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BULGARIA

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Figure 29.1 Map of Bulgaria
1 Geographical position

Bulgaria is a middle-sized country situated in south-east Europe, at the heart of the Balkan Peninsula, bordering Romania in the north, Serbia and FYROM in the west and Greece and Turkey in the south. It has a coastline on the Black Sea in the east. The country’s territory of 111,002 square kilometres is dominated by mountains in the south-west, the Danubian plain in the north, and the Thracian plain in the southeast. Situated in the western part of the territory, the capital city of Sofia is the financial, administrative, and cultural heart of the country.

Being traditionally a unitary state, Bulgaria is divided into 27 territorial management units called oblasts (provinces) and the metropolitan capital province. Throughout the last two decades the population dropped from a peak of around 9 million inhabitants in 1988 to around 7.3 million in 2012, according to Eurostat data, more than 70 per cent of which reside in urban areas.

2 Historical background

Major political developments marked the rise and fall of the First Bulgarian Empire between 671 and 1018: territorial expansions, the introduction of the first written code of law, the
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adoption of Eastern Orthodox Christianity in 864, the introduction of the Cyrillic alphabet, and the birth and spread of the Bogomil heresy. After a period of Byzantine dominance, the state was re-established in 1185 as the Second Bulgarian Empire. For the five centuries to follow, Bulgaria formed a part of the Ottoman Empire. A national revival started in the second half of the eighteenth century and culminated in the country’s liberation in 1878, with the decisive involvement of Russia. The Third Bulgarian State was set up as an autonomous principality in 1879 with the Tarnovo Constitution.

The search for national unification became a political and military priority after the 1878 Berlin Treaty left large populations of Bulgarians outside the new country. This defined the country’s participation in four wars in less than half a century after liberation: in 1885 Bulgaria incorporated the semi-autonomous Ottoman territory of Eastern Rumelia after a successful war against Serbia; in 1911–1918 the country was twice severely defeated in the Second Balkan War and in WWI. Internal political life was dominated by two major factors: the Russophile sentiments of the population and of some of the important political circles on the one side, and the controversial alliances of the monarchs, who were descendants of the German dynasty on the other. During WWII, Bulgaria was a member of the Axis Pact. Authoritarian rule and the much-contested alliance with Nazi Germany led to the formation of a resistance movement.

On 9 September 1944, an uprising lead by the Communist-dominated Fatherland Front brought the monarchy to an end. A Soviet-style People’s Republic was established with a Communist constitution adopted in 1947. The country’s Communist rulers set up close ties with the Soviet Union, linked the development of the planned economy to the needs of the Comecon and forced the country to become a firm military ally within the Warsaw Pact. There was no internal political unrest like in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Poland, but by the late 1980s dissident groups started to oppose the ruling party’s monopoly in perestroika style. Shortly after the breakdown of the Communist regime in November 1989, a new Constitution re-establishing civil and political rights as well as democratic institutions was adopted and entered into force on 12 July 1991.

3 Geopolitical profile

Bulgaria’s foreign policy environment has been completely transformed since the end of the Cold War. Once the closest ally of the Soviet Union, during the early 1990s Bulgaria had to face the difficulties that came out of two parallel processes: the dissolution of the USSR itself and the USSR-led military bloc, on the one hand, and the dissolution of Yugoslavia, on the other. The first opened a space for fostering improved relations with Western European institutions and structures: Bulgaria became a member of the Council of Europe in May 1992 and signed an Association Agreement with the European Union in 1993. In the meantime Bulgarian security policy stuck to maintaining stability through non-alignment and keeping equal distances. Bulgaria has supported other regional institutions, such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC). The second process has pushed Bulgarian governments to adopt a balanced regional policy as a stabilizing force in the Balkans. By 1999, the ongoing conflicts in Yugoslavia had pushed Bulgaria to reconsider its security policy, and a major shift from non-alignment to guaranteeing stability through involvement was observed. Promoting regional security since then has been one of Bulgaria’s major foreign policy priorities.

Bulgaria became a NATO member in March 2004 and a full EU member in January 2007. The country’s well-developed energy sector and its strategic geographic location, which make it a key European energy hub, are major determinants for Bulgaria’s current foreign policy.
4 Overview of the political landscape

The new Constitution of 1991 created a European-type parliamentary regime with a pluralist party system, yet with a directly elected President, aided by a Vice-President, both enjoying a five-year term of office. The \((\text{Narodno sabranie})\) is a unicameral Parliament with 240 members, each elected for four-year terms by direct popular vote. A reform of the electoral legislation that entered in force in 2009 allocates seats according to a mixed system, with predominantly a proportional system (209 seats) and a first-past-the-post system (31 seats). There is a 4 per cent threshold to be passed by political parties in order to get representation in parliament.

The Parliament is ‘sovereign’ in that no institution can dissolve it or terminate its mandate. Pre-term elections are a procedural outcome of three consecutive unsuccessful attempts to form a cabinet. The Bulgarian legislature is also supreme in the procedure of appointing the executive as within the process of cabinet formation the President has a very limited role as moderator. The Bulgarian model of separation of powers is a version of ‘rationalized parliamentarism’ (Frankowski and Paul, 1995, 158); the Bulgarian Constitutional Court has strong powers to declare acts of Parliament unconstitutional on the appeal of one-fifth of all members of the National Assembly, the President, the Council of Ministers, the Supreme Court of Cassation, the Supreme Administrative Court, and the prosecutor general.

The President has a relatively weak position in the domestic political process as he or she disposes with the authority to return a bill for further debate, although Parliament can override a presidential veto by a simple majority vote of all the members of Parliament. Between 2007 and the end of 2011 Georgi Parvanov was re-elected for a second term as President of Bulgaria. On 22 January 2012 Rosen Plevneliev was sworn in as the new President. He was the candidate of the ruling GERB party.

