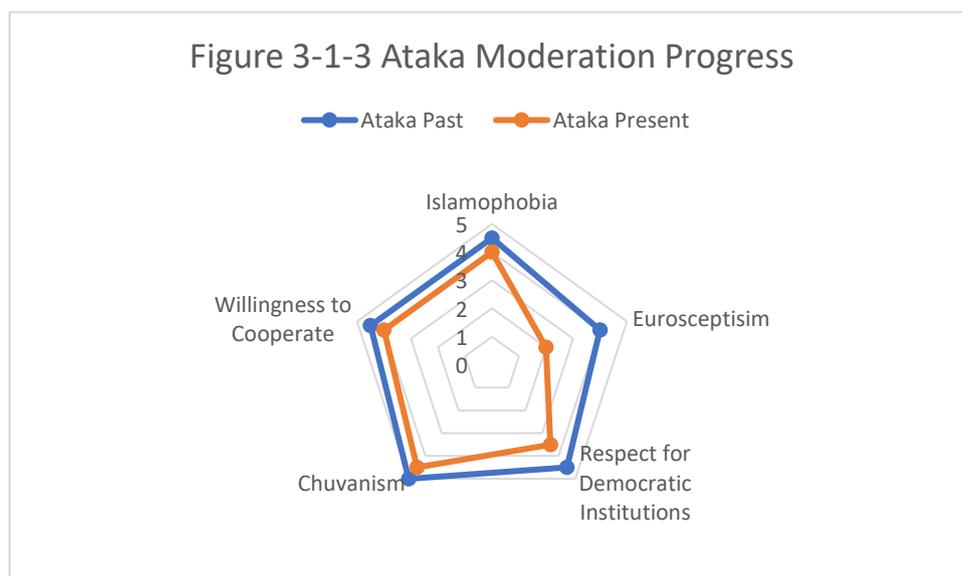
In this regard, actions that the party had taken in the past: such as attacking a mosque and labelling their rivals in the National Assembly as traitors to the country certainly demonstrate the lack of respect for democratic institutions and norms. In comparison to the past, the present version of Atka is certainly complying with democratic institutions. However, while the actions and rhetoric may have softened within the party's structure, it does not mean that the party elite's mindset and beliefs have changed. Thus, we must conclude that they have moderated their tone in their party for as long as it is convenient to them with respect for democratic institutions. Thus, they transition from a 4.5 out of 5 to a 3 of 5 in terms of respect for democratic institutions. The party is a microcosm of chauvinism within Bulgaria and has improved over the course of time.

Siderov's party demonstrates that one of the central tenets within the Bulgarian nationalist mindset is chauvinism itself. This exaggerated form of patriotism, forceful rhetoric, and occasional violent action shows that in the past, one of the prime examples of chauvinism was Ataka. It never got to the level of open insurrection against the democratic government but, they were the loudest and most prominent voices within the framework of the various organizations, parties, and groups throughout the land. The examples of the group's chauvinism extended everywhere. These include the rhetoric from the various party members and Volen Siderov, the direct attack on the mosque, and ongoing actions by the various subgroups of the party.

The party has also demonstrated that they are willing to engage and violet contact with groups they find particularly offensive, including Bulgarian Turks, Muslims, and refugees fleeing from the Syrian Civil War. Beyond this, the rhetoric has largely remained the same since United Patriots formed in the past election. Treating border security as a tool to keep

Bulgaria the way it is and encouraging harsh treatment of these refugees certainly indicates that the volume of chauvinism rhetoric has not changed along with encouragement of brutal treatment of both refugees and asylum seekers (PRO ASYL, 2018). They are less willing to take direct action as this would most likely offend their coalition partners in the government coalition, GERB. Thus, the party has changed through time had transitioned from five out of five in terms of chauvinism to a four point five out of 5 where the distinguishing factor is the fact that they have not taken violent action over the past two years. However, how well does Ataka cooperate with their moderate counterparts in the National Assembly?

Ataka exists within a twofold form of coalition, thus their existence within this framework suggests that they are willing to cooperate with their moderate counterparts. The fact remains that the rhetoric from the party apparatus and other organizations has not improved. This suggests that while they have cooperated with a center right party they will not do so in the future. The instant that Ataka is part of the opposition, the rhetoric and action will immediately revert to how they acted and spoke prior to the current Borisov Government. Yet, when examining their moderation progress, they have clearly moderated (Refer to Figure 3-1-3). However, within the United Patriots there is a party that has a far longer history and less of a propensity to personalism despite having a popular leader: the IMRO.



