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# Balkan Politicians, Mostly Immune to the Influence of EU Integration

SIMEON MITROPOLITSKI

Are the post-communist politicians changing their political identities as a result of European Union (EU) integration? Are they more likely to accept democratic norms and procedures as their countries are moving toward EU membership?

The literature gives two mutually excluding answers with possible shades of gray between them. On the one hand, Vachudova and Spendzharova<sup>1</sup>, Levitsky and Way<sup>2</sup>, Pridham<sup>3</sup>, Hullen and Borzel<sup>4</sup>, share the optimistic vision of EU integration as beneficiary to democratic development in post-communist context, including also its role in promoting democratic political culture, in shifting political calculations toward accepting western norms, and in teaching local political elites the rules of democratic bargaining. As an alternative, authors such as Gallagher<sup>5</sup>, Raik<sup>6</sup> and Bideleux<sup>7</sup> tell a different story. EU

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<sup>1</sup> Milada Anna Vachudova, *Europe Undivided: Democracy, Leverage, and Integration After Communism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005; Aneta B. Spendzharova, Milada Anna Vachudova, "Catching Up? Consolidating Liberal Democracy in Bulgaria and Romania after EU Accession", *West European Politics*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2012, pp. 39-58; Milada Anna Vachudova, "EU Leverage and National Interests in the Balkans: The Puzzles of Enlargement Ten Years On", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 52, no. 1, pp. 122-138.

<sup>2</sup> Steven Levitsky, Lucan A. Way, "Linkage, Leverage, and the Post-Communist Divide", *East European Politics and Societies*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2007, pp. 48-66.

<sup>3</sup> Geoffrey PRIDHAM, *Designing Democracy: EU Enlargement and Regime Change in Post-Communist Europe*, Palgrave Macmillan, London and New York, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Vera van Hullen, Tanja Borzel, "The EU's Governance Transfer. From External Promotion to Internal Protection?", *SFB Governance Working Paper Series*, no. 56, 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Tom Gallagher, *Modern Romania: The End of Communism, the Failure of Democratic Reform, and the Theft of a Nation*, New York University Press, New York, 2005.

<sup>6</sup> Kristi Raik, "EU Accession of Central and Eastern European Countries: Democracy and Integration as Conflicting Logics", *East European Politics and Societies*, vol. 18, no. 4, 2004, pp. 567-594.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Bideleux, "Europeanization and the Limits of democratization in East-Central

conditionality may produce effects contrary to democratic expectations. Populist elites may also use European democratic image to promote their selfish political agenda. Thirdly, Coman and Crespy<sup>8</sup> find scholars who minimize the overall influence of EU integration in post-communist political development<sup>9</sup>. Finally, Sedelmeier argues<sup>10</sup> that EU pro-democratic influence over political actors in post-communist countries varies across issues and countries and that it might require a demanding constellation of favorable conditions for both social and material pressure.

This paper aims to settle down/address this dispute by bringing up the evolution of some key political decision makers in two post-communist countries, Bulgaria and Macedonia. Methodologically, it produces short analytical narratives on seven Bulgarian and four Macedonian politicians. These politicians, however, do not live in isolation. They are physical but also symbolic centers of groups of followers who maintain their discourse communities through intense communication. Therefore the information is evaluated in the light of these discourse communities, the traces of ideas that are present in the larger society. These traces were collected through field research in Bulgaria and Macedonia between 2009 and 2011. In terms of organization, the paper is divided into sections that tell the story of post-communist political development in both countries, followed by biographical narratives for each politician, followed by discussion of findings.

Findings for both countries represent a collection of different statements that are part of third-party interviews, media reports, and official party sites. The study narrates political events that are part of these top politicians' biographies. These statements were published for the most part in Bulgarian and Macedonian; the fact that Bulgarian was my mother tongue and Macedonian was very close to Bulgarian was of help to understand the messages on a semantic level; on a pragmatic level, the interviews that I made with ordinary

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Europe", in Geoffrey Pridham, Attila Agh (eds.), *Prospects for Democratic Consolidation in East-Central Europe*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2001, pp. 25-53.

<sup>8</sup> Ramona Coman, Amandine Crespy, "A Critical Assessment of the Concept of Europeanization in Light of the State of the Union", *Studia Politica. Romanian Political Science Review*, vol. XIV, no. 1, 2014, pp. 9-28.

<sup>9</sup> Ruud Koopmans, Paul Statham, *The Making of a European Public Sphere: Media Discourse and Political Contention*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2010; Yves Meny, Pierre Muller, Jean-Louis Quermonne, *Adjusting to Europe: the Impact of the European Union on National Institutions and Policies*, Routledge, London, 1996; Rosa S. Salgado, Cornelia Woll, *L'Europe en action: l'europeanisation dans une perspective comparée*, l'Harmattan, Paris, 2007.

<sup>10</sup> Ulrich Sedelmeier, "Anchoring Democracy from Above? The European Union and Democratic Backsliding in Hungary and Romania after Accession", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 52, no. 1, pp.105-121.

Bulgarians and Macedonians were helpful to further interpret the political message in a particular social context.