Proportional representation has been the predominant electoral system for almost two decades and Liberal party legislation has added to the European content of the new Bulgarian political system. Post-Communist governments in Bulgaria have displayed different trends: majoritarian cabinets were short-lived and unstable during the first years of liberalization from 1989–1997, while during the consolidation of the democracy phase consecutive full terms have been completed by a single party majoritarian cabinet (right-wing Union of Democratic Forces, 1997–2001), a single bloc Liberal coalition (National Movement for Stability and Progress and Movement for Rights and Freedoms, 2001–2005) and a cross-bloc coalition bringing together parties from the left and the centre (the Bulgarian Socialist Party, the National Movement for Stability and Progress, and the Movement for Rights and Freedoms, 2005–2009). During the past 20 years of post-Communist development, the political system in Bulgaria has displayed the major trend of majoritarian democracy.

5 Brief account of the political parties

Bulgarian political tradition, part of which is the unicameral Parliament, puts a particular emphasis on political parties. In fact, Bulgaria developed an array of reasonably developed political parties whose membership comprises about 7 to 10 per cent of voting-age Bulgarians (Todorov, 2010, 138).

The party system itself has proved to be relatively stable. Only four parties or election coalitions have ever won elections during the post-Communist period. Only three parties were represented in all six legislatures after 1990. The relative stability of parties and the party system
in Bulgaria is supposed to be a noteworthy democratic asset: ‘[i]t is difficult to locate anything other than political parties to account for the Bulgarian advantage in democratization’ (Fish and Brooks, 2000).

Major European party families, such as the Christian Democrats, the Social Democrats, Liberals and Conservatives, are represented in the Bulgarian party landscape as well. They demonstrate a certain degree of persistence and consistency in the Bulgarian national framework. There is a relatively clear division between ‘left’ and ‘right’ and between more Nationalist and more open tendencies.

On the left, the Balgarska Sotsialisticheska Partiya, BSP (Bulgarian Socialist Party) is the successor of the former Communist Party of Bulgaria. BSP won the grand national assembly elections in 1990 and thus has dominated the constitution-building process in Bulgaria. After an initial decade of internal ideological battles, the BSP managed to transform itself into a Social Democratic party only on the eve of the new millennium, with the substantial support of the Party of European Socialists. BSP has undergone a long process of Europeanization as well changing its initial controversial position on the country’s EU accession only after Bulgaria started negotiations in 2000. Although in the early 1990s its electoral potential reached more than 40 per cent, since 1997 the party’s electoral ceiling has declined to about 31 per cent. There is also considerable volatility among BSP voters. In the last elections of 2009, just 17.7 per cent voted for the party. On the other hand, the party has never faced major internal splits, even after the dramatic failure of its government in 1997, and still dominates the left part of the political spectrum in the country.

The right part of the political spectrum has undergone intense changes throughout the two decades after the breakdown of the Communist regime. Originally the right was represented by the Sayuz na demokratichnite sili, SDS (Union of Democratic Forces), which was founded in 1989 and consisted of 11 small anti-Communist political parties. In 1997, the SDS was transformed into a single party affiliated with the European Christian Democratic family. By the mid-1990s it was the only Reformist party with the potential to form a government. In terms of electoral strength, the party achieved over 52 per cent of the vote in the 1997 elections that then declined...
Dramatically to about 17 per cent in 2001 and 6.4 per cent in the 2009 elections. The Demokrati za Silna Bulgaria, DSB (Democrats for a Strong Bulgaria), which emerged after the defeat of the SDS in the 2001 general elections, is an SDS splinter party. The party follows Conservative and Liberal policies similar to the SDS. In the 2009 EP and general elections, the SDS and DSB formed the so-called Blue Coalition. The coalition got 6.4 per cent of the vote. Both parties are members of the European People’s Party.

Other Conservative parties that emerged recently are the Balgarsi Naroden Sajuz, BNS (Bulgarian People’s Union), which emerged as an electoral coalition of several parties in the 2005 election only to disappear in 2009 due to growing factionalism within the party, and the Red, Zakonnost, Spravedlivost, RZS (Order, Lawfulness, Justice Party) founded in 2005, which was able to achieve 5.13 per cent of the vote and 13 seats in Parliament after the 2009 elections. The RZS is closer to the European Conservative Party.

At present the ruling right-wing party in Bulgaria is Grazhdani za Evropeysko Razvitie na Balgaria, GERB (Citizens for European Development in Bulgaria), led by the former Mayor of Sofia, Bojko Borissov. It was founded in 2006 and was able to win the EP elections of 2007 and 2009 as well as the general elections of July 2009. The party’s charismatic president and current Prime Minister Boiko Borissov gained electoral support on the basis of populist Conservative language and an election programme that promised to fight against crime and corruption, and to protect Conservative values in society. GERB is a member of the European People’s Party.

Two parties have dominated the Liberal political centre in Bulgaria. Founded in 1990, the Dvizhenie za Prava i Svobodi, DPS (Movement for Rights and Freedoms) represents the 8 per cent Turkish-Bulgarian minority. The party is an important player in government formation. Due to the lack of absolute majorities amongst the main parties, DPS became an important kingmaker three times over a period of 20 years, in 1992, 2001, and 2005, respectively. The party’s ideological makeup is liberalism as far as the DPS claims to be open to any citizen, although it is predominantly the main representative of the Turkish-Bulgarian minority. Since 1990s, the party started polling about 7–8 per cent of votes, but since 2005 its electoral support has increased to 12–15 per cent.