3-2 Internal Macedonia Revolutionary Organization

Introduction

Founded as an insurrectionist party to represent those in Macedonia who wished for Bulgaria to take over the territory, the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization - Bulgarian National Movement is a party that while a far more stable entity than their two United Patriot counterparts. They have moderated significantly compared to their past. Compared to their counterparts, the IMRO has a very long history and has largely stuck to their original goals regardless of whoever leads the party. Compared to Ataka, they are a far more enigmatic entity due to their ideology driving the party forward rather than their party leaders. However, the progress that they have made in moderation is slight compared to what would be expected of a party that is part of center right coalition.

3-2-1-IMRO History

The current iteration of IMRO was founded as a spiritual successor to a previous iteration of the IMRO that existed prior to the Bulgarian Communist Party and the Bulgarian Fatherland Front. It was heavily influenced Bulgarian policy to be dismissive and outright hostile to their neighbors in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Bulgarian Turks within their own borders. This party has a long and tragic history regarding their views towards Bulgarian citizens and their neighbors and it's one of the major reasons why some in Bulgaria still do not recognize the sovereignty of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. In addition to this, IMRO does not recognize minority rights, considers themselves a Pan-Bulgarian National Party, and wishes for the state religion to be the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (Danforth, 2012). Beyond the rhetoric, the IMRO has been part of several electoral Alliances with other nationalist parties in the past including the National Front of the Salvation of Bulgaria and other nationalist parties that have emerged with Ataka or the NFSB.

That is not to say that the rhetoric of the party is any more moderate than their counterparts. Yet, it appears that they are willing to co-operate with their peers far more than would be expected given the rhetoric. The party has received a very consistent vote count in both the National Assembly elections and during European parliamentary elections (Central Election Commission, 2017). This consistency may be since they utilize populist tactics and position themselves as a far more right-wing party than an ultranationalist parties like their peers do. Additional targets of the IMRO include the Roma, those who practice non-traditional forms of religion, and other sects.

Given the prominent position of the party within the governing coalition, and the fact that the party leader is the current Minister of Defense, the party has a lot of leverage that can set the tone and policy of the government regarding the same field. For example, Minister of Defense has frequently defined border protection as one of the main priorities of the government. On top of this, the Minister made frequent ill comments regarding the Roma population as well as the migrant population being a threat to Bulgarian national security (Novinite Staff, 2016). However, for those who study Bulgarian politics and history stretching back further than the reign of the Communist Party post World War II, the history of the IMRO is one of active collaboration with Nazis and other fascist organizations throughout Central and Eastern Europe (Detrez, 2015). That alone would be a profoundly disturbing revelation yet, the issues persist into the modern day. Despite his views, he remains one of the most popular figures within Bulgarian politics and conducted respectable runs for the presidency in Bulgaria.

The most defining ideological aspect of IMRO is the deep connections to irredentism. Like Jobbik in Hungary, IMRO believes in eventually creating a Greater Bulgaria that consists of the neighboring states including Macedonia, parts of Greece, and parts of Turkey (Detrez, 2015). Yet, the party passes itself off as a populist right wing party that is far more moderate compared to their counterparts in the United Patriots coalition. Profound statements along with

the actions of the Minister of Defense give credence the idea that while IMRO is not nearly as outlandishly ultranationalist as Ataka counterparts, they themselves are hardly more moderate than their center right coalition partners. However, when we apply IMRO to the 5-point scale of moderation, how do they compare to their counterparts in the United Patriots coalition?

3-2-2 IMRO Moderation

Compared to the previous iteration, IMRO is a far more moderate organization, yet, within its own context it is still is a right-wing organization that holds deeply disturbing views. When examining IMRO through the 5-point scale, we must utilize the statements that they had made in the current iteration of IMRO yet hold them up to the precedents that were set by the previous iteration of the party. This is to put the party on even footing with their much newer counterparts.

By applying the scope of xenophobia to IMRO's actions in comparison to their past, they are far more moderate organization. Yet as stated earlier, they are one of the most xenophobic organizations within the context of Bulgarian politics. Throughout their history, they have always been one of the forerunners for Bulgarian nationalism and this is little changed in the modern incarnation of the organization. Compared to the tone utilized by their coalition partners they have remained largely consistently xenophobic but not to such extremes that we see with Ataka or the National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria. Thus, this organization goes from a 4 out of 5 to a 3.75 out of 5 with only minor changes being observed from their incarnation prior to the United Patriots. Yet, this is a massive change compared to their prior incarnation that existed prior to the Second World War which can only be described as a willing fascist organization.