Regarding the choice of politicians, seven for Bulgaria and four for Macedonia, at first, I decided to follow the evolution of the political identities of those who represented only authoritarian positions, former communist or populist. It made sense because if EU influence had to be found, these politicians would be the ideal group of initially reluctant but afterward accepting new European norms of behavior. Later on, after the first set of interviews with ordinary people in Bulgaria in 2009, I came to the conclusion that this approach of sample building was incomplete; it could not identify the opposite trend, politicians who became less democratic and more authoritarian, or more populist, alongside or despite or maybe because of the process of European integration. This goal not to miss and to account for as many as possible political culture trajectories explained why I included politicians for both Bulgaria and Macedonia who entered and remained in the politics representing, at least initially, democratic and pro-European positions.

The choice of the politicians had to meet certain criteria. They had to be as long as possible within active politics throughout the entire post-communist period (1989-2011). They had to occupy key decision-making positions, such as heads of state, heads of government, or “gray cardinals”. They had to enjoy significant popular support for at least part of the post-communist period. Some very interesting politicians from both countries were eliminated from the sample because their sudden death made difficult if not impossible for me to speculate on their possible political trajectories if they had survived until 2011; thus I eliminated the former Bulgarian Prime Minister Andrej Lukanov, a key figure in Bulgarian post-communist political transition, who was killed in 1996 and the Macedonian president Boris Trajkovski who died in a plane crash in 2004. Another potentially interesting politician from Macedonia, Ali Ahmeti, the leader of the ethnic Albanian party *The Democratic Union for Integration*, was eliminated from the sample because he represented a confirmed case of schizophrenia; in this case I could not filter out the influence of the EU from his mental condition.

## BULGARIA

In Bulgaria, the very beginning of the post-communist transition was heavily marked by the political domination of the ideological heirs of the Communist party: they won the first competitive election in 1990. The first political transition occurred in 1991 following a parliamentary election. The parliamentary elections in 1994, 1997, 2001, 2005, 2009, 2013 and 2014 were won by parties and coalitions in opposition to the incumbent government. The

president of the republic, elected by popular vote, is largely a ceremonial figure. The presidential elections have been won by either incumbents (2007) or challengers (1997 and 2002). Aside from the first post-communist year of political transition, when the country was marked as an “intermediary” political regime, Bulgaria has always been considered a “free” political regime by Freedom House’s annual assessment<sup>11</sup>. Bulgaria is an interesting case as a principal subject for this study as it became an EU member state not too long ago, in January 2007. In addition, this country defies the simplistic logic of institutional transfer from West to East. Even after its formal EU membership, Bulgaria continues to incite serious questions regarding the quality of its democracy<sup>12</sup>.

### *Alexander Lilov (1933-2013)*

Member of the Politburo of the Communist Party and of the State Council in the 1970s and 1980s. Leader of the Socialist, former Communist, Party in 1990-1991. Known in the party circles as the “strategist”. From 1993 led the Party’s Center for Strategic research. PhD. Worked on philosophy of art, ideological struggles, and international relations. Among his most recent works were: *The dialogues of civilizations* (2004) and *Informational epoch* (2006). Despite the lack of formal positions in the state, there was a consensus among his political friends and enemies that he was still among the top decision-makers in the Socialist Party. He was credited with having imposed the idea of unity at all costs within the party despite the calls for separation of the communist and social-democratic wings at the beginning of the post-communist transition.

An overview of some recent writings and interviews of Lilov showed that he remained a communist believer as far as the final goal of social development was concerned. He stated that there was a new form of society developing beyond the industrial and the capitalist form of production, and also beyond the soviet type of socialism<sup>13</sup>. As a true Marxist, he believed that this new society would come forward following objective laws of history, and as such it was historically inevitable. Talking about Bulgaria within the large European Union, Lilov was a utilitarianist: the European Union was just an economic tool for Bulgaria to overcome its technological backwardness through foreign investments that could not be accumulated fast through internal sources. Nowhere Lilov spoke about national identity shifts toward more European

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<sup>11</sup> FREEDOM HOUSE, *Nations in Transition*, 2014, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/>, accessed 16 October 2014.

<sup>12</sup> Venelin Ganev, *Preying on the State: The Transformation of Bulgaria After 1989*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 2007.

<sup>13</sup> TEMA WEEKLY, <http://www.temanews.com/index.php?p=tema&iid=333&aid=8066>, accessed 16 October 2014.

elements whether descriptive or normative. The nation-state for him remained historically and conceptually the best level of analysis. Lilov did not consider European liberal democracy as the only possible for Bulgaria or even as the best form of political regime, although he acknowledged that it might have some benefits over the Soviet political regime<sup>14</sup> (Blog.bg, 2009). Nevertheless Lilov defended the need for authoritarian leaders, akin to the Machiavellian princes of *virtù*, to push ahead Bulgaria on the fast track of the post-industrial informational society<sup>15</sup>. To summarize Lilov's political positions, he did not change significantly toward a more procedural and egalitarian political culture. He remained deeply entrenched within the communist teleology; he believed that a perfect social world beyond politics was not only possible but also historically inevitable. European Union membership was just the way to accelerate the path of history in Bulgaria and therefore it was desirable. The ultimate goal of civilization, however, lied beyond the EU itself. Comparing the ideas of Lilov with the set of Bulgarian interviews, I could safely say that there was a good match between them and those who still believed in communism. They were also people of certain age, 70 and over. For them, post-communist transition was no more than a strategic retreat or a temporary accommodation before further political and social mobilization that aimed to build a communism. There was not even a talk about accepting the new procedural rules as fundamentally fair, or, using Lilov's words, there was no acceptance of the "end of history".