In 2001, fatigue over the bipolar party system in Bulgaria brought to life a new Liberal, market-oriented party, Nacionalno Dvizhenie za Stabilnost i Vazhod, NSDV (National Movement for Stability and Progress), named after its charismatic leader Simeon II, former tsar of Bulgaria. Between 2001 and 2005, it formed a coalition with the Turkish minority party, the DPS. However, in the 2005 general elections its share of the vote declined from over 42 per cent to 19.9 per cent and in the 2009 general elections to just 3 per cent. The party is no longer represented in Parliament. After the 2009 electoral defeat, Simeon II Saxe-Coburg-Gotha resigned from the party leadership.

On the extreme right, a xenophobic, Nationalist, and populist party was founded in 2005 as a reaction to the clientelistic policy style of the 2001–2005 coalition partner DPS. The party was named Ataka (Attack!) and is led by Volen Siderov. The party was able to find some electoral consolidation since the 2005 elections, achieving almost the same electoral share of about 9 per cent in 2009. Ataka advocates national independence, protectionism of the Bulgarian economy, and the country’s withdrawal from NATO, the IMF, and the World Bank. The party’s principal xenophobic target is the Turkish–Bulgarian minority.

This lack of cohesion is still typical for rightist political parties in Bulgaria, which are at some stage in their development dominated by factionalism and divisions. Charismatic leaders play an important role in the foundation of new political formations, but after electoral defeats, there is a clear tendency for dissent and collapse amongst right-wing political parties.
5.1 Party attitudes towards the European Union

Although the ‘European idea’ has played an important role in the process of party differentiation (Todorov, 1999, 9), the European Union has never been a divisive issue among the political class in Bulgaria. As part of their quest for legitimization, political parties began to incorporate Europe as an issue into their political agendas and into party competition at a very early stage of the democratization process. There was not a single more or less influential political power in Bulgaria, with the rare exception of a few, highly marginal parties without any influence whatsoever in the political debate, which did not stress that Bulgaria’s accession to EU was a matter of unquestionable first-order priority. Nevertheless, political projects for the country’s accession did differ until the late 1990s as a consequence of the bipolar model of party politics that was typical for Central and Eastern European countries.

The Bulgarian Socialists started as a reformed Communist party advocating a mixed economy and pursued an agenda of generalized opposition against neo-liberal capitalism. The party’s big transformation took place after its disastrous defeat in the mid-term legislative elections of 1997. The Party of European Socialists was instrumental in helping the BSP to become a mainstream social democratic party, and European integration was framed through the lens of social democracy. While in 1994 the BSP’s programme was still very much framed against capitalism, in 2008 their programme resembled that of many of other social democratic parties. In the 2009 EP elections, the BSP offered the largest ever public discussion on the PES European election manifesto compared to any other political party (Spirova, 2008, 491; Dimitrov, 2000, 103; Hristova-Valtcheva, 2010).

The Union of Democratic Forces (SDS) was originally set up as an umbrella anti-Communist coalition of broad spectrum formations, including Social Democrats, as well as ecological and agricultural movements. However, after the creation of a unified party in 1997, the SDS leadership decided to affiliate with the EPP’s Christian democratic profile (Todorov, 1999, 21–3; Dimitrov, 2000, 103). The SDS remained a very pro-European party with a clear outline that it had before 1997. All splinter parties remained pro-European, while the most influential ones such as Democrats for a Stronger Bulgaria (DSB), became affiliated with the mainstream EPP.

The relatively protracted accession of the country to the EU brought the collapse of the bipolar political model in 2001 and the rise of the NDSV. The party’s advocacy of a free-market economy, a limited state and protection of civil rights, clearly led to strong support for European integration as well. The party soon became affiliated with the European Liberal, Democratic, and Reformist group (ELDR). Successful accession to the EU was an important part of the NDSV programme before 2007. However, its ‘integration at any cost’ approach while in power did not provoke any popular EU pessimism.

GERB also has strong, sometimes quite uncritical, European credentials. It clearly sees the solution to all Bulgarian problems in further European integration. However, in contrast to other right-centre parties, GERB uses populism and Nationalist rhetoric in order to attract votes. In addition, it clearly presented anti-Turkish minority positions in the 2007 EP elections that were toned down in 2009 (Savkova, 2007, 6).

The Turkish minority Movement for Freedoms and Rights (DPS) is a strong pro-European party, and is affiliated with the ALDE. The mainstream parties, BSP, NDSV, SDS, DSB, GERB and DPS, are supportive of European integration. Probably the only major party that has remained outside this mainstream is Ataka. In 2005, the party became popular with a clearly populist programme, criticizing the post-Communist political class, requesting the renationalization of privatized assets, and calling for the re-negotiation of Bulgaria’s EU accession agreement.
Nonetheless, the European Union was and is regarded as a *vincolo esterno* (external link) (Dyson and Featherstone, 1999) that is instrumentalized by the political parties to achieve the development of the country.

### 6 Public opinion and the European Union

Public support for Bulgaria’s EU membership has constantly been positive. During the years following accession, Bulgaria retained its leading position amongst countries with the most positive image of the EU, with a high level of trust in the EU and its institutions (European Commission, 2008, European Commission, 2009, 92). Utilitarian support for the country’s EU membership also displayed a steady increase in 2009 (European Commission, 2009, 92).

Bulgarian citizens did not demonstrate a particular interest in the EP elections as such, although the very objective of EU membership had for a number of years been of the highest priority on the country’s political and civic agenda. Two years after accession the majority of Bulgarians still approved of EU membership. Forty-nine per cent definitely showed a positive attitude and only 14 per cent did not support membership. At the same time, they did not think that they had individually gained from EU membership. Only 9 per cent saw themselves as winners, while 15 per cent thought that they were losers. The great majority of the public, more than three-quarters, did not see any serious changes (Alpha Research, 2009).