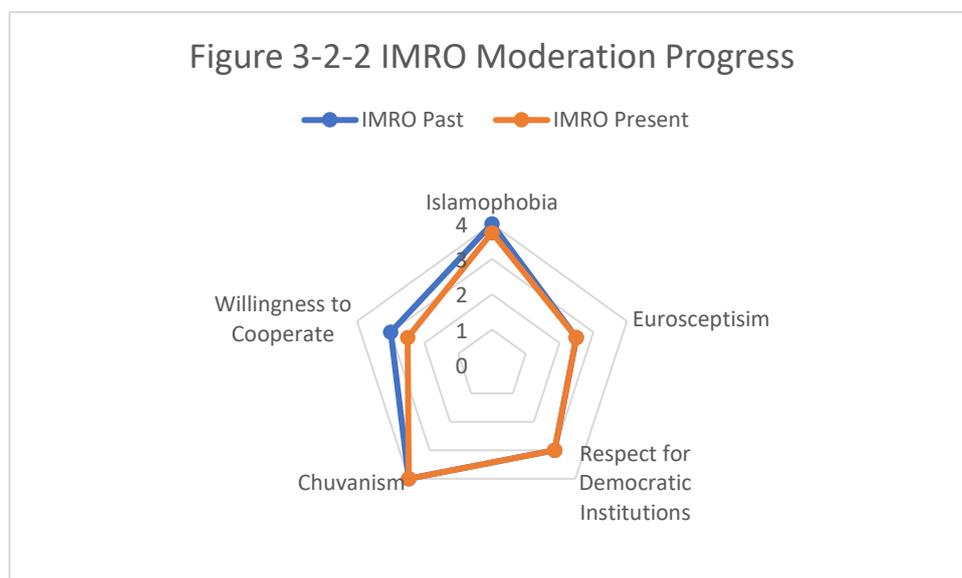
The connections between Euroscepticism and IMRO remain opaque because many within Europe see them is acceptable partners on the right. The party positioned itself very much as a soft Eurosceptic organization that promotes the reform of the European Union, much

like the Conservative Party in the United Kingdom once did (Kaniok and Hloušek, 2016). Yet, there are elements within the party's extreme wing that would much rather see the European Union be dissolved to further of the expansion of Bulgarian borders and influence. This is a large dichotomy within the party itself that would suggest that while the party may live on in one incarnation or another, it depends upon the inclinations of party elites. Thus, on my 5-point scale I would rate the IMRO a 2.5 out of 5 and it remains steady over time. Yet, this is subject to change over time given the mood at the party or the associated coalition that may emerge in the upcoming European parliamentary elections.

Regarding respect for democratic institutions, IMRO are difficult to quantify because they largely comply with democratic norms. They exercise their right to free speech and they gain legitimate power through elections in both national and European elections. The best way to describe the dichotomy between how they act and what they say is while they respect the rules of liberal democracy, they don't respect the qualities of liberal democracy. Their frequent xenophobic actions and policy decisions made through legitimate channels demonstrates their respect for the minutiae of the institutions yet not the normative meaning of liberal democracy. Thus, when we apply the five-point scale I would rate them a 3 out of 5 for respect for democratic institutions.

In many ways IMRO are difficult to quantify compared to their peers yet, one of the major areas where they are easily comparable to their peers is the area of chauvinism. In terms of chauvinism, IMRO are easily comparable to their peers: directly advocating for policies that exist solely to promote the Bulgarian nation at the detriment of those around them. The key policy that determines the level of chauvinism compared to their peers is the expression of irredentist attitudes. Active campaigning for a Greater Bulgaria (the expansion of Bulgaria past its own borders into neighboring countries) puts them in the same category as Jobbik was in its early days and that is profoundly disturbing (Danforth, 2012). While not as vociferous as their

allies Ataka and the NFSB, their attitudes toward religious and ethnic minorities alongside their attitudes regarding irredentism put them firmly in the category of a consistent 4 out of five for the five-point scale regarding irredentism. Apart from disrupting the regional order of things, it directly contributes to the ongoing perception of the Balkan region as one of being in constant conflict and perpetuates the ideals of the old Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization. IMRO persistently displays itself as one of the most chauvinistic parties within the entire of the European sphere. Yet, in recent days the IMRO has been in discussions with multiple moderate parties which suggests that they are willing to co-operate with moderate parties regularly. In addition to this the party and its leader displays itself quite well to the Bulgarian public with a relative amount of respectability.