### *Georgi Parvanov (b. 1957)*

President of the republic since 2002 and reelected for the second term that started in 2007. Former leader of the Bulgarian Socialist Party (1996-2001). In early 1997 he was largely credited with preserving the social and political peace in the country by refusing, on behalf of his party, at that time with an absolute majority in the Parliament, to accept a new mandate to form a government. In mid-2009 he was credited with the idea of electoral law amendments that introduced mixed proportional-single district systems instead of the existing simple proportional system. Doctor in history (1988); his scientific interests lied with the history of the socialist and communist movement in Bulgaria as well as with the Bulgarian national movement. Between 1992 and 1996 he was director of the Center for historical and political studies of the Socialist party. Up to the late 1990s, as a leader of the Socialist

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<sup>14</sup> BLOG.BG, <http://gerbsenior.blog.bg/politika/2009/01/31/aleksandyr-lilovinterviu.284436>, accessed 16 October 2014.

<sup>15</sup> TEMA WEEKLY, cit.

party, he strongly suggested to take into account the negative Russian position on NATO and EU enlargements.

Unlike Lilov, Parvanov was not a communist believer. For him the real social world, the world to be improved, was the world we lived in. The European Union was mainly a tool for economic and technological modernization, and a guarantor for the peaceful development of the continent, in general, and of the Balkan region, in particular. The EU, according to Parvanov, influenced the candidate countries either with the direct effects of institutional diffusion or by changing the expectations of the local political elites and general populations. Some statements, however, showed that he was far from uncritical regarding European discourses in different areas. Taking collective security as an example, Parvanov remained “realist” by inviting Russia to be a more active player in the Balkans alongside Europe and the United States in what he described as regional balance of forces. Another way of using the EU for domestic political purposes was his idea of increasing the relative power of the president and reducing the relative power of the parties. The imperatives of adopting European norms, according to Parvanov, clashed with the existence of hundreds of parties, which promoted selfish economic interests. The presidential institution, on the other hand, according to him, was the most republican institution in the country, thus more adapted for coordinating the economic and technological development. We could better understand these ideas for institutional change with the special personal relations between Parvanov and the Russian president Vladimir Putin and his projects of establishing a “power vertical”. There would be no space here to explain the reasons why, unlike Bulgaria, the presidential “coup” in Russia became possible in the early 2000s. It suffices to say that Parvanov was among the chief architects of the electoral law amendment in 2009, only weeks before the general election that tried to change the rules in order to reproduce the same parliamentary majority. This showed that Parvanov was not ready to play by the rules, and that he used the EU symbolically as an excuse for his attempts to change the rules of the political game. It was hard to find some analogies of this behavior with any other Bulgarian informant in the interviews. Another example of playing at the border if not outside frame of rules was Parvanov’s decision to back the new citizens’ political movement in late 2010 that presented candidates to the Parliament elections in 2014. According to the Bulgarian constitution, Parvanov at the time of his presidency was not allowed to have party affiliations; the constitutionality of such moves was therefore questionable.

### *Zhan Videnov (b. 1959)*

He was a nomenclature cadre of the Communist youth organization in the late 1980s. He was the leader of the Bulgarian Socialist Party (1991-1996) as a political and ideological heir of Alexander Lilov. Bulgarian Prime Minister in

1995-1997. He stepped down following hyperinflation, social protests and calls for resignation from inside the Socialist party. Left the Socialist party executive in 2000; left the party by 2009. He was part of radical socialists' groups for discussions, not happy with the official party policy and the general political direction of the country. He taught courses on European integration at the European College of Economics and Management in Plovdiv, Bulgaria.

Zhan Videnov was a radical socialist; yet words such as “communism”, “revolution” were not part of his everyday vocabulary. Instead, he preferred using negative qualifications, to attack the rich and most powerful, the mafia, oligarchs, and firm directors<sup>16</sup>. Ideologically he was close to Lilov. Videnov was against the separation of powers and against the courts' independence from the political executive. The state for him was a machine that did not like having more than one head. This also explained why he was against the office of president that interfered with governmental policy<sup>17</sup>; according to Bulgarian Constitution the office of president was largely a ceremonial figure. For Videnov the art of politics was technocracy, deprived of feelings and subjective dimensions of any sort. This was what he saw in the European Union and European integration, an opportunity for attaining better technocracy and social management. This technocracy was value neutral; it might be used for different political projects, including radical leftist. There was no independent civil society in his political project; even the media had to be mobilized in order to reveal the enemies of the people. The state had to be kept economically and financially as independent as possible from foreign interests, western as well as eastern. For Videnov, electoral procedures came always second to the will of people, which, undisturbed, had always to give power in the hands of progressive parties. If not, this was always a result of lack of political principles, such as being ready to form strategic electoral and post-electoral coalitions without other purpose than taking and remaining in power. Like Lilov, Videnov had sympathizers among some older leftist citizens. As a technocrat, he was also close to some interviewees within the Bulgarian civil service; they reflected the vision of the state as unitary and independent actor from the private social interests.

### *Ivan Kostov (b. 1949)*

He was an economist who supported Marxist ideology even after the start of post-communist transition in 1989. In 1990 he entered active politics and ran for a member of Parliament under the banner of the united anti-communist

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<sup>16</sup> VESTI.BG, <http://www.vesti.bg/?tid=40&oid=2749391>, accessed 16 October 2014.