However, this disappointment is not caused by EU institutions, but by Bulgaria’s economic and political reality. It is indicative that European institutions are more trusted than domestic ones. On the eve of the EP elections in 2009, the European Parliament was trusted by 61 per cent, the highest positive shift amongst the EU 27, and the European Commission by 52 per cent (European Commission, 2009, 110), whereas the Bulgarian National Assembly and the government were trusted by only 7 per cent and 10 per cent, respectively (Alpha Research, 2009).

Finally, Bulgarian citizens were amongst the least informed in all the 27 Member States on the working principles of the EP: only 22 per cent of Bulgarians were aware that the basic principle of organizing work in the EP is based on political rather than national representation, and more than half did not have an opinion on this issue.

### 7 National and EP electoral systems

On 7 June 2009, Bulgarians voted for their MEPs for the second time in a two-year period. The elections were held according to slightly amended 2007 legislation. A proportional representation system with preference voting was used. Any candidate who achieved 15 per cent on the list was automatically elected. Seats were distributed in a single national constituency using the Hare-Niemayer method. Certain changes were made in order to secure better control over campaign financing and to prevent possible vote trading. The electoral law defined a three-week official period for campaigning and no day for reflection. These measures were taken to make the European elections more voter-friendly.

It was the first time that the electoral system for the EP elections differed significantly from the national election system. After an initial experiment with a mixed voting system in 1990, according to which half of the Members of Parliament (MPs) were elected through a system of proportional representation with a 4 per cent threshold, and the other half through a majority voting system in two rounds in one-mandate constituencies, a proportional voting system has been consistently applied since 1991. Only in April 2009, after continuous and heated debates, was a proposal to elect 31 out of 240 MPs through a majority system approved by Parliament.
The revised voting system provides for 209 MPs to be elected through proportional representation in 31 multi-mandate constituencies with a threshold of 4 per cent and for 31 MPs to be elected through a majority system in one round (‘first-past-the-post’) in the same constituencies.

8 A glance at the EP and national elections

The decision to hold the first direct although partial European elections in Bulgaria to be convened in the spring of 2007, the first ‘European Year’, was preceded by intense political debate. In the year before full accession to the European Union, the idea of organizing the European elections before the date of accession was tested. The idea was promoted from the ranks of the ruling coalition and political analysts suspected that it was an attempt to use technology to strengthen the electoral position of the ruling majority, after the general elections held in the summer of 2005. Options were put forward to organize the EP elections in parallel with the November 2006 presidential elections. This turned to be a rather exotic idea, given the fact that none of the other ten new EU Member States had ever convened partial elections to the European Parliament before the official date of its entry, and therefore it found no support among the political parties represented in the national Parliament. Thus, the chosen date for holding the European elections coincided with the completion of the first half of the mandate of the ruling coalition. The location of the first direct elections to the EP in the political calendar of Bulgaria is further symbolically loaded, bearing in mind the fact that in the autumn of the same year regular local elections were to be held.

Fourteen coalitions and political parties and two independent candidates took part in the June 2007 EP elections in Bulgaria. The number of candidate lists can be deemed as ‘modest’ compared with the practice in other Member States.

Unlike the common practice in other EU countries, where the formation of candidate lists rests on the model of a single-party presentation with a predominance of middle-echelon party leaders, the Bulgarian political parties and social elite were widely represented in the lists for elections of MEPs. The leader of the first opposition party in Bulgaria and former head of state, Petar Stoyanov, led the SDS electoral list. Another characteristic of the Bulgarian case was the involvement of the two major trade unions: the leader of the Podkrepa trade union led the list of candidates supported by the Konfederatia na Nezavisimite Sindikati v Bulgaria, KNSB (Confederation of Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria). Both lists failed to gain seats in the assembly in Brussels and Strasbourg.

A modest presence of EU issues marked the electoral campaign in Bulgaria. The main issue for participating political parties was the struggle to mobilize support for the upcoming local elections, rather than to get involved in comprehensive discussions over the major issues of the European integration project. Indicative in this respect is the fact that only six of the 16 participating candidates, political parties, and coalitions had prepared and presented programmes directed primarily at problems of the country’s EU membership (Hristova-Valtcheva, 2008, 39). Second, with a low turnout of only 28.6 per cent (Central Election Commission, 2007) Bulgaria ranked slightly above average for the ten new Member States during the 2004 EP elections, whose average level of turnout was of 26.3 per cent. This turnout is the lowest in the modern democratic history of the country and represented only 50 per cent of the voter turnout recorded in the last general elections held in June 2005.

The three ruling coalition parties received a total of 48.3 per cent of the total vote and fielded ten of the 18 Bulgarian representatives in Parliament; more specifically the BSP got five seats, the DPS won four seats, and NDSV got one seat.

The protest vote split and materialized in support of a newly established political formation: GERB obtained five seats, and remarkable support was shown to the main anti-European
political opposition force, *Ataka*, which secured three seats. Unlike the Old EU Member States, where small, marginal, and extreme political parties seemed to gain support, the Bulgarian model represented a significant deviation, which is again typical of the New EU countries.

### 9 The 2009 European election

#### 9.1 Party lists and manifestos

In the 2009 EP elections in Bulgaria, ten political parties and three coalitions registered their party lists of 17 nominees each. One independent candidate participated in the elections as well.

It is usual that candidates appearing in EP election party lists are not first-rank politicians. This was the case in Bulgaria in 2007, especially regarding the major opposition lists (Kanev, 2008). However, there was a change in 2009. Most of the parties nominated, at least as heads of their lists, were prominent and well-known names.