Despite having such chauvinistic tendencies IMRO are willing to co-operate with their other counterparts in recent years compared to the past. Over the past two decades, IMRO has been in coalition after coalition with their peers, yet, in recent years they have agreed to be in a governing coalition with the center right party GERB. In addition, in early May they met with representatives from the Bulgarian Socialist Party which suggests that they are further willing to co-operate with the moderate counterparts. This came to the chagrin of their coalition counterparts in the government which also suggests a certain amount of instability within the current government which shall be discussed later in this work (Balkan News Agency, 2018).

Thus, when we apply the five-point scale regarding willingness to co-operate with their moderate counterparts, IMRO have moved from a three out of five to a 2.5 out of five. This demonstrates a clear willingness to either moderate their tone to suit the message of the government, or a willingness of the government to ignore their chauvinism to gain their wiliness to vote to form a governing coalition (Refer to Figure 3-2-2). The final party that should be covered within the analysis is the newest party to exist within the United Patriots: National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria.

3-3 National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria

The National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria is an ultra-nationalist party in the vein of Ataka that has differentiated itself through the lack of Russophilia as well as a heavier emphasis on personalism compared to IMRO which makes it much more comparable with Ataka. The party has only existed for the past decade and it's a split party away from Ataka after the two-party leaders had a falling out. In addition to this, there is a far stronger emphasis on presentation on television in its political messaging. The television apparatus utilized by the NFSB used to be part of Ataka's media apparatus, then transitioned into the primary outlet for the National Front of the Salvation of Bulgaria. When we look at the history of the NFSB, it is heavily linked with one personality: Valeri Simeonov.

3-3-1 National Salvation History

The NFSB is a nascent party that was founded in 2011 and has had a wild history in its brief existence. It was founded as a splinter party from Ataka and is led by Bulgarian firebrand Valeri Simeonov. They are a Bulgaria nationalist party that campaigns on protectionism, conservatism, Euroscepticism, and islamophobia. Following their founding, the party ran in the National Assembly elections where they did not pick up as many seats as they had hoped. They split the seats they had with Ataka when they were part of that party (Zankina, 2018). Thus, in the next election in 2014, they entered an electoral alliance with IMRO and named it the

Patriotic Front (Cheresheva, 2016). This alliance ran on the promise of reducing corruption, reintroducing a fair judiciary, and promoting modern education throughout Bulgaria. With this alliance they managed to gain a European Parliament seat as well as a few seats in the National Assembly. Soon after this, this alliance's path converged with Ataka. In the 2016 election, they formed United Patriots and gained a foothold as part of the government in a governmental coalition agreement.

Valeri Simeonov is the singular most integral part of this whole party. Used simultaneously the figurehead and the most prominent politician within the whole party while exercising his views and utilizing the party apparatus. However, there was a curious episode in which he openly insulted the patriarch of the Russian Orthodox church. The insult centered around the patriarch's opulent lifestyle and his direct influence in Russian politics. His colleagues in the National Assembly openly condemned his statement and it caused quite a lot of consternation between the parties of the United Patriots. Valeri Simeonov refused to retract the statement (Sofia Globe Staff, 2018). Therefore, it appears that Simeonov wields a considerable amount of influence while he must counterbalance the demands of his coalition partners at the same time. Yet, despite the short history of the party, how much moderation has the National Front for Salvation for Bulgaria undertaken?

3-3-2 NFSB Moderation

The NFSB emerged as new party centered around one political leader for the entirety of its existence. Therefore, there is only a small sample size for the progression of moderation and so far, we have seen little of it. By utilizing the 5-point scale in the five categories we can determine how moderate they are towards five distinct areas in Bulgarian nationalism. The first area is islamophobia and xenophobia. In this regard the NFSB is just as bad or worse than Ataka. In these regards one look at the record of accomplishment of the Party in its brief existence shows that the party and leader have a long record of accomplishment of

