

**DEPARTMENT OF EUROPEAN STUDIES
FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY
SU "ST. KLEMENT OHRIDSKI"**

Summary

of

DISSERTATION FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

(code 3.3. Political science - European integration studies)

On

"An empirical reconstruction of political interactions

in the history of Bulgarian integration in the European Union"

(Study on the memories of participants in the process)

Georgi Dimitrov Dimitrov

Sofia, 2022

The dissertation's main text is of 1050 standard pages and contains a bibliography of 332 titles, of which 73 are in Bulgarian and the rest in English; 25 illustrative figures; 16 tables with empirical data and two appendices with information about the empirical study. The dissertation was discussed and approved at the Departmental council meeting of the specialty of European Studies at the Faculty of Philosophy, Sofia University "St. Kl. Ohridski", on 28.03.2022.

CONTENTS of the dissertation:

CHAPTER I - WHAT, WHY AND HOW WILL BE INVESTIGATED

- 1.1. Justification of the interest in Bulgarian integration in the EU
- 1.2. The subject of research
- 1.3. The challenge in the research task set by the previous academic experience
- 1.4. The key to understanding the European integration process – what exactly is the *way of its accomplishment as a political interaction?*
- 1.5. The background of the research design
- 1.6. Methodology for studying the *structure* of the aggregate discourse on the EU accession process as a *manifestation of its character*

CHAPTER II - WHY AND HOW DOES THE EU EMERGE AND ENLARGE (OR "IS BEING ENTERED IN")?

- 2.1. The conceptual and methodological program of the study
- 2.2. How to *understand* how the Eastern enlargement of the EU *happened?*
- 2.3. The fall of the Berlin Wall as a fundamental threat to Western Europe
- 2.4. The CEE countries as a monstrous challenge to the integration project
- 2.5. How the EU has gradually acquired the capacity to become an instrument for solving the European security problem
- 2.6. The strategy to have no strategy
- 2.7. The political rise of the European Commission in the context of a degradation in the imperativeness of accession instruments
- 2.8. The peculiarity of the Eastern perspective on "EU entry"
- 2.9. Summary: The initial contradiction as a determinant of the character of EU enlargement process

CHAPTER III - THE BEGINNING OF THE PROCESS: HOW DID IT ALL BEGIN?

- 3.1. The stake in the title
- 3.2. How to recognize the beginning?

- 3.3. **Content diversity in recorded responses**
- 3.4. **The actors of the EU accession process**
- 3.5. **The specific content of the integration objectives**
- 3.6. **Public forums - scarce but still available in a particular way**
- 3.7. **Explanations – logical consistency in the expressed positions**
- 3.8. **Summary: The overall picture**

CHAPTER IV - WHY INTEGRATE INTO THE EU?

- 4.1. **On policies and money**
- 4.2. **Framework premises for the attitude towards European funding**
- 4.3. **On the unknown and misunderstood in the preparation for EU membership**
- 4.4. **What is the Bulgarian integration in the EU – socio-historical background, peculiarities in the way of accomplishment, dubious results**
- 4.5. **The unknown and misunderstood role of decisive actors**
- 4.6. **Summary: Bulgaria's EU integration is a "Great unknown" worth understanding**

CHAPTER V - GEOPOLITICS AND EURO-ATLANTIC INTEGRATION

- 5.1. **The wars as an incentive for the EU's Eastern enlargement**
- 5.2. **Russia**
- 5.3. **Transformation of the steering contradiction in the course of joining NATO and EU accession**
- 5.4. **Summary: The overall political achievement - integration with the West**

CHAPTER VI - MEMBER STATES AND CANDIDATE COUNTRIES IN INTEGRATION INTERACTION

- 6.1. **Content and methodological framework assumptions for the forthcoming analysis**
- 6.2. **General characteristics of unequal participation in the process**
- 6.3. **Disproportionalities in the structure of integration relations**
- 6.4. **Structural specificities of national participations**
- 6.5. **Specificity of political participation of the most important countries**
- 6.5. **The exceptional few cases of serious support for Bulgaria**
- 6.6. **Marginal countries in Bulgaria's EU integration**
- 6.7. **Summary: Far too picturesque a picture of international relations**

CHAPTER VI - EU INSTITUTIONS AS ACTORS IN THE INTEGRATION PROCESS

- 7.1. The European Commission - our best friend who is not a friend at all
- 7.2. Structures of agency in the EC
- 7.3. The EC cannot be a friend
- 7.4. The Commission in time
- 7.5. How come the EC, both, *is* and is *not* our friend
- 7.6. Other EU institutions
- 7.7. Summary - The EC seen as ascending above all else

CHAPTER VIII - WHO PARTICIPATES IN BULGARIAN PREPARATIONS FOR EUMEMBERSHIP

- 8.1. Why Bulgaria in general?
- 8.2. Preparations for membership concentrate on completing negotiations
- 8.3. Central and marginal actors in the preparation
- 8.4. The main actors seen more closely
- 8.5. Peripheral players
- 8.6. The impact of historical dynamics on the way EU integration is conducted
- 8.7. Summary - An analytical deconstruction of national unity in the accession process

CHAPTER IX - WHY SO HARD?

- 9.1. Hard because it is very difficult, and it is difficult for a variety of reasons
- 9.2. Bottle-necks in negotiations
- 9.3. Impact of reforms on the negotiation process
- 9.4. Summary - Would we have started if we knew in advance what it was about

CHAPTER X – GENERAL CONCLUSION: WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

- 10.1. Can we comprehend Bulgaria's EU integration?
- 10.2. Lessons from EU Eastern enlargement for its future and for the future of Europeanisation studies
- 10.3. CONCLUSION - The general meaning of the history of Bulgaria's EU integration

BIBLIOGRAPHY

APPENDICES

The integral dissertation concept is developed in 10 chapters, proposing solutions to specific problems and creating a systematic historicized picture of integration interaction between Bulgaria and the EU. The work defends the thesis that the Bulgarian accession to the EU is a process with national specificity, revealed by the complementarity of the substantive details that demonstrate its deep and prevailing political character.

The **first chapter** justifies the necessity of the study by arguing that in order to be able to *conduct EU integration policy in a responsible way, we need to understand the process of which Bulgaria's accession to the Union is a particular, but also particularly important part*. The relevance of the study follows from the fact that interest in Bulgarian EU integration has been small and steadily declining over the years, despite this unfinished episode of the country's recent history being crucial for Bulgaria's future. Our *integration into the EU has become a victim of its success* because its several achievements in the improvement of life through sustained economic growth and a package of personal freedoms are taken for granted (as a fulfilled promise of 'normalization of life'). Normalcy seems to be 'no big deal' and cannot be a priority of public attention. Apart from this, the mass culture, being formatted by the media, is focused on scandals, and on the subject of "EU integration" there is no shortage of them in our country. They seem to outweigh the benefits and the *public sees them only* (be it the closure of reactors at Kozloduy NPP, the suspension of Phare and SAPARD funds or "houses for mothers-in-law"). The focus is on particular misfortunes and abuses, not on the *EU integration process itself*.

Bulgaria's accession to the EU deserves attention because it is a problem for the future of the Union in two senses. Firstly, taking into account all the positive changes, the *overall local social situation has deteriorated in terms of quality of life (not only in terms of quality of democracy - Kanev, Todorov 2014), as evidenced by the annual Catch-up Index survey data*.¹ But the quality of EU integration of one member state affects the whole Union, because the very essence of membership is in the national contribution to its development. It is therefore important, secondly, that *the outcome of Eastern enlargement, as we see it in Poland, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria*,² *is derived from EU enlargement policy*. Although from an Eastern point of view the process looks like EU accession, it is precisely the Union that has organized and orche-

¹ For information on the *Open Society Institute's* comparative cross-country study, conducted annually since 2011, and its specific results, see <https://osis.bg/?p=871>.

² In the first years of the 21st century, it seemed that the Bulgarian-Romanian case was "a bit more special" due to the "lagging behind" of the two Balkan societies from the common process, which is why the discrediting label of "laggards", which has become a "common place" in much of the academic literature, was applied to both countries. But in this particular case, one sees an early warning of a fundamental problem in the whole set of *values assumptions, goals, priorities and toolkit* of the Eastern enlargement policy.

strated its policy (materially, institutionally and ideologically). *The interest in Bulgarian integration into the EU is stimulated by the desire to understand the general logic and specific mechanisms of an extremely important European macro-historical process.* The search for alternative models for EU enlargement policy is historically crucial for the whole continent.³ EU accession was expected to be a testament to the success of the post-communist transition in the CEE and a guarantor of the irreversibility of reforms. Now we already know that *the success of the EU's eastern enlargement is quite conditional* (van Meurs, de Bruin, van de Grift, Hoetink 2018; Pridham 2007). For, first, its price was to break Bulgaria and Romania away from the common CEE bloc. Second, their accession to the EU in 2007 became 'conditional', with an additional safeguard clause - to delay the start of membership and for a year, plus the introduction of a post-accession conditionality in the form of the 'Cooperation and Verification Mechanism' (CVM). Thirdly, the post-accession conditionality was supposed to be short-lived, but it has not been formally terminated yet. Strictly speaking, the Fifth Enlargement of the EU is not finalized. *The research carried out found that the policy of Europeanisation through pre-accession conditionality* (Grabbe 2006) *is not a natural, i.e. the only possible scenario.*⁴ *Its design was unintentional, politico-historically constructed, insofar as it very gradually evolved and was imperatively imposed by a set of then existing socio-political circumstances and concerns.* This pattern of enlargement policy creates 'the gap between the *demands of accession* and the *obligations of EU membership*' (Hillion 2011: 196). Conducted through the implementation of pre-accession conditionality, EU membership preparation contradicts the declarative goal of Europeanisation (contained in the Copenhagen criteria) because of the EC's interest in mandatory success in the face of a lack of resources for *substantive civilizational transformation, which even does not figure in the accession preparation agenda.*