The most influential party currently in Bulgaria, Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria (GERB), was an exception to this case. Their list was topped by MEP Rumyana Jeleva, who at that time was almost unknown by the broader public. According to a survey conducted by the National Centre for Public Opinion Research, she was trusted only by 28 per cent of Bulgarian citizens (NCIOM, 2009). However this relatively new party did not have and did not really need well-known candidates because the charisma of its leader Boyko Borisov was powerful enough.
The Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), running in the left-wing Coalition for Bulgaria (KB), together with several minor parties, nominated the acting Foreign Minister and Deputy PM Ivailo Kalfin as the top candidate on its EP ballot. Kalfin was Foreign Minister during Bulgaria’s EU accession on 1 January 2007 and his nomination was broadly approved by the electorate (38 per cent).

The Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS) put on the top of its ballot some recognizable names, most of which were acting MEPs: Filiz Hyusmenova at the top was followed by Vladko Panayotov and Metin Kazak. The far-right Ataka party list was headed by its three current MEPs: Dimitar Stoynov, Slavi Binev, and Desislav Chukulov.

Another prominent top candidate was the European Commissioner Meglena Kuneva from the National Movement for Stability and Progress (NDSV) of former PM Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. Kuneva became the first Bulgarian member of the European Commission on 1 January 2007. Before that she was EU Affairs Minister of Bulgaria, and Bulgaria’s chief negotiator for EU accession. She enjoyed broad approval in the country and was placed first according the sympathies of the public (48 per cent).

The ballot of the rightist Blue Coalition (BC), an election alliance of the Union of Democratic Forces (SDS) and former PM Kostov’s Democrats for Strong Bulgaria (DSB) joined by three other parties, was headed by Nadezhda Mihaylova, Bulgaria’s Foreign Minister in 1997–2001, at the time that Bulgaria was invited to start EU accession negotiations.

Other parties and coalitions with ambitions to pass the 5.88 per cent threshold, like LIDER, which was founded and sponsored by the mogul Hristo Kovachki, or the Order, Law, Justice Party, also nominated relatively well-known people at the top of their lists.

An analysis of the candidates shows that most of them were either experienced European parliamentarians, or had significantly contributed to the cause of Bulgaria’s EU membership. It turned out that ten of the former 18 MEPs were re-elected, and two foreign ministers as well as other well-known politicians became MEPs. This fact reduces to some extent the validity of the Second-Order Election notion for the 2009 EP elections in Bulgaria.

Respectively, most of the parties preferred not to elaborate special manifestos for the EP elections. Only five out of a total of 13 parties and coalitions presented an EP election platform. This is even fewer than in 2007, when six parties had their manifestos for the EP elections.

GERB, the party that won the highest number of votes at the elections, did not come out with such a manifesto. Moreover, in the course of the EP campaign, four days before 7 June, it presented a governmental programme designed for the parliamentary elections. The same applies to the Blue Coalition, whose representatives explained that the campaign programme of the coalition was one and the same for both elections. In this platform European issues were treated in the last chapter with the title ‘Strong European policy for Bulgarian citizens’.

Ataka also did not present a concrete programme for the European Parliament, and like GERB and the Blue Coalition, it introduced its election platform for the national Parliament.

The five parties that presented separate election manifestos were the three parties from the ruling coalition, BSP, NDSV, and DPS, as well as two small parties without a chance to enter the EP: the Greens and Bulgarian Social Democracy. The general approach of the parties was to reproduce the manifestos of their respective European political parties and to add their own accents.

BSP, being a member of the Party of European Socialists (PES), adopted the basic messages of its manifesto: ‘People first. A new direction for Europe.’ DPS, as a member of ALDE, leaned on its election platform, developing further its ten priorities. The other member of the Liberal party family, the NDSV, came out with a concise paper of ten laconic topics on EU issues.

Party slogans and messages lacked diversity and in a number of cases did not touch upon any European issues at all. The typical approach was to choose messages that could be used for both elections in the prolonged election campaign. This was the case with some of the major actors...
in the campaign. For example, GERB’s slogan was neutral and borrowed from Parvanov’s presidential campaign in 2006: ‘Bulgaria can do it.’ The Blue coalition’s slogan ‘It’s time for the good ones’ sounded naive and meaningless. DPS used its abbreviation in simple general words: ‘Vote confidence, get support and security.’ The Order, Lawfulness, Justice party came out with one single slogan: ‘No to corruption.’ LIDER contented itself with the traditional ‘We want change’, and the Napred (Forward) coalition preferred the classic ‘Unity is power.’

Even those slogans that emphasized European issues were simplistic and unlikely to motivate voters. BSP turned to the slogan ‘We protect Bulgarian interests’ and tried to connect it with specific messages to different target groups. NDSV’s slogan ‘Europe is hearing us’ was alluding to the party’s contribution in the EU integration process as well as to the capacity of its top candidate Kuneva as a European Commissioner. BND, a splinter party from the NDSV, used the unconvincing slogan ‘To bring Bulgaria back to Europe’. The most clear-cut slogan belonged to the Bulgarian far-right, Nationalist, and only Eurosceptic party Ataka: ‘Not Turkey in the EU.’

9.2 The electoral campaign

A distinct feature of the 2009 EP elections in Bulgaria was the low degree of Europeanization of the electoral campaign. Leading Bulgarian politicians almost unanimously stressed the priority of the national elections in relation to the European ones. According to Boyko Borisov, leader of the strongest party, the GERB, the EP elections were just the first half-time point of the game. PM Sergey Stanishev, from the ruling BSP, talked about a first round that would assign the pace and the tempo of the election cycle. The leader of another party in the ruling coalition, DPS’s Ahmed Dogan, described both elections as the same elections in two stages. According to Ivan Kostov from the opposition Blue Coalition, the EP elections were important as a preparation for the parliamentary ones. For almost all the participants the significance of the EP elections derived mainly from the fact that they were expected to form a voting structure that would be difficult to change in a month’s time.