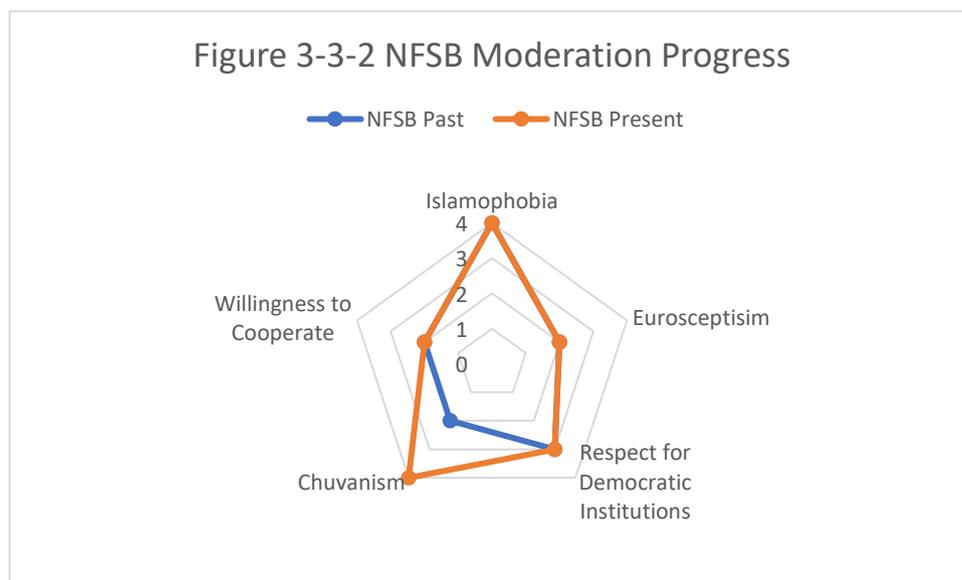
islamophobia and xenophobia (Leviev-Sawyer, 2018; Andreev, June 2017). Thus, on the 5-point scale I would rate the NFSB a four out of five with little change over its present history. Euroscepticism is a very different aspect when it comes to the NFSB.

Regarding Euroscepticism the NFSB has a record of accomplishment of criticizing the European Union but not outright wishing for a dissolution of the Union. According to Dr. Zankina many of these parties especially the NFSB compete among their constituents to see who can gain more in terms of European development funds (Zankina, 2018). Thus, I see the NFSB as more an opportunistic creature that wishes to operate within the limits of the European Union. The Euroscepticism is largely kept to the background. This indicates that they have more in common with IMRO than Ataka in terms of attitudes to the European Union. Therefore, in this regard I would rate the NFSB a 2 out of 5 in terms of Euroscepticism. However, does the NFSB have respect for democratic institutions and is willing to operate within them to achieve their goals?

The NFSB aligns much more with IMRO in terms of its policy regarding respect for democratic institutions: respect them but use them for their own gains. In this regard the NFSB respects democratic institutions largely on an institutional basis. However, utilizing outside media and the language used in terms of islamophobia and xenophobia towards refugees demonstrates that they show a lack of respect to these foundational institutions. Therefore, out of the possible five points I would award them three points out of five. This respect has carried over time therefore the score remains largely unchanged.

Out of all the parties within the United Patriots the NFSB is one of the frontrunners in terms of chauvinism and outrageous occurrences. Yet, over the few years of its existence, it has gotten more chauvinistic even compared to their peers. Aside from the blatant racism, ultra-nationalism, xenophobia, islamophobia, and compressed into a one-man party, it is a splinter party from Ataka. That context makes a lot of sense. However, the NFSB began with a patina

of credibility. They campaigned on an anti-corruption campaign and poached seats from Ataka on that basis. The party looked like it was the answer further to the right of GERB but not as far as Ataka. After 2013, things took a turn for the ghastly. The Nazi salute, the hardline reaction to the Refugee crisis, and other reactions to ongoing crisis show that the NFSB is backsliding away from the center right and to the extreme edges of the Bulgarian political sphere (De La Blume, 2018). That is why it has transitioned from a 2 out of 5 to a four out of five. For context this is the only party within the United Patriots that backslides in terms of chauvinism. In terms of aligning with moderate counterparts, throughout the history of the NFSB, they're the ones have been able to co-operate with moderates in the center. Thus, we can see that outside of one aspect, the party has largely remained the same in terms of moderation (Refer to Figure 3-3-2).