The object of the current study is the relationship between politics, policies and politics of the European integration of Bulgaria, determining the specific degrees and forms of Europeanization. Previous studies have shown a *high degree of commensurability in the sectoral differentiation of EU integration outcomes of the first 10 countries of the Fifth EU Enlargement and Bulgaria.* This suggests that it is the overall EU enlargement policy that is the main determinant in both cases and not so much the national situations. Therefore, while the focus of our empirical study is on the breadth and diversity of details in the Bulgarian preparation process for EU membership, *the real research object here is the EU integration mechanisms as the embodiment of a distinctive*

³ It is worth noting that a number of studies on Bulgaria's EU integration motivate their interest in the topic through the relevance of the findings for the future EU enlargement to the Western Balkans. (Bozhilova 2008, Karamfilova 2012, Plačková 2020, Popova 2022, etc.).

⁴ "... Europeanisation should be seen as a problem, not a solution .. At this stage the potential would be greater if one approached Europeanisation as 'something to be explained' rather than 'something that explains'." (Radaelli 2004: 2).

policy approach.

The study of this subject builds on a conceptual synthesis of the achievements of previous experience in EU enlargement studies. Most of the previous studies fall into two main groups: a) following a chronological or factual-descriptive approach and b) testing the validity of dominant theories. In contrast to this tradition, the present work *elucidates the actual mechanisms at play in the entire integration process*, which have hitherto remained beyond the reach of research interest mainly *due to concerns about the very problematization of the effectiveness of policies pursued by the European Commission*. The study adheres to the methodological agenda of the cross-country comparative study of Europeanisation implemented through transformations in the regional policy in the CEE (Hughes, Sasse, and Gordon 2005). Its main imperatives are: a) to use not empirics solely to test preconceived theoretical schemes, but as a *source of new information on the complexity of the subject under study*; b) to take into account the *dialectic of a two-way interaction between the EU and the candidate countries*, which was unsuspected before the study; c) to consider each of the parties in the interaction as a *complex construct of agents* with their own interests and repertoire of action, but undergoing *changes in the course of the interaction itself, which is why the latter evolves historically*; d) to weave not the interest in the particular modus operandi as a way of understanding the *socio-political mechanisms for constructing the specific outcome in which the essential character of EU enlargement policy is embodied*. The EU enlargement policy is not pre-ordained as a way of interacting with candidates for membership, but its substance is far beyond and deep below declarative goals and promises. The latter are a part of the reality of the process, also, but they are not the whole truth about it. *The essence of the EU enlargement policy, including the mechanisms for its practical implementation, is a great unknown to date*. The course of concrete events in the Eastern enlargement has made it possible to move *from a statutory procedure to a politically discretionary comprehensive EU enlargement policy*, with in which the EC holds a decisive role through the instrument of pre-accession conditionality. The chosen research approach, focused on the peculiar way of political realization of the EU's Eastern enlargement, necessitates the main focus on the level of the *personal agency of the integration actors*, but, *at the same time, the research must go beyond their inextricable subjectivity*. Since the vast majority of interactions took place far from (and sometimes in contradiction to) the written rules of EU integration, only the memories of the participants in these events can testify to their complexities, diversities and dramas. The qualitative methodology chosen aims *to reach, beyond individual discursive practices, to the substantive and structural features of the social reality that is represented through them, but in an ideologically distorted form that sometimes hides particular aspects of what happened*.

The empirical research⁵, the results of which created the basis of the dissertation, is an analytical

reconstruction of Bulgarian EU integration through the memories of key actors, based on a critical dialogue with the previous academic tradition, through which we identified the thematic emphases in the group narrative of our EU-integrators.⁶ Taking into account the fact that our respondents were involved in the European integration process at its different stages in different professional and institutional roles, the research team⁷ gathered the empirical information through an in-depth semi-standardized interview to minimize the influence of the diversity of personal positions. The questions asked (see Appendix) focus on key events and aspects of Bulgaria's EU accession *with a strong accent on those that are contested in the academic literature: the beginning of the process; its overall political design and objectives; the role of the geopolitical context; supporters and opponents of the Bulgarian cause; the role of the EC; the way in which preparations for membership were handled; problems in the negotiations; the possible contribution of civil society, etc.* The fieldwork took place from autumn 2017 to the end of 2018. We received the recollections of 47 persons: 2 prime ministers, 7 deputy prime ministers, 7 foreign ministers, ministers and their relevant deputies, directors and head of departments of institutional units on EU integration in the state administration, chief negotiators and diplomats, heads of working groups on negotiation chapters. The pool of respondents is sufficiently diverse, not only in terms of professional status. Twenty-seven of the respondents were men, twenty were women. They are representatives of the main parties that have had the greatest involvement in the European integration process: the BSP, the MRF, the NDSV, the SDS (in alphabetical order). *The collected information has the necessary role polyphony, so that the aggregate discourse is typologically representative of the integration process itself, rather than a sum of private views.*

The task of the analysis is to *highlight the significant socio-political facts, to valorize them by conceptual situating in a large-scale European historical process, whereby they acquire a completely new meaningfulness, sometimes different from what our respondents had subjectively in mind.* The reading of this "group memory" instructed by the academic tradition *creates a completely different socio-political picture that does not coincide with anyone's personal view.* A mutual substantive adjustment of facts reveals the real meaning of the historical

⁵ It builds on the results of previous research projects: 'The Role of the Fight against Corruption in the Relations between Bulgaria and the EU' (funded by the FSR of SU 2011-2012); 'A Comparative Analysis of Post-accession Conditionality in Bulgaria and Romania' (within the framework of the FP7 project MAXCAP 2013-2016); 'The Eastern Enlargements of the European Union: Features of the Interaction between the European Commission and the Candidate Countries' (within the research program of Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence at the Department of European Studies, Sofia University, funded by the Erasmus+ Programme 2016-2017).

⁶ See the National Archive of Memories of Bulgaria's EU Accession Process on the website of the Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence project (<https://jeanmonnetexcellence.bg/дейности/дигитален-архив/>), as well as on the website of the Diplomatic Institute of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (<http://bdi.mfa.government.bg/>). The archive is over 1200 pages long.

⁷ Research team: prof. prof. Georgi Dimitrov (head of team), participants: prof. prof. Mirela Veleva, Bilyana Decheva (expert at the Diplomatic Institute) and PhD student Lyubomira Popova.

process in the multidimensional socio-political space of the Fifth EU Enlargement. The analysis highlighted 8638 (eight thousand six hundred andthirty-eight) *distinct meaning emphases in the group discourse*. Their interpretation was done through an original methodology that sits between content analysis and discourse analysis, being different from them in several ways:

- A unit of meaning is not a single word or phrase, but the whole paragraph of an utterance;
- What is sought is not a number occurrence to individual words, but the broadest possible range of explicit or implicit semantic and value dimensions in which the statements are situated;
- A particular, characteristic for the particular subject-matter, systemic structural integrity in the mental space is sought;
- Identifies the socio-historical structural grounds for interpreting the system of recognized substantive and value emphases.
- The multidimensional *structure of aggregate expert discourse is an objective fact. It has a concrete system of characteristic features, considered in its relation to the factual content of the statements about the characteristics of the subject-matter – EU accession*. On the highest abstract level, this is a historicized application of the approach of "expanded ontology of consciousness" (Mamardashvili 2004) to the Bulgarian integration into the EU.

The cognitive aim is to identify, typify and explain (through their systemic relationships) key features of the problematic socio-political situation in terms of its complexity, internal structure, variants of manifestation, possible dynamics of development (or at least change) and, above all, possible - within its framework - actions to enhance the effectiveness of public policies, in this case EU enlargement policies.

Chapter Two builds the conceptual and methodological program of the study. Despite the wide-spread mainstream understanding that the Eastern enlargement of the EU is yet another (fifth) one, the integration of the CECS stands out as a *unique and amazing* historical process that cannot be understood if we reduce it to a particular case of something more general. It is transforming not only post-communist societies applying for EU membership, but also the Union itself. More importantly, in the course of its unfolding, it is itself changing qualitatively by transforming - according to its own internal logic - its political goals, objectives and instruments, as well as the pace of its implementation. Crucially significant is that the *EU's Eastern enlargement is not a series of events, but a single process of transformation designed to solve an existential socio-political problem of Europe after the collapse of the Socialist bloc (Communist camp)*. The proposed concept is an *explanation of what is known about the Eastern enlargement of the EU, paying particular attention to the*

apparent oddities in the process, i.e. an explanation not only of *why* things happened, but also why they happened in *that peculiar way out of necessity*.