<sup>17</sup> DNEVNIK DAILY, [http://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2010/06/10/915180\\_jan\\_videnov\\_prezidentut\\_triabva\\_da\\_ima\\_samo/](http://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2010/06/10/915180_jan_videnov_prezidentut_triabva_da_ima_samo/), accessed 16 October 2014.



opposition. In 1991 he was nominated as minister of finance. In 1994 he was elected as chairman of the anti-communist coalition, Union of democratic forces; he was reelected in early 1997. In 1997, he won the general election and became Prime Minister. From this time on he was also known in the party circles as the “commander”. His government strongly pursued the EU and NATO integration goals. He lost the election in 2001 and stepped down as a party leader. In 2004 he created a new center-right party, *Democrats for strong Bulgaria*, which helped him enter the Parliament in 2005 and again in 2009, although his influence was currently marginal. He stepped down from party leadership in 2013 when his party remained outside the Parliament. Because of his physical appearance many Bulgarians, usually opposing Kostov’s policies, called him “mangal”, which is a pejorative word for a dark-skinned gypsy.

Ivan Kostov was a conservative politician; he advocated a free market economy with some social protection, defending Christian moral values, and a strong foreign policy orientation to the West, EU and NATO combined. He was also a strong advocate of a United Europe of nations with the possibility, but only if necessary, of some supranational institutions such as the common European currency. Throughout the 1990s and up to the end of his term in office as a Prime Minister European integration, always together with Euro-Atlantic integration, was a “civilizing” project, a Bulgarian choice for modernity, free markets, liberal democracy, and human rights<sup>18</sup>. In that sense he strongly opposed the perceptions that Bulgaria was destined to remain outside the Western sphere of influence. EU membership was instrumental in bringing Bulgaria into the West. By changing the main foreign vector, from Russia toward Europe and the United States, Kostov changed domestic power relations from balanced and even tilting toward Moscow at the beginning of post-communist transition to predominantly pro-western at the end of the 1990s. In order to please the EU, he was ready to make big concessions such as closing four nuclear reactors that Brussels considered dangerous<sup>19</sup>. When in opposition, Kostov nevertheless advocated the Bulgarian agenda in Brussels. After becoming a EU member, Kostov tried to block Turkey’s membership because of the violations of democratic norms and human rights; he also strongly opposed the right to vote among some ethnic Turks, born in Bulgaria, who lived permanently in Turkey since the mass expulsion in 1989. Kostov easily found close matches with some interviewees as far as European integration was concerned. These were mainly older citizens who opposed the Russian influence in Bulgaria, open anti-communists, and financially independent persons thanks to the real estate restitution policy of Kostov’s government in

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<sup>18</sup> BULGARIAN GOVERNMENT, [http://sun450.government.bg/old/bg/prime\\_minister/statements/2000/02\\_11\\_Otchet\\_NS.htm](http://sun450.government.bg/old/bg/prime_minister/statements/2000/02_11_Otchet_NS.htm), accessed 16 October 2014.

<sup>19</sup> KAPITAL WEEKLY, [http://www.capital.bg/politika\\_i\\_ikonomika/bulgaria/1999/10/30/252797\\_zatvariame\\_starite\\_blokove\\_na\\_aec\\_kozlodui/](http://www.capital.bg/politika_i_ikonomika/bulgaria/1999/10/30/252797_zatvariame_starite_blokove_na_aec_kozlodui/), accessed 16 October 2014.

the late 1990s. Compared to the other Bulgarian politicians within this sample, Kostov “spoke” better European language; this language, however, had been learned before the European integration of Bulgaria officially started. Chronologically, Kostov had made his “civilization” choice much before Brussels started the integration talks; and this was for strategic reasons linked to the distribution of political forces within and outside the country. In 2010 the EU remained for Kostov only a tool, material and symbolic, for clearing the internal political landscape of uncivilized and uncivilizing enemies, found mainly in the Socialist party but also in the Turkish ethnic *Movement for Rights and Freedoms*.

*Simeon of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha*  
(*Simeon Saksoburggotski*) (b .1937)

Born as heir to the royal family in Bulgaria, he was forced into exile in 1946 following referendum establishing a republican form of government. In April 2001 he called for creation of political movement bearing his name, the *National Movement Simeon II*, to take part in the forthcoming general election. He won the election with a landslide and became Bulgarian Prime Minister (2001-2005). During his mandate Bulgaria joined NATO in 2004. He lost the general election of 2005, but his party took part in the new government coalition (2005-2009). His party did not enter the Parliament following the 2009 general election. Simeon of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha immediately stepped down from the party leadership. As political refugee he never renounced his claims to be a head of state. As a Prime Minister, in 2001, he took oath to protect the republican constitution.

Among Bulgarian politicians, Simeon was in a class of his own, being most of his life a political refugee, mostly in Spain, and also being a close or distant cousin to most European royal families. This gave him the unique opportunity to feel himself “European” long before most Bulgarians did; in other words, he did not need to prove his Europeanness or change identity in order to become European. Unlike most Bulgarians that still perceived Europe as “over there”, since 2007 he openly spoke of Brussels as “we”<sup>20</sup>. His principal political agenda when he entered Bulgarian politics was the restoration of the monarchy or at least putting under question the legitimacy of the republic as form of government. With the passing of time, his monarchic ambitions vanished and the role of a Prime Minister so far remained the pinnacle of his political carrier. Initially reluctant about strongly pushing ahead with the EU

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<sup>20</sup> BLOG.BG, <http://meto76.blog.bg/politika/2010/04/25/negovo-velichestvosimeonsakskoburggotski-chlenstvoto-ni-v-.534361>, accessed 16 October 2014.

and NATO agenda, he gradually accepted the already predominant social and political opinion and built his political legitimacy as a strong advocate of both international institutions. Outside of power he used the EU as an institutional tool for pursuing his private interests<sup>21</sup>. Feeling both Bulgarian and European, Simeon could easily switch allegiance because there was no line separating both identities. In that sense his opinions were very close to some expressed by the interviewees who used the EU in order to solve their private problems and thus being comfortable of becoming de-nationalized.