Since the EP elections were considered by the parties as the first stage of the ‘real elections’, it could be expected that their campaigns would also be conceptualized as the first part of the ‘real campaign’. This meant that European issues served as a background rehearsal for the national elections campaign. Some domestic topics were indeed directly connected with European ones, for example corruption and European funds. In most of the cases, however, even these issues were used in a populist manner.

This attitude became apparent at the opening of the party campaigns. From the very beginning, the major political actors accentuated aims and issues connected with the parliamentary elections, leaving aside the European ones. For example, the largest party of the governing coalition BSP started its election campaign with a claim to keep its ruling position. The leader of DPS Dogan opened the campaign stating the aims of the party and presenting some of the candidates for the parliamentary elections.

Media interest in the EP elections can be characterized as weak. According to the election law, the parties had the opportunity to broadcast one-minute introductory and final clips as well as daily election chronicles. Four 90-minute television debates were carried out on two topics: ‘The role of MEPs in the effective utilization of European funds’ and ‘Party politics in the European Parliament, the positions of the main European parties and Bulgaria’s interests.’

The European issue, however, did not become dominant as a whole, and it was often completely overshadowed by current and scandalous issues. As a whole, radio and television election programmes were broadcast in time slots that proved inconvenient for viewers or listeners, against the background of a generally low level of interest. For example, the introductory clips of the parties were broadcast at 12.30 p.m., the debates were normally broadcast at 6.30 p.m., and only the final debate between the top candidates was broadcast during prime time.
The parties conducted relatively active television advertising campaigns. This was also a certain deviation from the former EP elections and was obviously due to the upcoming national elections. The number of broadcast clips was significant. According to a GfK survey, even a small party like LIDER broadcast 579 advertisements. The leading position was occupied by the BSP and its coalition with nearly 800 clips (Web Media News, 2009).

The internet campaign was not active and intensive. None of the parties opened a special website dedicated to these elections. Most of them prepared a page linked to their official websites. The rest did not participate in any online campaign. Only a small number of all candidates for EP deputies used their own personal blogs. According to media reports, only ten of Bulgaria’s 17 newly elected MEP’s had Facebook profiles: three from the BSP; two from the DPS; two from the Blue Coalition; one from GERB; one from Ataka; and one from the NDSV. Of these, only three had fan pages. Two others had Facebook groups with a modest number of members (Sofia News Agency, 2009).

An analysis of the substance of the campaign, demonstrated in election manifestos, debates, speeches, and statements, leads to certain conclusions. First, similar to the European parties, there was a broad area of common priorities and positions between the Bulgarian political parties mainly concerning strategies and policies with regard to the world’s financial and economic crisis, climate change, and the international role of the EU. Specific Bulgarian demands concerned the end of restrictions for hiring Bulgarian citizens in companies in EU Member States, the simplification of the procedures for structural and cohesion funds, membership in the Schengen Agreement, political support for the introduction of the euro, a positive approach towards the Lisbon Treaty, and EU enlargement. This can be seen as a proof of the theory that there is not sufficient potential for party differentiation at European elections.

Second, there were certain points of disagreement. For example, the BSP group emphasized the use of nuclear energy as one of the important priorities that it would support in the EP, as well as projects for energy security (Nabucco, South stream, Burgas, Alexandroupolis). It demanded additional compensation for Blocs 3 and 4 of the Kozloduy nuclear power plant, as well as support for the construction of the Belene nuclear power plant. Similar positions can be found in the position of other parties like GERB. On the contrary, other parties like the Blue Coalition did not support most of these projects, suspecting possible dependence on Russia.

Third, no real debates were carried out on these issues during the campaign. Even the debate provoked by Ataka namely ‘In favour of or against Turkey’s membership in the EU?’ did not take place. Policies proposed by parties and candidates in European elections rarely had much European content. The campaign in general revolved around domestic issues following the government–opposition confrontation axis. European issues were more or less ornamental or only a part of the campaign. The BSP campaigned on the performance of the party and of the coalition as a whole once in power. The opposition parties focussed negatively on governmental performance.

Fourth, there was a lot of negative campaigning or even dirty campaigning in this campaign from almost all sides. This even forced President Parvanov to warn the parties to avoid using discrediting materials and faulty practices in the campaign.

Fifth, there was a significant exception with the NDSV and its top candidate’s campaign. The NDSV conducted the most EU-friendly campaign and put up positive messages. From the very beginning of the campaign, Kuneva opposed the attitude that the EP elections were a preparation for the parliamentary elections and insisted on their European character. This campaign proved very successful, since most public opinion polls showed that the NDSV would not get even one MEP and in the end it got two. This fact can be seen as a sign that the position of a party on Europe matters to the results of EP elections.
In spite of the campaign, the majority of citizens remained uninformed about and alienated from the EP. They did not have enough reasons to consider the EP elections as something important for their everyday lives. Certainly, at a declaratory level Bulgarians acknowledged the importance of the European elections for their country, but in a two-year period this conviction decreased.

The modest information campaigns about the EP and the elections did not help to change attitudes. In contrast to 2007, the political parties in Bulgaria did nothing. The visibility and the impact of the EP information campaign itself were also weak. Only 13 per cent of Bulgarian citizens saw EP advertising materials in this campaign; 62 per cent did not see them; and 13 per cent were not sure whether they had seen any, which in fact added to the former figure (Alpha Research, 2009).

Because of all of this, citizens consider their participation in the EP elections as linked with national politics, rather than with any particular European expectations. Civic interest in specific European topics was not very high either.