The Eastern enlargement of the EU *necessarily had to* elevate its border post-communist societies to the integration process in Europe, but that *could NOT* happen in the beginning because of the qualitative incommensurability of the two "ingredients" that should be integrated (but not simply "put together"). This contradiction marks the character of each of the *phases in the unfolding process*, which are only *forms for the movement of the essential contradiction*. With the movement itself, the contradiction is simultaneously preserved to some degree, but also redefined, transformed, and displaced toward what has become a possible, in final account, end. Which is why we come to the very strange outcome of the process: firstly, it ends in mid-2004 for the majority of the countries involved, secondly, for two of the CEECs - Bulgaria and Romania - accession to the Union is postponed for a year and a half; thirdly, on 1 January 2007 the process ends relatively successfully with the export of peace, stability and prosperity to the newly acceded countries, but at the cost of destabilizing the Union itself, the consequence of which is two important things: (a) the failure of the draft EU constitution, and (b) the need after 2013 to develop, (and now implement), common policies to defend the EU's fundamental values, against systemic abuses by governments in member states that undermine the European integration, with increasing urgency.

Such an outcome is substantially, *negatively-different* from the goals set at the beginning of the process. *This ambivalent result is a direct consequence of the political contents of the overall process, which is driven by the contradiction in the initial task itself – the Eastern enlargement must happen, but it cannot*. Therefore, interest in the logic and peculiarities in the political course of the twinned access-enlarge process is justified. The collapse of the Communist camp *launched a whole firework of monstrously acute security threats to Western European societies* (Moravcsik, Vachudova 2003; O'Brennan 2006; Piedrafita, Torreblanca 2005; Wood 2017). These are usually grouped into three orders:

- a) Germanisation of Central Europe and subsequent collapse of the Franco-German "engine of European integration";
- b) Central Europe as a volcano of socio-economic and political instability;
- c) Russia's aspirations towards the "zone of its traditional strategic interests".

The creation of the EU in the early 1990s seemed like a miraculous solution to these fundamental (existential) threats. It is both a continuation and a qualitative transformation, involving a rethinking of the objectives, policy instruments, substance and scope of integration policies. For, as the chief negotiator on behalf of the EC metaphorically but accurately puts it, post-communist countries "are a different beast, all together"

(Landaburu 2006). It is not just that their economies were in crisis at the moment; that they had yet to undergo structural reforms in ownership, governance and sectoral structure; that they were all much weaker economically than the EU average, and that the differences between the societies in the region themselves were very significant. In addition to all that, the real problem was the "post-communist legacy" (Cirtautas, Schimmelfennig 2010). It is not yet another of the many characteristics of the societies in the CEE, but rather their essential typological character. It is, first and foremost, an economic problem: dependence of the economy on *state subsidies* and on the *state as the main consumer of goods and services*; an irrational, ideologically motivated, *cost-oriented attitude towards public resources*; disregard for written norms due to the *absolute primacy not of law but of voluntarist party will*. The pseudo-economic nature of the post-communist economy⁸ is not automatically changed by privatization (Dimitrova, Dragneva 2002). A very heavy economic obstacle is the quality of the workforce, but not so much in terms of demographic structure and competencies, but in terms of the unquantifiable work ethos - the disposition to use personal capacities to secure one's prosperity. Half a century of "building socialism" has created a prevailing attitude of passivity and dependence on state care - first and foremost in health, education, and social care, but also more generally: in the widespread attitude that "the state must provide" (Avramov 2016; Agh 2008, 2015). Given these premises, it is more than logical that mass corruption as a way of survival would become a systematic phenomenon.

The communist legacy is even more severe in two other crucial sectors of public life - the administration and the justice system. In communist societies, the economy is state-planned and there is no need for legal protection because property is considered an archaism of the past, subject to historical extinction. Therefore, the legal system is extremely marginalized, as it is not a foundation for a system of laws mediating interactions between equal and equal subjects, which affects both the content and quality of laws, and the way the whole legal system operates (Schönfelder 2005; Hristov 2012; Mihailova 2015; Todorova 2020; Punev 2022). It is this character of the post-communist societies in the CEE that is the "monstrous problem" in the task of their European integration.

But the Maastricht Treaty does almost nothing new in terms of the decision-making process that CEE integration entails, because it relies on the inherited institutional structures of the EC. It was not until 2003, when the Treaty of Nice came into force, that the EU became somewhat ready to deal with the expected Eastern enlargement.

⁸ Rumén Avramov proves that in Bulgaria complete monetization, i.e. complete integration of the economy in commodity-money relations, occurred only in the late 1990s (Avramov 2007, vol. III).

The initial contradiction in the task that the Fifth Enlargement of the EU has to solve is formulated as follows: according to the logic of the security problem in Europe, enlargement should include as many countries as possible from the undefinable Central and Eastern Europe. But by the logic of the national priorities of the EU member states, including (without being limited to) budgetary concerns, the effort is to minimize the number of admitted post-communist countries. In a situation of simultaneous necessity and impossibility to take a decision, *it is postponed*, leaving the course of events in a high degree of uncertainty. The signing of Europe Agreements is considered to be the beginning of the process, building on the previous common framework for such agreements with the European Communities and their member countries (then 12) developed as early as 1990. In this situation, there are two features that are very symptomatic of the nature of the process:

First, the conclusion of Europe agreements was not seen at the time *as a preparation for membership, but as an alternative to membership* (Maresceau 1997; Tatham 2009). Second, the Title 'Europe of Agreements' suggests wholeness and completeness, while the content is the opposite - a treaty of partial binding, without integration: a) it is not the whole of Europe, but only the individual country and the EC that agree b) to interact only through mutual trade plus, rather casually (but demonstrating good will, however), political dialogue. Meanwhile, already in mid-1993, the Copenhagen European Council decisions introduced the possibility of a policy of sustained EU enlargement. The document clearly shows that *the ultimate goal of the EU's eastern enlargement is peace and security in Europe, guaranteed by its support for the reconstruction of the economies in the CEE*. It is also evident that unambiguity and conceptual rigor were the last concern of the authors, who were very worried about the forthcoming venture. Hence the concern to preserve the momentum for further development of the Union is highlighted in a separate paragraph (Hillion 2014), while the other criteria are all enumerated in a single sentence. Such a vague phrasing opens the opportunity for a variety of interpretations.

The strategic document which for the first time specified the necessary political changes in the institutional design of the EU, the mode of operation and EU budget structuring, together with the feasible enlargement at that time, was *Agenda 2000, which envisaged the accession of only five CEECs*. The catalyzing impact of the wars in the former Yugoslavia (1991-1995) cannot be underestimated because they materialized Europe's worst security nightmares: refugee flows from the mutually-inflicted atrocities in the countries involved, but also *a growing process of criminalization of the economies of neighboring countries*.

Although a number of documents have been produced in the course of the process that contain the word 'strategy' in their title or have been seen as strategic by interpreters, the only strategy actually implemented by the Fifth enlargement has been to follow no strategy (Grabbe 2006: 28). The EU has consistently shied away

from making a clear commitment to enlargement in the region. It operates with encouraging rhetoric and symbolically loaded gestures such as the 'structured dialogue', but *without any legal mutual binding*. At each successive point in time, as the process progressed and gained momentum, the interaction between the EU and the candidate countries was based on and regulated by documents with an ever-lower rank of EU involvement and legal status: White Paper, Screening Questionnaire, EC monitoring reports, etc.

Under the Europe Agreements, the first step towards their implementation is to establish compliance with EC/EU trade legislation in the *acquis communautaire*. This is a job entrusted to the European Commission, which it has taken on directly, actively and responsibly. As the process progresses, however, the role and political weight of the EC changes qualitatively. It finds itself in the role of the many-handed god-mentor Shiva: it has to define the "operationalization" of the Copenhagen criteria; assess how candidate countries are making progress towards compliance with the membership standards it has detailed; manage the whole package of instruments to promote and support pre-accession preparation, including providing expertise, providing models for reform, the famous twinning programs on a range of sectoral policies, etc.; manage the budget, including monitoring how the funds are used.

This set of competences and powers makes the EC a central political actor in the enlargement process, which it has not been *in previous waves of enlargements* (O'Brennan; Laursen, Illion, Verheugen). Moreover, the EC itself sees the Eastern enlargement as an opportunity for its own institutional-political expansion (Verheugen 2020; Grabbe 2006), to consolidate its political influence in the EU and in Europe as a whole. This is of crucial importance for the course of the whole historical process. The candidate countries, on the one hand, got an extremely valuable, competent, well-intentioned and well-resourced, of all kinds, ally who was simply 'too big to fail'. The EC received a particular incentive to achieve the maximum in the task assigned to it. That *had a direct bearing on the political essence of enlargement policy* - the 'fetishization of EU law'. This means that the whole process of preparing for EU membership was marked by the overriding priority of harmonizing national legislations with the *acquis*, which in the academic literature is referred to in the most unambiguous way as 'rule transfer'. The latter was, *both, a priority and an institutionally convenient instrument for the implementation of the Commission's most important function in the course of enlargement*. In demanding a positive end to the policy pursued under its leadership, the EC understood that *the key to success lied in... minimizing the task* (Hughes et al. 2005: 17). *Because of that politically constructed and interested detachment, it began to seem that enlargement policy was like a 'natural phenomenon' - universally valid, as if natural* (Sedelmeier; Gateva). And that false appearance gave it political legitimacy and motivational force.