### *Volen Siderov (b. 1956)*

He entered active politics as editor-in-chief of the main opposition daily newspaper *Demokracija* in 1990-1992 and later as deputy editor-in-chief of daily newspaper *Monitor*. He studied theology. His political views were laid down in literary writings *The Boomerang of the evil*; *The Power of the Mammon*; *The Bulgarophobia* that were published in the early 2000s. In brief, he considered the international Jewish-led conspiracy and freemasonry as driving forces for modern Bulgarian political development; they aimed at genocide and enslavement of Christian Orthodox nations, forcing upon them wars and cataclysms in order to make them financially dependent. He tried briefly to work as political partner for the Bulgarian Socialist Party in the mid-1990s and unsuccessfully ran for a candidate of the Simeon Saxe-Coburg and Gotha movement in 2001. He ran, unsuccessfully, for Sofia mayor in 2003. In 2005 his newly-registered party *Ataka*, named after his popular TV talk show, the National Union Attack, finished in 4<sup>th</sup> place in the general election with 8% of the votes. He lost the presidential election in 2006 against the incumbent president Georgi Parvanov. His party maintained its electoral strength during the general election of 2009.

Siderov opposed European integration as a form of suppression of the Bulgarian nation. He advocated a strong Bulgarian state and the assimilation of the ethnic minorities through education. Every Bulgarian government before and especially after the beginning of the post-communist transition represented mafia interests that aimed at the theft and destruction of the Bulgarian nation. The EU was a form of surrendering national sovereignty; the possible entry of Turkey into the EU would signal the beginning of a new Turkish (Ottoman) yoke in Bulgaria. The EU was ruled by special interests, by politicians who stole as much as their Bulgarian counterparts. The more integrated Bulgaria became within the EU, the more radical the ideas of Siderov became. This

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<sup>21</sup> DIR.BG NEWS, <http://dnes.dir.bg/news/simeon-saxkoburggotski-mincho-spasov-tzarskite-imoti-6835957>, accessed 16 October 2014.

radicalism paradoxically appeared less radical given the even greater radicalization of the mainstream politicians against the migrants in some EU member states. Despite his anti-European vocabulary, Siderov's speeches showed the acceptance of Europe as political "normality" that he used in order to measure up the Bulgarian, and other, political and social developments<sup>22</sup>. When necessary, he was ready to invoke some European principles, such as the free movements of people, in order to defend his positions. His positions and political trajectory easily found analogues throughout the general population.

### *Ahmed Dogan (b. 1954)*

He took part in underground political activity against the forced change of names of the ethnic Turks in the late 1980s. Arrested in 1987; condemned to 10 years of imprisonment for creating an anti-state organization. He fell under amnesty law and was liberated in the late 1989. PhD. Founding father of the party *Movement for Rights and Freedoms* in 1990, also known as the Turkish ethnic party, and its leader until 2013. Under his leadership, his party supported the governments in 1991-1992 and in 1992-1994 and took part in the governmental coalitions in 2001-2005 and in 2005-2009.

Dogan presented his party as part of an alternative political and ethnic model of inclusion in the Balkans in the 1990s, the other alternative model being the ethnic populism based on ethnic exclusion and oppression, e.g. the Milosevic's regime in Serbia. The European Union was used instrumentally by Dogan throughout the 1990s as a "normality" representing ethnic tolerance as opposed to the Balkanization. Political support in Parliament was offered as an exchange for presenting Bulgaria as being up to the European democratic standards, and his party was presented as a guarantor for political stability and ethnic peace, given the strong and irreconcilable opposition between the Communist party successor and the anti-communist political pole. With the EU membership being mission accomplished in 2007, Dogan realized that the ethnic populism that was kept under control was about to blow up, and that his party would inevitably become the center of attacks of the Bulgarian ethnic majority<sup>23</sup>. Being again in opposition, without natural political allies, made difficult the task of surviving through building larger coalitions. The EU could not be used directly anymore as a tool for influencing the Bulgarian policy because EU membership made Bulgaria relatively immune to critiques

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<sup>22</sup> Political party ATAKA, [http://www.ataka.bg/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=5102&Itemid=91](http://www.ataka.bg/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=5102&Itemid=91), accessed 16 October 2014.

<sup>23</sup> BLOG.BG, <http://reporter.blog.bg/novini/2009/12/13/dokladyt-na-dogan.453865>, accessed 16 October 2014.

regarding the composition of government. That was why Dogan tried to influence directly the European Union by manipulating its original idea of union of democratic values instead of just economic union or of Christian political club. By trying to shift the core European identity toward more ethnic and religious inclusiveness Dogan hoped to see Turkey inside the Union, and by turning it into multicultural project, to “normalize” his political position within the Bulgarian political landscape. Thus, for Dogan, European integration was not just a means of directly changing his position within Bulgarian politics or changing the priorities of public policies, it was also a new opportunity for dialogue with Brussels that represented two-way political road of mutual influence.