Discussion

Out of all the parties within the United Patriots, the NFSB is the one to most frequently align themselves with the center of right in terms of coalitions. Since their founding, the NFSB has frequently aligned itself with the center right both in government and in opposition. Outside of this framework, they have aligned themselves with IMRO most frequently, however,

according to Dr. Zankina, they are highly unlikely to do this in the future due to internal divisions between the two parties and the two prominent leaders in the parties falling out (Zankina, 2018). Thus, I would give the NFSB a two out of five in terms I've been able to cooperate with moderate in the center.

Chapter IV: Implications

Examining the various aspects of moderation for each of the three parties within the United Patriots raises many questions. Why is there even a debate regarding the movement for these nationalist parties to moderate themselves away from their traditionally radical roots? Outside of the messaging and common goals of the three parties within the United Patriots, it seems that these three parties are regulating their messaging far more than they had previously when they were in opposition. Earlier the evidence pointed to a certain amount of regulation between the parties in terms of wanting to maintain a certain amount of respect. This may be indicative of these parties self-regulating while balancing their core voters. This whole process shows that they have an impetus to regulate themselves while balancing their interests.

The actions of the United Patriots suggest that they are not moderating themselves to remain in power or to reach out to a more moderate voter. This indicates that the Bulgarian context does not line up neatly with Moderation Theory when it is applied to a new context. It seems that the United Patriots are complying with the wishes and the demands of their governmental coalition leader, GERB, to remain together as a functional nationalist bloc or at least give the public appearance of doing so (Bulgaria News Agency, 2018). However, there is one big issue: most of the parties within United Patriots are highly personalistic therefore their moderation relies heavily upon the wishes of their party leaders or the foundation of their ideology. However, there are other reasons why we may or may not see moderation in Bulgarian nationalist bloc: the very foundation that these parties operate under is unstable due to multiple reasons. One of the biggest mysteries of Bulgarian politics is why the center right GERB party entered a governmental coalition with the nationalist bloc United Patriots.

4-1 On PM Borisov's Watch

Without the United Patriots, GERB would not be in power today. Yet, people still wonder why GERB tolerates their presence in the government. The key elements of the current

government are that United Patriots must, as minority partners, in a confidence and supply arrangement, pass laws that are put forth by the prime minister and his party GERB. A few years ago, the stability of the entire Bulgarian democratic sphere was very low. Throughout the center right, there were a multitude of parties that emerged from the demise of the United Democratic Forces. The Reformist Bloc, Ataka, and GERB were some of the ones that emerged around prominent personalities and individuals. The whole situation other than the center left was extremely unstable and filled to the brim with personalist parties that would not pass a “loss of leader” test. For clarification the “loss of leader” test is when the party leader is removed from power, would the party be able to continue operating or survive? If yes it means that the party is stable and can continue its own power. Parties the such as the Bulgarian Socialist Party and IMRO pass this test. However, Ataka and the National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria do not pass this test due to the highly personalized nature and the fact that the policy is tailor-made to the leader that the party is centralized around.

Until recently, GERB did not pass this test. GERB was a highly personalized party that was centered around Boyko Borisov. According to a few experts within Bulgarian politics, GERB has transformed from a personalistic center right party to a consolidated center right liberal party. Stability is what gives PM Borisov his leverage against the United Patriots. According to Dr. Zankina, PM Borisov knows that he can call an election at any time and he would conclusively win the election in favor of his party. In addition to this, he would most likely not have to rely upon the United Patriots as a minority partner in government (Zankina, 2018). Thus, it is highly unlikely that this governing arrangement between the center and far right will last beyond the European elections in 2019. This is corroborated by investors who have concluded that the United Patriots coalition will not last beyond the next national election, if they survive that long (Koneska, 2018). But, one of the major reasons why the United Patriots

is losing ground is not due to their own internal conflicts, it may be due to outside parties that are co-opting their chauvinist message.

4-2 Rival Chauvinists and the European Union

One of the most interesting aspects of Bulgarian politics is that chauvinism is not isolated within the far right or the nationalist bloc. In my interview with Dr. Zankina, she elaborated on the fact that chauvinism is not isolated to the far right or the national sphere of Bulgarian politics. The obvious party in question is Volya, the self-proclaimed center right party. They are a Russophile right wing party that utilizes populist tactics to gain the crowd that is tired of corruption. They utilize chauvinistic tactics to gain a larger share of the vote. But, they are not the primary beneficiary of utilizing chauvinistic tactics. The experts of tone shift within Bulgarian politics is the Bulgarian Socialist Party.