Thus, *the essence of the task solved by the EU's Eastern Enlargement was transferred as demonstrated*

by the characteristic features in the way policy was performed. These features, taken by themselves, often seem *puzzling oddities*. However, they are essentially *the inevitable cost of the process towards its eventual desirable but uncertain end*: the initial postponement of enlargement, the narrowing of the task of preparing for EU accession to prioritizing economic integration; the further narrowing of the task to the transfer of the *acquis* to national legislatures; the parallel rise of the EC as the locomotive or conductor of the process, (but at the cost of subordinating the preparation for membership, to the institution's specific competences).

This is the price of the qualitative progress made in enlargement policy. It is only at this price that it became possible for the initial momentum of the previous phase to change the starting preconditions so that success would become more likely. *That transformed momentum became, as it were, an integration impulse in its own right, against which the other historical circumstances and contributions of the actors involved were stacked*. The only strange thing here is that, at a later date, this *historically constructed momentum begins to appear as primordial* and as a general explanatory principle for the course of EU enlargement policy, both, according to the 'logic of appropriateness' and the logic of 'EU's transformative power'. Positivist scholarship readily departs from this unquestioned assumption to construct its fanfare version of the EU's 'greatest foreign policy success', following the self- congratulatory rhetoric of the EC (Kochenov 2014).

This is only the historical reality's first half, because the Eastern enlargement is also the result of the counter-movement of the CEE accession policies. To speak of a common viewpoint of the Eastern actors is an overgeneralization, erasing many significant differences between the CEECs in their seemingly uniform orientation towards EU accession. Yet, like their EU counterparts, the political leaders of the CEECs have little understanding of the situation they find themselves in and the real motivations of the other side. This political attitude is built on three emphases: 1) the *historical debt of European unification in a distinct moral key*; 2) the emphasis on *a definitive break from the communist past rather than on economic benefits*; 3) enlargement should be a *purely volitional, one-off act* - a political decision to join the EU (Balazs 1997).

The main political priority from the Eastern point of view is the speed to complete the process. *In order to achieve precisely this objective, it is absolutely necessary that the task to be solved should be minimized as much as possible*. The EC's reduction of the process to bureaucratic paperwork and "*acquis transfer*" is well received by political leaders in the CEE, because the very stretching of the accession preparations even over a decade portends dangerous mass frustration (not forgetting that the minimized task seems, in itself, complex enough).

The overall picture outlined above leads to the conclusion of a *fundamental incommensurability in the 'definition of the situation' between Western and Eastern partners*. For Eastern leaders, EU accession is only a

matter of political goodwill and for them the problem of Europeanisation does not exist at all, much less as a political task to be solved through structural societal reforms. For their part, political leaders in the EU and its institutions view the Fifth enlargement, in Marc Maresceau's apt phrase, with an indeterminate "mixture of economic, political and legal considerations" (Maresceau 1997), in which there is also a considerable amount of legitimate *concern*. The process requires the Europeanization of post-communist societies, but such a program of profound social reform does not enter into the plans of local politicians who believed they had done already their share of the work. So suddenly, to the surprise of the orchestrators of the enlargement, relying on local political enthusiasm, they found themselves dealing with very "reluctant regimes" (Heather Grabbe). By its very essence, the EU has neither the *legal nor the institutional, or at least - the values-based, instruments for political coercion* (Smith 2003). It was only then, and only during the actual course of Eastern enlargement, that pre-accession conditionality came to the fore across the spectrum of different instruments for conducting enlargement policy. It is neither defined anywhere, nor legally regulated in any way. But its rise and expansion in political significance was so abrupt, undeniable and wide-ranging that it was to look like a metonym of enlargement policy itself (Gateva 2015).

Initially, the pre-accession conditionality appeared to have been effective, managing to bring 10 of the 13 countries to a successful conclusion of negotiations in late 2002 and to membership by mid-2004. Presumably, the EU's 'power of attraction' was behind that success, which had been a motive for the Europeanisation of the CEE. In line with their own 'definition of the situation', those countries achieved success, but only in the narrow sense of the political act of being admitted to the EU. The historical task has undergone a substantial substantive transformation, which is expressed in a cascade of substitutions: the Europeanisation of society is reduced to preparation for market integration; the overall transformation of public life, including the establishment of the rule of law, is reduced to a transfer of the *acquis* into national legislations, remaining largely only on paper; the success of the preparations for membership comes at the price of national governments accepting commitments that remained unfulfilled after EU accession.

This ambiguous success is possible because the main political priority is the speed of concluding the negotiations, not the sustainability of Europeanization. The *success is due to the minimization of the scope and content of the task of preparation for EU membership*. Which corresponds to the Commission's own political interest. However, this means *an inevitable increase in the tension between the expected Europeanisation of post-communist societies, on the one hand, and on the other hand, the political logic in implementing an accession process formatted by the initial contradiction in the historical task at hand*. A political disjuncture (gap) is thus constructed between the requirements of accession and the obligations of EU membership (Hillion

2011).

The above concept is a starting point for explaining the specificities in the way the process and the overall logic of the Bulgarian EU accession process is carried out.

In **Chapter Three**, according to the accounts of our European integrators, the peculiarities at the beginning of the process are presented, proving that, on our side, the integration in the EU took place also more by virtue of a sequence of events, in relation to which political *ad hoc* decisions were taken, rather than as the realization of an overall rationally thought-out strategy. The conclusion is drawn from the analysis of the answers to the question: 'At the time of the beginning, was there any specific vision of the objectives of Bulgaria's accession to the EU, beyond the general idea of not falling behind the other former socialist countries?' Do you remember if there was any official forum where such a vision was discussed?"

The main arguments, on which the above summary is built, are:

1. There is no consensus among the key Bulgarian EU integrators on the question when the integration process started: - 1988, 1990, 1994, 1995, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2001 - depending on the personal experience of the respondent and the way of interpreting the EU integration itself - as a political act of re-orientation of Bulgaria's foreign policy, as the establishment of a contractual relationship with EC, signing of our Europe Agreement, the beginning of negotiations, etc. That is, even among the main actors in the process, there is no clarity as to when it started, and this precludes there having been a public process of creating a publicly approved national strategy for joining, the then newly emerging and unfamiliar, EU.

2. Many respondents explicitly stated that they do not remember there being a public debate on the prospect of EU membership (int. 3, 12, 13, 18, 23, 34, 37) or that they clearly remember the lack of a public debate (int. 38). The variations are between the recollections that a) there was no detailed political strategy; b) even if there was a document of that kind, it had no direct political consequences because, written "under pressure from Brussels", it remained only on paper; c) in our country, in general, nobody respects political strategies, although we create them all the time; d) there should have been one (but those answers do not point out a single substantive feature of the hypothetical strategy).

3. There are frequent references (almost in every second interview) that the orientation towards EU membership is simply a sub-case of the more general ideological orientation towards anchoring Bulgaria to the "West", in which case the variations are between a) an abstract-intuitive value understanding of this orientation in opposition to the communist past and b) recognition of particular values of Western civilization such as market economy, democracy, human rights and freedoms and quality of life. In this perspective, the EU has no

distinctiveness, let alone a specified path to membership linked to specific tasks of societal reform.

4. References that those ideas were a shared value attitude rather than a substantive policy agenda, the differences being between a) a shared attitude among the general public due to the deep crisis in the mid-1990s; b) a shared value foundation among a narrow group of like-minded individuals who have been given access to strategic policy decision-making (int. 27, 28, 39). The transition to EU integration is explained by the existence of *political will*, from which an administrative effort to operationalize the government's course began.

5. When there has been a real public action related in any way to Bulgaria's EU integration, the participants in it remember it in specific details. Only two such memories are registered: a) a public forum for expert discussion with international participation in 1994 (int. 32) and b) the adoption of a decision on a general foreign policy reorientation of the country by the Grand National Assembly in 1990 (int. 1, 4, 15, 31). The recollection entering into the substantive details of the adopted decision is that of the author of the text. In other cases, it is only mentioned that the public debate on EU integration was in the GNA. Actually, that decision was adopted on Christmas Eve 1990, together with the decision to apply for membership of the Council of Europe, *without a single speech on it*, with 210 votes in favor and one abstention (out of 400 MPs). In accord with the specificities of that historical moment, the motivation for the foreign policy reorientation, in the first place, referred to the country's *urgent need for financial assistance*.

6. Several respondents emphasized that Bulgaria *could not have* its own content strategy because EU accession is the result of a political decision in the member states "to take us" (int. 7).

7. Not rare are the cases in which "Bulgaria's entry into the EU" is presented as an end in itself and not as a path to EU membership, which could be an instrument for solving important societal problems of economic and political development. Therefore, it seems logical that it also has nothing to be meaningfully specified or discussed with the public.