## MACEDONIA

In the Former Yugoslav Republic (FYR) of Macedonia, from the beginning of the post-communist period until the end of the 1990s, Kiro Gligorov, a former high-ranking communist official, dominated the political executive as president of the republic. The first political transition occurred in 1998 and 1999: a large political coalition, led by Ljubco Georgievski, won both the parliamentary and the presidential election. Political transitions also occurred after the parliamentary elections in 2002 and 2006, and after the presidential election in 2004 and 2009. During the post-communist period, Freedom House (2014) has considered Macedonia as “intermediary” political regime. Macedonia, which is a candidate for EU membership, is still in the conditionality “waiting room,” pending the official start of accession negotiations. For comparative analytical purposes, Macedonia is a good candidate for a study alongside Bulgaria.

### *Kiro Gligorov (b. 1917-2012)*

He was a member of the anti-fascist resistance movement during the World War II and an active participant in the political creation of the People’s Republic of Macedonia after the war. He was a member of the Yugoslav federal government in the 1960s and president of the federal assembly, the parliament, during the 1970s, and also a member of the collective presidency of Yugoslavia. After the establishment of pluralistic democracy he was elected twice as president of Macedonia (1991-1999). Severely wounded during a bomb explosion in 1995; he lost one arm and remained blinded with one eye. After his terms in office accomplished, Gligorov wrote books; he also created a foundation bearing his name for cultural projects. He was an important member

of the *Balkan Political Club*, a club of former Balkan heads of states and heads of governments that aimed at contributing to the regional peace and prosperity.

Gligorov was largely perceived as a pro-Serbian politician despite his claims of being equally distanced politically toward Macedonia's four neighbors during his terms in office in the 1990s; these neighbors being Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece, and Albania. He was the political architect of the first post-independence Constitution<sup>24</sup> and of the referendum for independence of September 1991. The referendum, that officially proclaims independence, in fact opened the possibility to renew political links with the other Yugoslav republics within a new union. This aspect of the referendum question should not be forgotten given the real situation in September 1991, when Yugoslavia did not have functioning federal institutions, the Slovenian ten-days war was over and the war between Serbia and Croatia had already begun. Despite the slow process of European integration during the 1990s, Gligorov was its strong advocate as an alternative to the ethnic enclaves and the creation of Slav or Christian Orthodox axes. Despite his European optimism, he did not accept European leadership without question<sup>25</sup>. In that respect, he shared the same opinion with many Macedonians who did not accept one-size-fits-all type of solutions coming from Brussels. Gligorov, being optimistic as far as EU integration was concerned as a distant goal, remained pessimist regarding its short-term prospective. That was why he suggested other intermediate forms of integration that stimulate regional cooperation. This key element might suggest that Gligorov saw European integration through the prism of the former economic ties with the other former Yugoslav republics, a quite common opinion in Macedonia.

### *Branko Crvenkovski (b. 1962)*

He entered the politics at the first multiparty elections in Macedonia as part of Yugoslavia (1990). A former communist, Crvenkovski presided over the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia, the SDSM, since 1991, except for the time of his presidential term in office. He was a Prime Minister of Macedonia after independence from 1992 to 1998 and from 2002 to 2004. As a Prime Minister, he officially applied for EU membership. From 1998 to 2002 he was the leader of the opposition in Parliament. Elected president of the republic for one term between 2004 and 2009. Known for his controversial decision in 1996

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<sup>24</sup> MACEDONIA GOVERNMENT, <http://makedonija.name/government/constitution-of-macedonia>, accessed 16 October 2014.

<sup>25</sup> UTRINSKI VESNIK DAILY, <http://www.ex-yupress.com/mkutvesnik/mkutvesnik8.html>, accessed 16 October 2014.

to remove all Albanian flags in front of governmental buildings in the areas where the Albanian minority represented the majority of the population; in 2005, as a president, he made a political U-turn by legalizing the Albanian flags.

Regarding the “name dispute” with Greece, which by extension was a dispute with the EU, Crvenkovski insisted on finding a solution that would be satisfactory to both sides<sup>26</sup>. As a president he frequently expressed the view that Macedonia should live by European norms and not vice versa, thus accepting the asymmetrical power relation between Skopje and Brussels. By doing so, he put in jeopardy his political future, given the strong opposition within Macedonian society on this issue. With nationalist propaganda playing in favor of his political enemies, now in power, the answer Crvenkovski was giving was to embrace the EU stand at any political cost even if that includes asking for change of the republic’s name, even in case of a real conflict of interests between Macedonia and Brussels, thus leaving the nationalist field even more in the hands of his political enemies. Crvenkovski’s views were shared by some ethnic Macedonians, and by most minorities in the country. The tough question was to understand the real influence of the EU on this ideological evolution; whether the EU was not just another name for asking for creation of new Yugoslavia when all former Yugoslav republics joined the EU. My tentative answer so far would be affirmative, the EU really was a way to sell again the Yugoslav idea; the proof was the change of the EU integration issue from marginal in the 1990s when Crvenkovski was a Prime Minister to top priority in the 2000s, when he was a president. In the 1990s an eventual rapprochement with the EU would have distanced Macedonia from most other former Yugoslav republics in the midst of military conflict. Once the wars ended and Milosevic was removed from power in Serbia, the possibility of all former Yugoslav republics entering the EU became real, thus explaining the more active and pro-European polity of Skopje.