### 9.3 Electoral results

In 2009, 2,601,677 Bulgarian citizens participated in the EP elections out of about 6.7 million registered voters on the official electoral lists. This amounted to roughly 650,000 more than in 2007. Turnout was 38.9 per cent compared to 29.2 per cent in 2007. Moreover, as far as the electoral lists are not exact, according most of the experts, the real number of Bulgarian voters is not 6.7 million but under six million, Bulgaria’s participation rate falls in line with the EU average.

This does not mean, however, that the elections had attracted more Bulgarian voters because of their European character. It is surely true that after two and a half years of EU membership, knowledge and interest with regard to EU institutions had increased to some extent. On the other hand, it seems reasonable that similar to the political parties, most citizens perceived the EP elections as the first episode in the struggle for winning in the national elections. In this sense higher turnout can be interpreted as a consequence of the voters’ intention to secure a better starting position for their parties.

Furthermore, while turnout was higher in the 2009 EP elections compared to the 2007 elections, it was still lower than the turnout in parliamentary or local elections in Bulgaria. The participation rate at these elections was about 55 per cent, or in absolute terms about 3.5 million votes. EP electoral activity is only coming closer to turnout in presidential elections.

Comparing the turnout at the EP and national elections, the picture becomes very clear. The parliamentary election attracted a further 1.7 million voters and the participation level was 24 per cent higher than at the EP contest. This, in a sense, is confirmation that the turnout at Euro-elections increases when they are held just before national elections.

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**Table 29.5 Importance for Bulgarians of the 2009 EP elections**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very important</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important to some extent</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not important to some extent</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not important at all</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 2009 Euro-election results in Bulgaria did not lead to major shifts in terms of allocation to parliamentary groups. All political parties that gained seats in Brussels and Strasbourg in 2007 succeeded in 2009 as well, the only exception being the Blue Coalition. The latter was successful in gathering the support of right-wing voters and managed for the first time to secure two seats in the EP.

In the meantime, the NDSV doubled its seats within the EU parliamentary institution, while Ataka and the BSP lost one seat. Thus four, instead of five, Bulgarian MEPs joined the left-wing group PES; five instead of four Bulgarian MEPs joined the EP Liberal parliamentary group; seven instead of five Bulgarian MEPs joined the EPP parliamentary group; and two instead of three Bulgarian MEPs joined the far-right group in the Strasbourg and Brussels arena.

Among the elected MEPs, eight, equivalent to 47 per cent, were re-elected and five, corresponding to 29.4 per cent, were women.

### 9.4 Campaign finance

The financing of political campaigns in Bulgaria still needs considerable improvement in terms of implementing the legislative requirements. The first legislation that regulated campaign finance, including public funding, dates back to the round table in 1990 and then in 1991. However, it was only in 2001 that a law on political parties was adopted. The implementation of the provisions was quite difficult (Kanev, 2007).
Table 29.8 List of Bulgarian MEPs: seventh legislature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>National party</th>
<th>Political group</th>
<th>Professional background</th>
<th>Year of birth</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>No of mandate</th>
<th>Committee/Chair</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Binev, Slavi</td>
<td>Ataka</td>
<td>EFD (Since December 2012)</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>1965</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyusmenova, Filiz</td>
<td>DPS</td>
<td>ALDE</td>
<td>Philologist</td>
<td>1966</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Vice-Chairwoman REGI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ilchev, Stanimir</td>
<td>NDSV</td>
<td>ALDE</td>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>1953</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iotova, Iliana</td>
<td>KB (BSP)</td>
<td>S&amp;D</td>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>1964</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Vice-Chairwoman CRIM, Vice-Chairwoman D-MD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivanova, Iliana</td>
<td>GERB</td>
<td>EPP</td>
<td>Economic analyst</td>
<td>1975</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borisov, Preslav</td>
<td>GERB</td>
<td>EPP</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalfin, Ivailo</td>
<td>KB (BSP)</td>
<td>S&amp;D</td>
<td>Diplomat</td>
<td>1964</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Vice-Chairman BUDG (July 2009–January 2013) Vice-Chairman DROI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kazak, Metin</td>
<td>DPS</td>
<td>ALDE</td>
<td>Politician</td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirilov, Evgeni</td>
<td>KB (BSP)</td>
<td>S&amp;D</td>
<td>Diplomat</td>
<td>1945</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kovatchev, Andrey</td>
<td>GERB</td>
<td>EPP</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>1967</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Vice-Chairman AFET</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mihaylova-Neynski,</td>
<td>BC (SDS-DSB)</td>
<td>EPP</td>
<td>Philologist</td>
<td>1962</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nadezhda</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nedelcheva, Mariya</td>
<td>GERB</td>
<td>EPP</td>
<td>Political scientist</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panayotov, Vladko</td>
<td>DPS</td>
<td>ALDE</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
<td>1950</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parvanova, Antoniya</td>
<td>NDSV</td>
<td>ALDE</td>
<td>Medical doctor</td>
<td>1962</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stoyanov, Dimitar</td>
<td>Ataka</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stoyanov, Emil</td>
<td>GERB</td>
<td>EPP</td>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>1959</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(until 06/12/2012)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panayotova, Monika</td>
<td>GERB</td>
<td>EPP</td>
<td>Politician</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(since 06/12/2012)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urunchev, Vladimír</td>
<td>GERB</td>
<td>EPP</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
<td>1954</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vigenin, Kristian</td>
<td>KB (BSP)</td>
<td>S&amp;D</td>
<td>Politician</td>
<td>1975</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(until 07/06/2013)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyubcheva, Marusia</td>
<td>KB (BSP)</td>
<td>S&amp;D</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
<td>1949</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(since 07/06/2013)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bulgaria