These empirically established facts testify that Bulgaria is not an exception to the rule of conducting the EU's Eastern enlargement.⁹ The orientation towards EU integration has been *more of a desire than a political agenda*, which is why it is much more about *value positioning* than substantive detailing of the position. It is 'self-evident', adopted 'by default' (int. 20, 28, 29, 35, 41). Given these premises, it is not surprising that *that view has been emotionally intense*, saturated with strongly positive emotions and even *euphoria, which is inevitably*

⁹ "In the end, the process was undertaken by the elites in the CEE and the West without any substantial participation of their societies. Enlargement was driven forward mostly by the bureaucratic expertise of the Commission and most important issues remained untouched by any form of public debate. The 1998-2002 negotiations were classic euro- elite talks. The CEE public only got a say after the negotiations were over, without any chance to influence the content of the accession treaties" (O'Brennan 2006a: 174). Cf. Landaburu 2006: 16.

open to a considerable amount of illusion (int. 7, 26, 31, 32, 35). Importantly, however, to be *politically effective* - The EU itself, in the early 1990s, had neither the institutional, nor the financial potential, nor the know-how for this task and, consequently, no particular desire to start immediately the too risky Eastern enlargement, about which the member states have conflicting views. Because of this political "reticence" in its early years, it is also not particularly attractive to stimulate deep insight into the changing character of integration. Bulgarian society at that time, being in an extremely unfavorable state (due to the overlay of the crisis legacy of the previous regime, the political turbulence of the beginning of the transition, the criminalization of economic and political life due to the wars in the former Yugoslavia and the catastrophe of the BSP government at the end of 1996), was in urgent need of external funding and stabilization, including international security, which EU membership could bring. But the EU's interaction with Bulgaria is doubly problematic. For, on the one hand, it is the Union that seeks minimal enlargement (Agenda 2000). And on the other side is Bulgaria - a post-communist country with a very bad image (Dimitrova, Dragneva 2002) and in a crisis situation, whose EU accession could bring no direct benefits to the Union but would have significant costs and additional risks.

At the same time, according to the memoirs of the then Prime Minister Kostov, the government did not count on meeting the general public's understanding and did not seek any dialogue with the local civil society (Kostov 2019). The government's visions were focused within the framework of the mandate won and the formulated goal of EU accession by 2007 seemed, at that time, an abstract "Beyond". On top of this, the character of the task of EU accession implies a categorical unalternative-ness - both in the orientation of the 'civilizational choice' made and in the imperative of practical, pro-market neo-liberal solutions that the EC sets (Grabbe 2006; Bozhilova 2008).

In short, *there is no one, no way and, most importantly, nothing for which to look for a meaningfully specified vision for EU accession*. At the time, it seemed that the firm political will to maintain a foreign policy orientation, operationalized by the Commission into a package of imperative sectoral tasks on *acquis* transfer, was quite sufficient. It is undeniable that there was an initial, *distinctly value-rational* (Weber) *goal in the quest for EU membership*. And this has far-reaching consequences: "There was "a primary political energy" and for the purposes of the task it was sufficient. The fact is that - perhaps because it was no more than that - *the process of transformation itself stalled further because of that...* but it is a complex process. " (int. 29, underlined - G.D.)

Chapter Four continues the analysis of the meaning of the Bulgarian integration in the EU in the eyes of its actors - in terms of what they think has remained unknown or misunderstood by the public, but it should *know and remember*.

What is clearly missing in the registered personal views is that integration policies could be a *means to solve specific socio-economic problems of Bulgarian society in order to achieve sustainable social development*. The absence seems strange given that at least Irina Bokova's team, which monitored Bulgaria's EU accession process in 2000, 2001 and 2002, was fully aware of the *complex and systematic task of Europeanizing Bulgarian society as a precondition for its full-fledged integration into the EU*. Integration policies have been crucially formatted by the way non-public policies are conducted in the country (Karamfilova 2012), where decision-making, including issues of public funds absorption, remain to a high degree in the field of political discretion. Behind it, as a rule, changeable as holders, but constant as a principle of action corporatist interests (whether by branch, ethnic groups, regions or party) manifest themselves. In other words, EU membership is not a solution to the problems of Bulgarian society - it only multiplies them, deepens them and makes them visible, especially in comparative international terms.

The registered answers are symptomatic both for the level of political culture and for the particular mode of the Bulgarian European integration. Opinions are located in the broad spectrum of "everything is known about the integration process", insofar as it was "the most transparent political process" (int. 10), through variations - "the one thing that is not known", "the few things that are not known", "many things are not known", "almost nothing is known", all the way to the radical statement "nothing is known" or even aggressive rejection of the assumption that the average Bulgarian "should know and understand EU integration" (int. 19 and 41). *The way in which one decides to answer depends directly on how one reads the meaning of the question itself, according to the specificity of one's personal experience*. Even answers that sound like merely stating specific facts essentially *contain evaluative-conceptual interpretations of EU integration - scope, objectives, mechanisms, subjects, outcomes, etc.* What these interpretations have in common, although it remains unspoken, *is an understanding of the extraordinary complexity of the integration process, and this has neither been brought to the public's attention nor understood*.

The synthesis of personal, group, national, international, continental and transcontinental relations makes the two decades at the turn of the twenty-first century a truly astonishing time that deserves to be understood in all its complexity and remembered as a peak episode in our history. In order to arrive at this understanding, we should present at least the general outline of the ~~main~~ registered picture. The main things, "important but remained unknown or misunderstood", refer to : a) key features of the EU itself and European integration in general; b) geopolitical stakes and specificity of interaction with the CEECs; c) Bulgarian political interactions with the EU member states and institutions; d) the characteristic of the processes practically carried out; e) the role of decision-makers, both along the geopolitical and EU enlargement lines, and along the

Bulgarian line - political leaders, government and lower-level state and non-governmental actors. Even more schematically, the general public is unaware of 1) the geopolitical logic of the process, 2) the inherently political essence of the partnership with EU countries and institutions, and 3) the political stakes and practices of our country's own preparations for EU membership. It is these semantic emphases that are subject to clarification in the following chapters of the dissertation.

According to our respondents, there are two main types of essential knowledge about EU enlargement: a) the general sense of EU integration and b) the features of the eventfulness that give it a distinct, national character: under what circumstances which actors, for what tasks, with what objectives, through what instruments/resources and mode of participation achieved ... what they were able to. And it is the links between these elements that determine the beginning, the pace of unfolding and the strange end of the process, because *these elements form an overall political mechanism of EU integration that is absolutely invisible at the level of personal experience of it.*

Respondents' recollections clarify in detail what the Bulgarian integration in the EU is like:

- the concrete specificities in the *socio-historical preconditions*, the *peculiarities in the way of working* and the resulting *ambiguous results*. It is worth highlighting two meaningful accents: *the uncertainty* of success and the associated *over-effort* to achieve it. The overall picture created by the extramural dialogue between personal positions leads to a clear understanding of the depth in the assessment of a Bulgarian prime minister:

"The road to full membership has not been travelled yet" (int. 8).

We could mark the main benchmarks on this historical path with the following personality markers: 'without Philip Dimitrov', 'under Lyuben Berov', 'despite Jean Videnov', 'the beginning is because of Ivan Kostov', 'the international membership agreement is through Simeon *Saxe-Coburg-Gotha*', and for Sergey Stanishev there remains the endless unfinished business. The latter is very important and is the subject of analysis at the end of chapter nine¹⁰. The present discussion, however, focuses on the particular resource through which the political will of leaders becomes a historical reality.

¹⁰ The root of the problem was clearly identifiable back in 2002: "The invitation to start negotiations was a political act, which the Bulgarian government should have taken advantage of immediately and started to accelerate the adaptation of the economy, the social sphere, the legislation, etc. to the membership requirements. Instead, it turned the negotiations into a technical exercise, locked them up in administration, and merely told the public how many chapters Bulgaria had opened and closed and how fast we were actually progressing.." (Popova 2002:23).

The exposition of the important things about our EU integration, which have remained unknown to the public, unfolds on 40 pages and the individual meaningful highlights (without therepetition of common themes, such as the geopolitical context, the huge efforts or the incompleteness of the process) *are over 200*. The answers received prove two things conclusively:

- (a) The *extraordinary complexity* of EU integration and the *very particular nature of its process* are the main reasons why, despite its enormous public importance, it remains largely unknown and misunderstood;
- (b) Each one of the many disparate and divergent details in this process is essential, for it *is only through the totality of their interrelationships that historical achievement acquires its real ambiguous yet unsuspected meaning*.

The analysis substantiates the essential importance of the key aspects and moments in the integration process:

firstly, in the trinity aspects of geopolitics (setting the overall integration framework and dictating the uneven rhythm of the process), integration policy (requiring consideration of multiple national interests and imposing solutions contrary to the substantive logic of specific situations) and the practical preparation for EU membership (focused on negotiations and carried out with crucial input from a few actors who have made colossal efforts to bring the negotiations to success);

- secondly, within the preparation itself: specific societal preconditions affecting the *institutional potential* of our society, whose *deficits the EU integrators have to compensate with personal enthusiasm*, but also the peculiarities in the way of working, under the *dictates of the political imperative for the fast conclusion* of the negotiations, on which the structure of subjectivity in the accession process (and the marginalization of the general public) depends, and this already directly leads to the *problematic final outcome*.