### *Lubcho (Lupcho) Georgievski (b. 1966)*

Leader of the Party VMRO-DPMNE from its inception in 1990 to 2003. The first vice-premier of Macedonia after its independence in 1991. Leader of the opposition in parliament until 1998 and a Premier between 1998 and 2002. Removed from the party leadership in 2003 he created a new party with marginal influence. While Premier, he presided over the military confrontation between Albanian armed separatists and the police in 2001; the conflict ended after the EU provided diplomatic aide. After the conflict, he suggested the

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<sup>26</sup> MACEDONIAN INTERNATIONAL NEWS AGENCY, <http://macedoniaonline.eu/content/view/15218/45/>, accessed 16 October 2014.

creation of ethnically pure nations on the Balkans, through population exchange, in order to eliminate the risks of new ethnic conflicts; he kept this idea unchanged throughout the years ahead<sup>27</sup> (Frog News, 2007). This suggestion was universally condemned, thus probably contributing to his demise as a party leader in 2003. In 2006 he received Bulgarian citizenship; this decision was severely criticized in his country and he gradually left Macedonian political life.

Georgievski declared himself a “bulgarophile”, which in the context of Macedonia was a code word meaning either feeling ethnically linked to Bulgarians or feeling to be of Bulgarian origin. This position made him automatically an anti-Serbian and anti-Yugoslav politician. Accordingly, his attitudes toward possible EU integration followed the ups and downs of the Serbian chances for euro-integration. He was more enthusiastic toward EU integration when Milosevic was in power in Belgrade and EU integration would mean distancing Macedonia from Serbia; in the early 2000s, however, he proposed his anti-European plan of creating pure ethnic states. This anti-European turn explained why Georgievski complained about the agreement to end the ethnic conflict in 2001 as being imposed under the pressure coming from the EU and the United States<sup>28</sup>. By deduction, I would suggest that the conflict of 2001 itself was a way of ethnically dividing the country, mainly between the ethnic Macedonians and the Albanian minority with possible subsequent exchange of population. Regarding the “name dispute” with Greece, he advocated finding a compromise respecting the asymmetrical power relations with the EU. The reason for accepting this time the EU diktat might have lied in the strategic calculation to destabilize the ethnic identity of the country through imposing a new name, thus making the Macedonians more acceptant of the idea of their Bulgarian origin; only such a radical switch in national identity could guarantee that he reentered Macedonian political life as a mainstream politician. The idea of an ethnically divided Macedonia was not popular even among the ethnic minorities who preferred EU integration as a way of solving their national aspirations to live without borders. For him the EU was either a tool or an excuse, never a new supranational identity.

### *Nikola Gruevski (b. 1970)*

His family originated from the territory of Greece. He was an economist; his economic ideas developed in the mid-1990s and did not change ever since. He challenged the liberal dogma of the benefits of foreign investment for fast economic development. He was minister of finance in the VMRO-DPMNE

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<sup>27</sup> FROGNEWS.BG, [http://frognews.bg/news\\_996/Liubcho\\_Georgievski\\_Velika\\_Albania\\_shte\\_spasi\\_Makedonia/](http://frognews.bg/news_996/Liubcho_Georgievski_Velika_Albania_shte_spasi_Makedonia/), accessed 16 October 2014.

<sup>28</sup> FROGNEWS.BG, cit.



government between 1998 and 2002. After the EU-brokered peace agreement in 2001 and the electoral defeat in 2002 he presided over the pro-EU faction within the party, ousting the former leader Georgievski and becoming himself party leader. He won the parliamentary election in 2006; he got another term in office with a landslide victory in 2008 after failing to secure an invitation for NATO membership; he won again the elections in 2011 and 2014. He was the political architect of the Skopje-2014 projet; a huge by the local standards public investment that started in 2008 aiming to change the image of the capital city center by adding ancient-style buildings, structures, and monuments.

Gruevski advocated finding a compromise with Greece over the name of the republic<sup>29</sup>. He however did not accept that Greece picks the name or circle of names to choose from. He considered the EU not as unified entity, but as an international organization within which there were many, often conflicting, interests; he tried to isolate Greece within the EU in order to change the balance of forces in Macedonia's favor. His perception of the EU reflected his vision of Europe as a community of relatively independent nations; a community within which the real decision-makers were and would always be the national governments. Within such a Europe, Macedonia had to remain relatively independent and relatively economically self-sufficient, which corresponded to his economic vision. For him the EU influence, which was by its very nature heterogenous, far from imposing the idea of inevitability of the membership, of the asymmetrical power relations, of the EU diktat, made him politically more active in order to rebalance these relations, by looking for strong allies within the EU<sup>30</sup>. Instead of complaining, like Georgievski, about the EU diktat, Gruevski affirmed his independence vis-à-vis the EU by trying to isolate Greece within the union; the strong popular support among the main ethnic group in Macedonia made him even more confident that his stand of defiance was politically sustainable.

It went without saying that his views were supported by many ethnic Macedonians. Unlike Gligorov and Crvenkovski who interpreted the EU as a tool of renewing the links between the former Yugoslav states, and Georgievski who saw the EU as a possible tool for "Bulgarization", Gruevski entered a dialogue of defiance with Brussels to foster a separate Macedonian identity. The asymmetrical power relation between the EU and Macedonia, therefore, instead of bringing Macedonia closer to Brussels, made the country more independent and sefl-confident.