In 2009, the law on political parties was amended to improve the regulation of political party financing. An annual state subsidy is allocated to parliamentary parties and coalitions in proportion to the number of valid votes received. The state subsidy is also granted to all political parties that received at least 1 per cent of the vote in the last parliamentary elections. The state subsidy is based on 5 per cent of the national minimum wage. In 2011 that was €6.15 per vote. Annual reports on political party expenditures have to be submitted by 31 March of the following year to the National Audit Office. A party that fails to submit annual reports for two consecutive years faces dissolution. A list of donors and donations also has to be published. However, a specific framework was presented only in 2011 with the adoption of the electoral code. Corporate donations are forbidden. Individual donations should not exceed 10,000 BGN, equivalent to about €5,100. However, there are so far no clear sanctions if parties do not comply with financing regulations (OSCE, 2009, 12–13). In this sense, the regulatory framework is still undermined by a non-existing enforcement culture. This has been a continuous pattern in dealing with campaign and party finance. This aspect of accountability, transparency, and control has been particularly emphasized by the Group of States against Corruption Committee of the Council of Europe in its 2009 report on Bulgaria (Kanev, 2007, 49–52; GRECO, 2009, 31–32).

Political coalitions cannot spend more than 2 million BGN (€1 million) and political parties cannot spend more than 1 million BGN (€500,000) in national parliamentary election campaigns. One particular recommendation about receiving donations through bank payment (GRECO, 2009, 10) entered into force only in 2011.

There are no official figures on how much money parties spent on national and European elections. In 2009, the close timing of both European and national elections clearly showed that there was an interaction between the two kinds of elections. EP elections were used as a rehearsal for the national legislative elections.

10 Theoretical interpretation of Euro-elections

10.1 Second-Order Election theory

The outcomes of the European elections in Bulgaria in terms of party choice can be used to test some of the basic hypotheses of Second-Order Election theory.

In particular, two specific features of the 2007 EP contest have pointed out the relevance of this model: the poor relevance of European issues during the electoral campaign and the low turnout.

As to the 2009 EP elections, the government-opposition hypothesis with voters using this competition to punish governing parties and to send a serious warning signal to them was confirmed in the Bulgarian case, albeit not entirely. The BSP, the leading party in the governing coalition with its 476,618 votes, did not lose votes in 2009 compared to the 2007 EP elections, but lost its relative weight in the electoral corps and got one less seat. However, the party’s losses are significant if we make a comparison to the 2005 parliamentary elections. This seems natural in view of the considerably lower turnout in EP elections, as compared to that of the last parliamentary elections. However, BSP diminished its vote share between the two elections.

The other ruling coalition partner, the NDSV had an unexpected success gaining more votes and one more seat compared to the 2007 EP elections. However, the NDSV also suffered large decreases compared to the last parliamentary elections. But if we compare the NDSV’s results with those at the consequent parliamentary elections, we can find certain evidence for the alternative theory of Europe Salience. As far as the issue of Europe seemed to be more salient for this party, it received better results at the EP elections than at the parliamentary ones a month after that.
The exception was the third party in the coalition cabinet, the DPS, which lost a certain number of votes and claimed one less EP mandate compared to 2007, but increased its proportional share within the electorate compared to 2005.

The election outcomes seem to prove another hypothesis: namely, that it is mainly large governing parties that are punished in European elections. Small parties in government do not lose as much. As has often happened in other EU Member States, the opposition party in Bulgaria had the best electoral performance.

A typical increase in the relative weight of smaller parties at the expense of larger parties and the breakthrough of new parties in EP elections was demonstrated in Bulgaria. Newly established parties and coalitions such as LIDER and Order, Lawfulness, and Justice have shown some surprising results, although none of them could secure parliamentary seats.

The 2009 EP elections were held just a month before the national parliamentary elections. This specific timing allows us to test all the elements of the Second-Order Election theory, including the assumption that:

> if a European Parliament election is held in the build-up to a new national general election, parties will be motivated to spend a lot of time and money in the campaign, and citizens will be motivated to vote, to try to influence the upcoming national election. In this situation, turnout should be comparatively high, and vote switching should be limited since voters are likely to behave as if this were a national election.

*(Hix and Marsh, 2007, 496)*

The close dates of both elections created an opportunity for the EP elections to attract more attention than usual. Consequently, because of their importance, the supposed Second-Order national elections might develop a momentum of their own.

Another specific feature of an analysis of EP elections in Bulgaria is connected with the absence of a constant party system during the four years between the last parliamentary elections in 2005 and the 2009 European ones. During this period of time, several new parties were established, one of which was the expected winner in the elections and two others which had a realistic chance of entering the EP. In this sense, it might be more conclusive if the 2009 European elections in Bulgaria are compared to the subsequent national elections than compared to previous national elections.

### 10.2 Europe Salience theory

Some of the hypotheses of the Europe Salience theory can be tested on the electoral results of the extreme Nationalist and anti-European party *Ataka*, the only party in Bulgaria that opposed the Lisbon Treaty. With 308,052 votes, equivalent to 12 per cent of the vote, *Ataka* showed considerable stability in its electorate and even increased the absolute number of its voters compared to 2005. It has obviously occupied a niche in Bulgarian society. However, due to higher voter turnout in 2009 compared to 2007, it decreased its relative weight and sent two instead of three deputies to the extreme right of the EP spectrum. It is not possible to assess the results of the Greens, because different parties took part in different elections and this party family is rather marginal in Bulgaria at the moment.

The lack of political polarization on EU agenda issues made EP elections instrumental in the conquest of power in Bulgaria. EP elections paved the way for the rise of the present-day ruling party.

If we try to assess the relative size of the Second-Order Election theory compared to the Europe Salience theory, we can say that the Bulgarian EP elections as a whole can be seen more
as second-order national elections. However, they have been not entirely of that kind, inasmuch as they included some of the characteristics of the alternative view.

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