The value of the registered opinions is that they offer a convincing, relatively comprehensive explanation of why it is normal, according to the specificity of this issue and the particularities of the historical moment, that it has remained publicly unknown and misunderstood. The implications of the research most directly affect the quality of understanding of Bulgarian integration in the EU, but are not limited to this. The new knowledge gained blow up the fundamental assumptions of rational institutionalism that dominate research on the Fifth EU enlargement. It is not just that the 'formal rationality' of Western partners clashes with the 'value rationality' (Weber) of Eastern actors in integration interactions. The assumption of rationality, by itself, presupposes a stable definiteness and orderliness of the relations that are being thought, but this is the least valid for the Bulgarian European integration process, which took place in conditions of high uncertainty and was realized through enthusiasm, euphoria, a lot of illusions and no small amount of misunderstanding.

Since Bulgaria's European integration policy has been more reactive than proactive, **Chapter Five** examines the primary geopolitical influences on our EU integration process, which, according to Verheugen, were of utmost importance for the entire Eastern Enlargement of EU. This is important, next, because in the specialized literature on Eastern enlargement, this consideration is not prominent, as far as it contradicts paradigmally the most fundamental assumptions, which the explanation of the subject-matter is built on - as a self-sufficient relationship between the candidate country and the Union, namely the "external incentives model" (Schimmelfennig, Zedelmeier, Börsel and many others). In the Bulgarian-Romanian case, however, the logic of the process is very different. The group discourse clarifies three main emphases in meaning:

- a) the impact of security threats in Europe on the priorities and timing (start, uneven pace, end) of Bulgaria's EU accession;
- b) Russia's changing role in the EU enlargement processes;
- c) the ambiguous relationship between NATO and EU accessions.

The significance of the wars as an incentive for the EU's enlargement to South Eastern Europe (and Bulgaria, in particular) has several dimensions. The impact of the "Kosovo crisis", as this war episode is most often referred to, *is present in the memories of one in three of our respondents* (int.2, 4, 9,10,12, 19, 24, 27, 28, 29, 33, 35, 39, 41, 46) through as many as 13 specific accents, most of the narratives including several of them. To summarize: up to this point in history we have been considered part of the problem for the "big players", and then we have already proven, not by declarations but in practice, that we are part of its solution (int. 41, 46). That abruptly reversed the Western attitudes towards the Bulgarian EU and NATO aspirations.

The 'wars in the former Yugoslavia' are a topic present in the memories and reflections of every fourth respondent (int. 1, 6, 10, 12,13, 19, 22,29, 32, 38, 41, 43). It is important because it proves that post-Cold War Europe is not immune to bloody military conflicts. But it is particularly important in the Bulgarian case because there are significant varieties of "economic defeats" suffered. One is Bulgaria's commercial detachment from Central Europe, while proximity to the Franco-German motor is a crucial consideration in the political debate about the limits of the EU's Eastern enlargement. It is quite another that without the prospect of integration we lose the potential foreign direct investments on which our national development depends crucially. And it

¹¹ "... when I came to Brussels [in 1999], Bulgaria was not envisaged as a country that should be a member in the foreseeable future" (Verheugen 2020). Compare with P. Ludlow 2004: 62.

is quite another thing that the embargo regime and the possibility of its violation leads to the criminalization of the economies and political systems of border countries, in particular - Bulgaria. The end of Zhivkov's regime left us

in a de facto bankruptcy - that had been the situation from which we were then "sharply pulled back" by the Yugoslav wars: of what interest could Bulgaria have been in 1990s, according the Copenhagen criterion for the national economy to withstand competitive pressure?!

As is well known in the specialized literature and from the recollections of the direct participants in the EU's Eastern enlargement, Bulgaria and Romania did not figure on that political agenda until late 1999.¹¹ Bulgaria's significance for EU integration arose, first and foremost, from its contribution to security in South-Eastern Europe and, consequently, to European security. Yet, it turned out that *the country lacked internal security - due to the inefficiency of the judiciary, systematic corruption and rampant organized crime*. This is another manifestation of the essential contradiction – both, 'it must and it cannot' (what makes it significant in EU enlargement context essentially highlights its political insufficiencies. Because Bulgaria's own insecurity as a European partner has another root, too, - due to its very bizarre relations with Russia.

Russia appears spontaneously in the memories of our respondents a total of 93 times, in 22 interviews, i.e. almost every second respondent mentions it in the context of Bulgaria's EU integration. Moreover - with two or more specific accents. The group discourse focused on the following problems:

The first complexity of this issue stems from the fact that Russia has been changing quite dramatically over the last 30 years, and this determines the dynamics in its attitude towards EU enlargement. During the mid-1990s, it was in a very severe economic crisis, and the West was providing it with all kinds of help and aids. At the same time, the EU was pursuing a policy of economic integration that made it possible to think that Russia could also be included in this process, eventually (or, at least, Yeltsin had such illusions – int. 41). Russia therefore did not oppose Bulgarian European integration actively until the late 1990s. But during the Kosovo crisis it became clear that it had a policy towards Bulgaria with a clearly identifiable character of metropole to dominion.

The second complexity lies in Bulgaria's perpetual ambivalent attitude towards Russia, on which we are not only energy dependent, but also a number of political parties have close and steady ties with it. It is here that the initial contradiction resurfaces, that Bulgaria wants to become a member of the EU because of what makes it unwelcome in the Union - the severe internal crises: of economy; of political life and of values identity. In the course of events *in the late 1990s Bulgaria became more attractive due to the increased stakes in common European security, but, on the other hand, it remained too unreliable a partner*. The high degree of insecurity has two dimensions: 1) internal insecurity due to a weak judiciary, systemic corruption at all levels, including at the highest political level, and strong organized crime as a consequence of the preceding, making the borders porous to smuggling and all kinds of other traffic; 2) insecurity due to the lack of certainty and the unsustainability of attitudes towards Russia, while the latter over time is more and more definitively parting with the pro-European illusions of the Yeltsin era and returning to old imperial reflexes.

These are the basic preconditions why *Bulgaria's EU accession problem cannot find a direct solution and becomes dependent on the external context of the EU-NATO relationship*. The usefulness of the empirical research findings is in highlighting multiple nuances of meanings in this particular relationship. The relationship between the EU and NATO, as well as Bulgaria's positioning in the process of joining the two organizations, is constructed a) at the level of values, b) at the level of policies pursued (in defense of these values), c) at the level of interconnections between specific political accession actions, but also d) at the level of public discourse related to the policies pursued but possessing its own particularities.

The link between the EU-integration and the Euro-Atlantic integration process has been very important for a country like Bulgaria, especially taking into account its geographical position and historical background, but, above all, because of the unity of the political goals pursued. And that has proved, in the course of the process, to be, due to its extraordinary political specificity, a particularly profitable stake. The Bulgarian-Romanian case provides a compelling confirmation of the rightfulness of John O'Brennan's conclusion: "Security considerations were especially important in both moving the enlargement process forward at critical junctures and also changing the contours of enlargement in specific ways." (O'Brennan 2006b: 168).

Within this general framework of meaning, all the other mentioned details take on significance: the Western European EU and NATO member states adopt a decision for the integration of the CEECs to simultaneously minimize the threat of Russia's influence in the region, to deal with the threat of the spread of fire from the war in the former Yugoslavia and to prevent numerous dangerous traffics. Because of the gigantic scale of the task, the initiators of the process are making understandable efforts to minimize it. This is reflected in the decision to take in only the countries in the immediate surroundings, which - because of their multi-dimensional proximity to Germany - also appear to be the most prepared for EU integration. Bulgaria and Romania remain on the periphery of interest and, consequently, of the integration process, until the escalation of Russia's imperial ambitions towards Southeast Europe resuscitates attention to them. Their demonstrated unconditional loyalty to NATO and its fight against the emerging threat of global terrorism gained them additional political support from influential actors in the integration processes in the face of the US and UK leaders in the period 1999-2007, of the particularities of which our respondents have direct personal memories (int. 3, 7, 8, 38, 41, 46). By virtue of these considerations, and *because we have a consistent government policy of putting the two integrations 'in the same basket' (int. 28), we got the coveted EU membership, despite the visible signs of non-compliance with the standards of European integration policies*¹². Bulgaria obtained membership, but on condition to complete (in the