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<sup>29</sup> TURKEY AND MACEDONIA NEWSLETTER, <http://turkeymacedonia.wordpress.com/tag/nikola-gruevski/>, accessed 16 October 2014.

<sup>30</sup> Most countries in the world, including many EU members recognized Macedonia under its constitutional name. Personally, I observed that in the EU offices in Skopje the local political maps had names reading "Republic of Macedonia" instead of "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia".

## COMPARING BULGARIA AND MACEDONIA

Bulgaria and Macedonia are on two different stages of European integration, which partly explains the differences in both countries between the developments of a new European identity. Some top Bulgarian politicians already develop such a new, more complex identity: Kostov, Simeon II, Siderov, and Dogan; there is, however, no such trend among the top Macedonian politicians. Interesting fact, none among the Bulgarian former communist leaders within the sample: Lilov, Parvanov, and Videnov, develops supplemental European identity; as it turns out, which may be the possible explanation for this fact, their political sub-culture is very resistant against western ideological indoctrination. They remain either communist believers, such as Lilov and Videnov, or use the EU only as an instrument for personal political ambitions, such as Parvanov. As far as European integration is concerned, the Bulgarian non-communist politicians are more likely to be influenced by it. Among them, however, Kostov is a peculiar case; he is under EU influence only if we enlarge the definition of EU integration well beyond the period of formal accession negotiations. He embarked on the EU train before the train was put together; as if he made the right calculation long in advance and adjusted his earlier positions, which were of being a Marxist economist, to fit the imperatives of the future world, neo-liberal and neo-conservative. Simeon II had fully adopted the European perspective to the point of using the EU institutions for personal interests. He too, however, had developed this new identity long before the EU integration by any definition; in a sense that he was European as early if not much earlier as being Bulgarian. I would point at the two remaining Bulgarian cases as most interesting for my research; Siderov and Dogan developed new European identities as EU integration went on. They felt part of a larger political landscape where their different political luggage, extreme right or liberal, could find storage space. They felt influenced directly by the processes within this larger landscape. But they were not just reacting to events that were orchestrated elsewhere. They both focused their policy on redefining the core meaning of being European, exclusively Christian for Siderov or inclusively multicultural for Dogan. They both looked at moving toward the political center and to a dominant position within domestic and supranational politics by rearticulating the main principles Europe was standing on. It seems that such approach is not trademark of Bulgarian politicians who represent ethnic minority interests. Dembinska<sup>31</sup> (2009) reports similar development in other new EU countries, such as Poland, Latvia and Lithuania.

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<sup>31</sup> Magdalena Dembinska, "L'appropriation de l'Europe par les minorités: une instrumentalisation bénigne", in Amandine Crespy, Mathieu Petithomme (eds.), *L'Europe sous tensions. Appropriation et contestation de l'intégration européenne*, l'Harmattan, Paris, 2009, pp. 239-260.

There was no corresponding new European identity under development among the Macedonian top political decision makers. Two of them, Gligorov and Crvenkovski, used the EU only as a politically correct tool for reestablishing close links with the former Yugoslav republics with a possible hidden agenda of reestablishing close links with Serbia in particular. Close to this group as a way of using the EU as a tool, but with the idea of moving Macedonia closer to Bulgaria was Georgievski. Only Gruevski was in fact strengthening the local national identity by redefining the power relations with the EU, a union that in his view was rather a community of heterogeneous interests than a supranational union speaking with one voice. Ironically, Gruevski was the only Macedonian politician who changed under the influence of EU integration, but in quite different direction from that of the EU's formal intentions, by becoming less pro-European and more nationalistic.

The stronger influence of the EU in Bulgaria, even as a tool for personal political ambitions, was reflected in the fact that some Bulgarian politicians, all within the communist spectrum, could use it in order to change the rules of the political game in order to remain in power, e.g. Parvanov. This paradox could be explained by the fact that although the EU was perceived as influential by the population, the politicians, as relatively more autonomous in their decisions, could use this new symbolic actor in order to change the political agenda, in the name of EU integration of course. In Macedonia, where the country did not see the EU as such a powerful domestic player yet, the local politicians, even if they contemplated unconstitutional political changes, e.g. Georgievski's idea of pure ethnical division of the country, they could not use the EU as a main excuse.

To summarize, most politicians, both Bulgarian and Macedonian, are relatively immune to the influence of EU integration in the sense of identity change; most of them remain and some, like Gruevski, move even more toward nationally-based identity, looking at the EU only as a tool for serving their short- or long-term political domestic agenda. Some politicians in Bulgaria, such as Siderov and especially Dogan, however, along with the instrumental vision of the EU, have also developed a new complex European identity allowing them to look at the political world differently, not only to fully accept liberal democracy's rules, but also to act simultaneously on different levels, national and supranational. This is not a simple reproduction of the institutional logic that follows the EU integration of Bulgaria. These two top politicians, especially Dogan who represented the Turkish minority, are not simple agents that follow the imposed rules and norms from Brussels in exchange for protecting their own political and social or ethnic interests. On the contrary, they are relatively free actors who try to influence the source of their new identity. They not only apply the norms without question, but also, and this applies especially to Dogan, try to enter a new form of dialogue that has a potential of changing the nature of EU integration by changing the nature of the EU itself.