The Bulgarian Socialist party is a master of political maneuvering within the Bulgarian sphere of politics. They advertise themselves as a center left social democratic party. In many respects they are a social democratic party: they advocate for a more equal society, better environmental protections, and other key aspects of social democracy. However, they do have a Russophile streak. In addition to this, in recent years they have been poaching voters away from the nationalist parties by utilizing chauvinistic language and tactics in elections and in daily operation. However, the future does show some different options for each of the parties involved. But, one of the central tenets of the movement away from their radical actions and to comply more with democratic norms is the presence of the European Union.

One of the main influences within this sphere is whether the European Union has played a critical influence in Bulgarian political moderation: I would say yes. Despite the lack of ability by the European Union to regulate the actions of populist leaders in Hungary and Poland, they have demonstrated an ability to compel Bulgarian nationalist leaders to move away from violent action using the carrot and stick method. Most specifically the usage of the European

Presidency should they compel compliance (Zankina, 2018; Smilov, 2018). Despite the worries of the various members and delegations within the EU, they have largely kept out of the news in terms of direct action. Rhetoric in public and parliamentary debates may be shocking, but they are still complying by the rules imposed by their senior coalition partners. There was a considerable amount of worry and consternation within the Western Community about the allowance of the Bulgarian nationalists within the government. But, as demonstrated by the five-point test on each of the three parties, we can determine that with only one variation, they have moderated their tone and actions. In addition to the internal party disruption and the structural controls placed upon Bulgaria during and after accession to the Union, Bulgaria largely has a positive view of the European Union which grants further impetus to the ideals of the EU and tolerance for the structural anticorruption controls as part of being the union (Andreev, March 2017). In addition to this, Bulgaria intends to join the Eurozone within the next five years, and despite the lack of optimism from investment firms and Wall Street, Bulgaria's government coalition, including the United Patriots, backs this venture to show favor to the European Union in a public fashion (Nixon, 2018; Koneska, 2018). Privately the party leaders may express their dismay at the situation and yet, their actions within their parties determine that these parties respect democratic norms and are willing to comply with them which is entirely within the EU's preview.

Conclusion

Upon reexamining my hypothesis, it turns out that Bulgarian nationalist parties are moderating most likely due to the ever-watchful eye of their senior coalition partner and the presence of the European Union's norms. To be specific, they are not moderating away from their original message and goals in the slightest. The five-point test that I utilized shows that most of the parties have meaningfully moved away from their roots in ideology in terms of rhetoric and action. Little has changed in terms of mindset however. The parties that are in

United Patriots are either personalist: attached to firebrands that they cannot get rid of lest they dissolve, or they are directly attached to an ideology that is irredentist and xenophobic by nature. Given enough time and the benefit of hindsight, more data will become available to give a complete picture of what has occurred over the past decade in the Bulgarian nationalist sphere.

The future of Bulgarian nationalist parties rides heavily upon three central factors. The first is whether these parties will be able to stand up over time given the eventual retirement of their leaders or produce new leaders within their parties over the course of time. The second is the confluence of external factors. Specifically, whether Bulgaria adheres to the Eurocentric model or regresses into a much more Russian centric model for foreign policy and alliances. The third is the structural internal factors. This indicates that the share of nationalist voters will go down given that other parties within the structure will co-opt many of their methods, specifically, the tinges of nationalism and chauvinism in messaging and other party mechanisms. In my interview with Dr. Zankina one of the details that was addressed is the fact that while the voter share for the nationalist parties is decreasing it is not due to the decreasing chauvinism. The reason the voter share for the nationalist parties is decreasing is since it's been co-opted by several different parties within the system (Zankina, 2018). Two of the primary parties that are operating within the National Assembly that are utilizing this are the Bulgarian Socialist Party and the populist party Volya. The professor explains that while the votes may be traveling away from the nationalist parties, they are still there within the system itself.