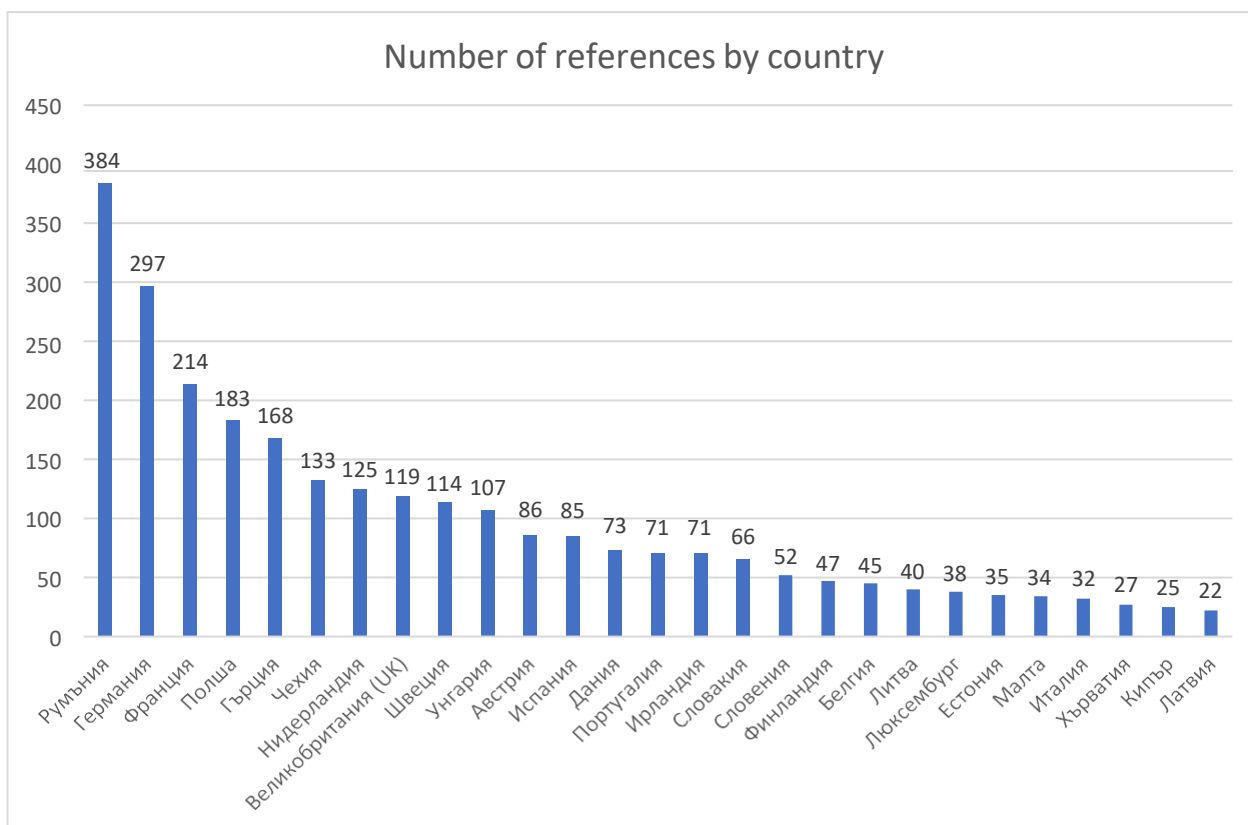
¹² "... geopolitics, i.e. the EU's use of enlargement as an instrument to promote stability, has prevailed over the strict application of the membership condition" (Bechev 2020: 163).

foreseeable future) the reforms, not coincidentally, of the judiciary and achieve efficiency in the fight against corruption and organized crime. But we continue to fail in this task 15 years after EU membership.

The results of the analysis of the empirical data presented in **Chapter Six** reveal the specific parameters of the complexities in the EU member states' attitudes towards Bulgaria, in the context of which the priority importance of unity between EU integration and NATO integration receives its real depth. It should be stressed that we did not deliberately ask anything about any country that participated in the Fifth EU enlargement. However, the memories of Bulgaria's path to EU membership are of high factual density and thus are saturated with all sorts of references to different types of relations through which each country was involved in the EU integration process.

Let us imagine that the interactions between relevant European countries create "force fields" of different intensities between them, which are manifested through differences in the intensity of citations by our respondents (Figure 1).

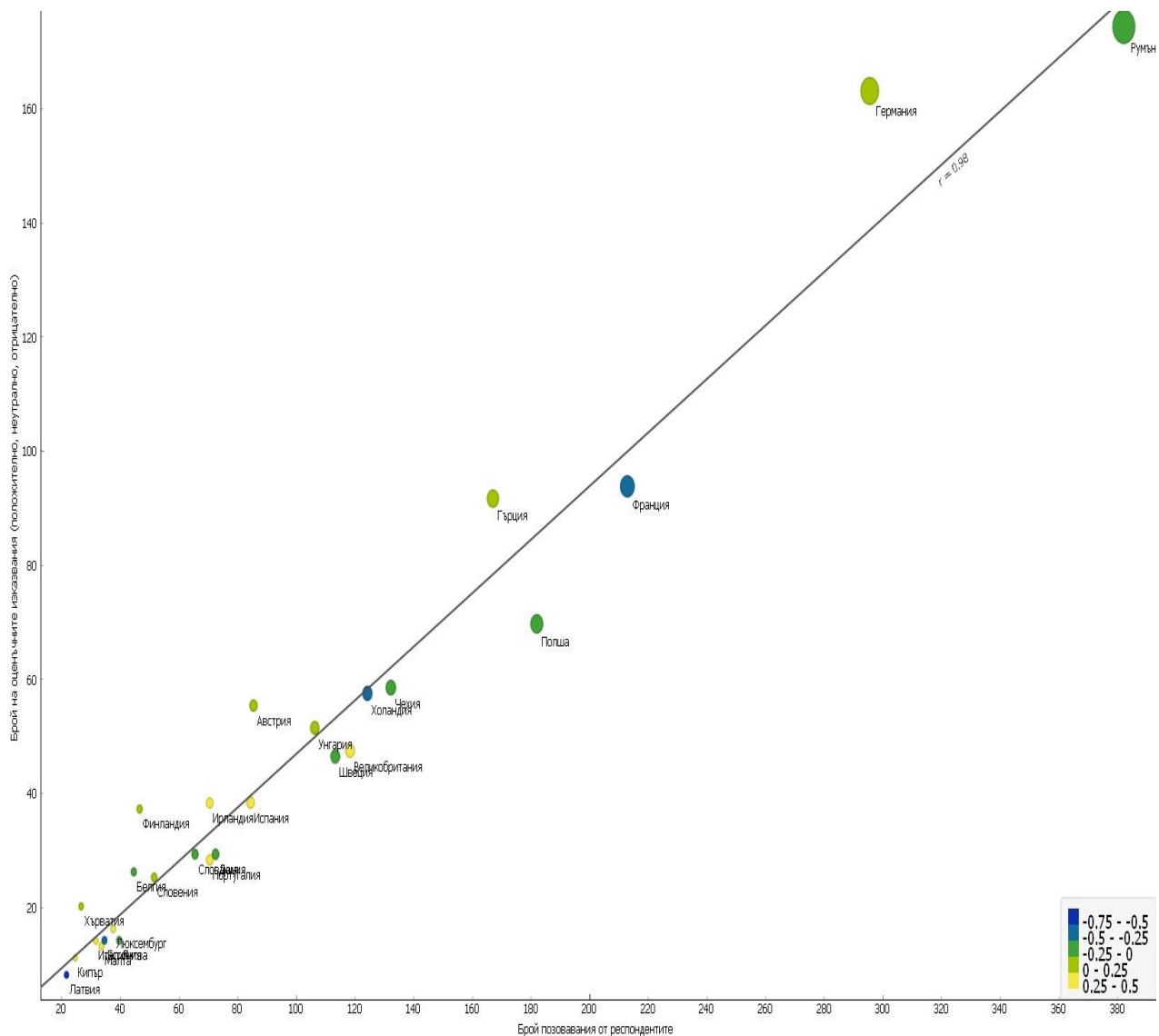
Figure 1. Proportions of countries mentioned in group discourse by absolute number



But besides the number of references for each country, they are also characterized by the specific

evaluative meaning of each statement and the combination of these two empirical indicators can be thought of as a kind of special positioning of the respective country's participation in the Bulgarian European integration 'political space'. The complex of all these cases forms an imaginary "EU-integration galaxy". It is unlikely that any country played an important role in Bulgaria's preparations for EU membership but was omitted in the group narrative. The positioning of each country is calculated as a synthesis of the values of two indicators: a) the total number of citations and b) the evaluative characteristic of the integration interaction (Fig. 2).

Figure 2. Conditional "radiance" of the EU countries on the "skyline" of Bulgarian integration in the EU



This visualization clearly shows the different rates and types of participation of each country in the Bulgarian EU integration process. The analysis of the empirical data highlighted two main structural characteristics: a) a striking inequality among the different countries; b) a *visible, although not drastic, dominance of the countries' negative roles in the integration process*. However, only two countries are most important -

Romania and Germany. The Romanian participation is the largest in absolute terms, but is slightly negative . Germany's is smaller by volume but is clearly positive.

Then come, but at a very great distance from the first two, three more countries - France, Greece, Poland, which are substantially distant from each other, and in addition France and Poland have a predominance of negative contribution, unlike Greece, whose positive contribution is less than that of Germany in number of references. These five countries (about 18% of the total) together account for nearly half of all citations (about 48%). Which is a reason to make them a priority object of attention in the analysis.

However, in the "field" of international life, actors are not abstract mathematical points, but real subjects representing national societies with all their meaningful diversity and complexity. This means that the interactions are not on a single plane of force, but unfold in a multidimensional and qualitatively diverse space. For the purposes of analysis, we can simplify this complex EU-integration galaxy by formalizing socio-political interaction to the *structure of political activity* (Table 1).