In one form or another, the nationalist voter bloc will always exist. That is why it is rather meaningless if the parties within the United Patriots, save IMRO, moderate. This is since while they may moderate within the frame of the government, the instant they leave the government or are kicked out, they will immediately revert to their old habits of radical messaging and party level opposition. This is not to say that nationalist parties at the whole are

dead within the confines of the Bulgarian system. It is more that the sentiment will always exist. It will ebb and flow with time. For example, Dr. Christopher Kroh of the University of North Georgia told my Western European Politics course in 2017 that while nationalist parties such as Alternative for Deutschland will gain significant ground in their respective elections, it will be far more difficult for these parties to go mainstream relevant outside of the limits of 15 to 20% of the electorate even in times of populist rhetoric in Europe and a swing to more radical aspects of politics. He speculated that this primarily is due to the inherent moderation seen within European politics. When I enquired about if this would apply to Bulgarian politics, he declared that the European Union has had a profound effect on how these parties operate in Bulgaria due to the presence of the Union and its structural constraints on corruption that do not exist within many earlier members of the European Union such as France and Germany. These constraints include requirements to implement corruption controls over the judiciary and in industry before the European Union releases the structural observation constraints and allows relative autonomy. When put in the context of Bulgaria, it indicates that one of the primary means of moderation in Bulgarian politics is the European Union requiring constant forward progress in corruption reforms. Yet, while this does not separate Bulgaria's radical parties from their roots, it provides an incentive to push forward with reforms.

Does ideology and party construction provide an impetus to moderation in a departure from their radical roots? We have seen parties that have made efforts to moderate themselves from their radical roots such as Jobbik in Hungary. Radical parties within Bulgaria may change over the long term to reach new types of voters. Yet, past efforts to placate their electoral coalition or major coalition partners in terms of ideology and party construction have indicated that there are no efforts to change due to the electoral construct and more specifically the party construction. Specifically, two other parties in question, Ataka and the National Salvation for Bulgaria, are highly personalized and personalistic in nature.

These two parties were founded by and centralize around their respective party leaders: Volen Siderov and Valeri Simeonov. Any movement towards moderation would require these two leaders to be directly involved in the moderation process. Given that these two are highly nationalistic firebrands within Bulgarian politics, it is highly unlikely that these two parties will moderate themselves after they've left the government, or should they continue to remain within the government. In addition to this, given that these two parties are highly personalized, it is highly likely that once these two-party leaders leave their respective parties or retire from politics wholesale, the parties will fall apart.

As this thesis is being written, the divisions between Ataka and the NFSB have become so great that Siderov has called for Deputy PM Simeonov to step down in a huge show of discord between the two parties. It is extremely likely that these two parties will refuse to cooperate in the future (Ataka, 2018). In my interview with Dr. Zankina, she declares that this sentiment regarding the personalism that predicates these two parties and party leaders, the party survival is highly dependent on the political viability of their leaders (Zankina, 2018). Any moderation that the various parties take part in can last only for as long as the parties survive. However, with the IMRO it is a rather different case.

The IMRO was founded as a spiritual successor to an earlier party that bears the same name that would represent Bulgarian nationalism within Macedonia. This individual party in the ideology that provides its foundation lasted for as long as Bulgaria has disputed the sovereignty of Macedonia over its own territory within the Pirin region. When we examine moderation within this individual party, we must realize that it is inexorably linked to its origins as a nationalist party that openly disputes another country's sovereignty. Individual leaders may be Eurocentric or quite moderate regarding how to interact within the framework of Bulgarian politics. However, one must always keep in mind the fact that this party is predicated on these ideals. But it is largely irrelevant to consider the idea of moderation given the circumstances

under which the party was founded, and its ideology is at odds with one of the central tenets of liberal international relations. However, there is a more sinister issue at play when it comes to dealing with these nationalist parties within governments and their attempt to moderate themselves.

We must always be on the lookout for parties that operate purely within the framework of politics that mean to disrupt the norms of those politics. Previous experience has demonstrated that radical parties within governments may become dangerous. This study displays that with the proper constraints, a radical party is incentivized to become more moderate. Yet, without these constraints, the same party that claims to have reformed itself from its violent roots is the same party that could very well cause those violent tendencies to become norms.

This thesis would have been massively helped through direct interviews with government officials beyond the experts in the field. The reserve of literature when it comes to nationalist parties in Eastern Europe is rather thin. With time that will be rectified but, one must always keep an eye on the parties that aim to modify their message to gain a greater following. One must also be on the lookout for the parties that surround them that attempt to utilize the same kind of messaging to poach voters at the detriment of liberal democracy itself. Is democracy at risk in Bulgaria? I would conclusively say no. I would give a warning of caution to those who examine Bulgarian politics and see it only for the corruption that lies underneath. Bulgaria is a great nation that is beginning to take its first steps out of the shade and into the sun. It is the responsibility of us scholars to help it along its way.

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