Table 1. Distributions of the absolute number of references of each country in a specific semantic context

Country	partnership	Subject	site	"terrain"	Government	Parliament	Diplomats	Ministers	Politicians	expert(s)	Expert at the	Event	correlation	business	Other	others listing	Total
Romania	15	49	133	3	1	1	1	1	2			24	130	2	3	19	384
Germany	31	92	4	34	2	1	7	2	17	15	1	10	19	8	19	35	297
France	14	53	7	19	7	1	4	3	1	1	2	19	14	4	13	52	214
Poland	11	28	46	4			4			1		4	42	1	3	39	183
Greece	17	59	1	20	2	2	3	7	1	4	1	6	12	6	12	15	168
Czech Republic	6	37	8	4			3	1		1		4	27	3	3	36	133
Netherlands	7	40	9	12	2	4		2		1	1	10	6	3	5	23	125
UK	15	31	13	6	3	2	3	2	4	3		7	8		2	20	119
Sweden	4	26	7	10	3		1	3			1	5	23		4	27	114
Hungary	6	15	6	2			1			2		34	1			40	107
Austria	1	28	11	13			1			2	1	2	10	1	3	13	86
Spain	10	11	15	4	1		1	2		2	2	12	11	2		12	85
Denmark	3	13	6	8							1	9	15	1	1	16	73
Portugal	6	13	14	2	2		2	1		1	1	7	9	1		12	71
Ireland	8	18	6	4			1	1			1	13	8	2	1	8	71
Slovakia	2	10	6				1					19	10	1		17	66
Slovenia	1	8	5					1		1		14	3			19	52
Finland	4	12		10			1	2			1	13	1		1	2	47
Belgium	1	10	3	13		3	1	2		4			1	2	2	3	45
Lithuania		4	6	1								1	14			14	40
Luxembourg	2	1	3	13	1							11	1		4	2	38
Estonia		5	9									1	13			7	35
Malta		2	7										13			12	34
Italy	4	5	2		2				1			3	5		1	9	32
Croatia	2	2	4	1								10	1		2	5	27
Cyprus			5										10			10	25
Latvia		1	4									1	8			8	22
Total	170	573	340	183	26	14	35	30	26	38	13	239	415	37	79	475	2693

Analysis of the data leads to a double-fold most significant initial conclusions: *the inferiority of partnership versus unilaterally conducted activity and the predominance of work on specific policy issues over general political relationships, while it is politics, exactly, that dramatically dominates business relations*. However, these generalizations are only valid at the level of the entire picture. For, from the same formal-structural point of view, one sees *not only unevenness between the share accumulations of responses among the different analytical categories, but also substantially of very different share proportions in the respective national cases, between which no two are even closely similar*.

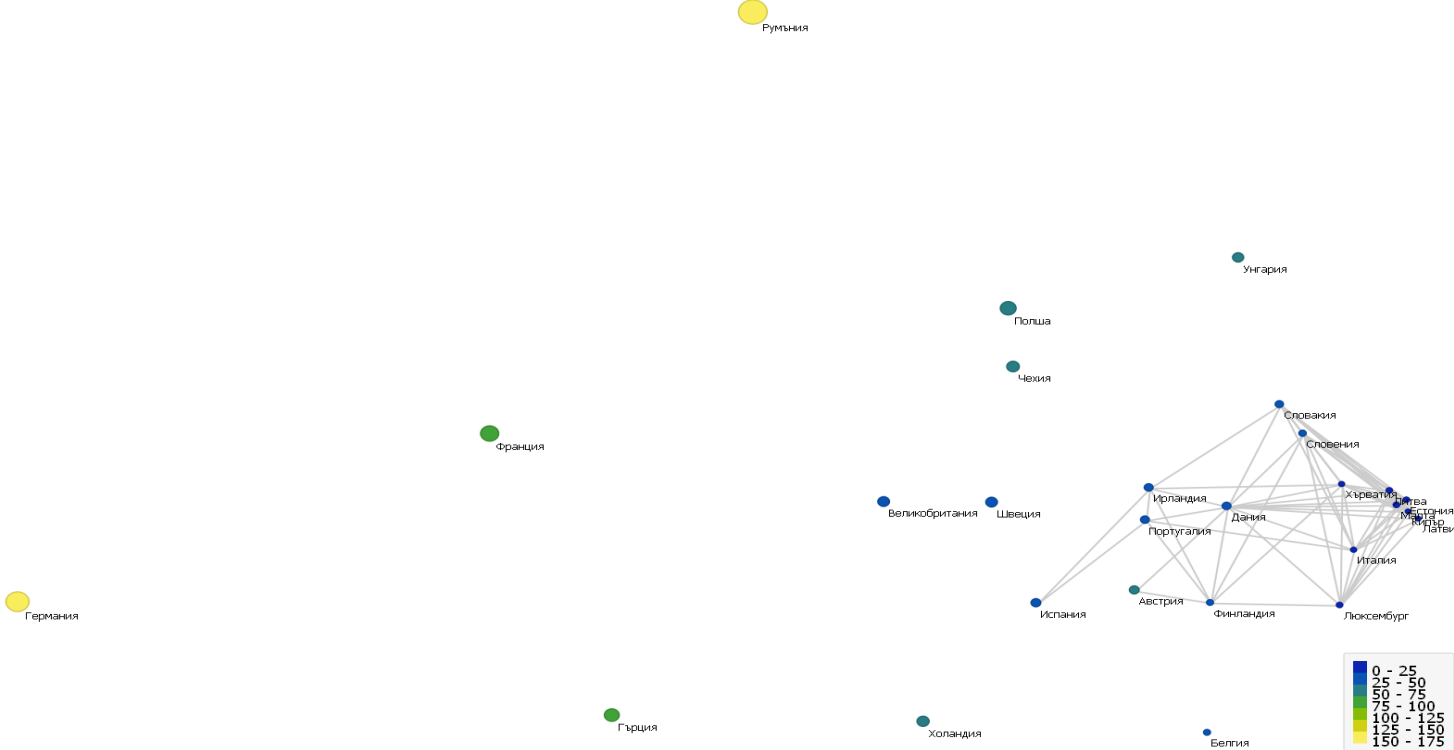
Next, we can now focus our attention on specific substantive features in the partition proportions that our research has identified. Each country 'holds' a certain share of the mentions in the aggregate group discourse, but its 'particular contribution' to some of the analytical categories deviates very significantly from the overall national share, which means that it is in this country that the analytical category in question has a distinctive meaning for the particular structuring of the Euro-integration galaxy. The obtained empirical results allow us to make a comparative analysis of the way countries participate in Bulgaria's EU accession, which serves as an orientation for the qualitative analysis of particular national participations (Table 2).

Table 2. Share contribution of each country in the structuring of the EU integration galaxy

Country	partnership	Subject	site	"terrain"	Government	Parliament	Diplomats	Ministers	Politicians	expert(s)	Expert at the	Event	correlation	business	Other	others listing amount	Share in %
Romania	8.8	8.6	39.1	1.6	3.8	7.1	2.9	3.3	7.7	0.0	0.0	10.0	31.3	5.4	3.8	4.0	14.3
Germany	18.2	16.1	1.2	18.6	7.7	7.1	20.0	6.7	65.4	39.5	7.7	4.2	4.6	21.6	24.1	7.4	11.0
France	8.2	9.2	2.1	10.4	26.9	7.1	11.4	10.0	3.8	2.6	15.4	7.9	3.4	10.8	16.5	10.9	7.9
Poland	6.5	4.9	13.5	2.2	0.0	0.0	11.4	0.0	0.0	2.6	0.0	1.7	10.1	2.7	3.8	8.2	6.8
Greece	10.0	10.3	0.3	10.9	7.7	14.3	8.6	23.3	3.8	10.5	7.7	2.5	2.9	16.2	15.2	3.2	6.2
Czech Republic	3.5	6.5	2.4	2.2	0.0	0.0	8.6	3.3	0.0	2.6	0.0	1.7	6.5	8.1	3.8	7.6	4.9
Netherlands	4.1	7.0	2.6	6.6	7.7	28.6	0.0	6.7	0.0	2.6	7.7	4.2	1.4	8.1	6.3	4.8	4.6
UK	8.8	5.4	3.8	3.3	11.5	14.3	8.6	6.7	15.4	7.9	0.0	2.9	1.9	0.0	2.5	4.2	4.4
Sweden	2.4	4.5	2.1	5.5	11.5	0.0	2.9	10.0	0.0	0.0	7.7	2.1	5.5	0.0	5.1	5.7	4.2
Hungary	3.5	2.6	1.8	1.1	0.0	0.0	2.9	0.0	0.0	5.3	0.0	14.2	0.2	0.0	0.0	8.4	4.0
Austria	0.6	4.9	3.2	7.1	0.0	0.0	2.9	0.0	0.0	5.3	7.7	0.8	2.4	2.7	3.8	2.7	3.2
Spain	5.9	1.9	4.4	2.2	3.8	0.0	2.9	6.7	0.0	5.3	15.4	5.0	2.7	5.4	0.0	2.5	3.2
Denmark	1.8	2.3	1.8	4.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	7.7	3.8	3.6	2.7	1.3	3.4	2.7
Portugal	3.5	2.3	4.1	1.1	7.7	0.0	5.7	3.3	0.0	2.6	7.7	2.9	2.2	2.7	0.0	2.5	2.6
Ireland	4.7	3.1	1.8	2.2	0.0	0.0	2.9	3.3	0.0	0.0	7.7	5.4	1.9	5.4	1.3	1.7	2.6
Slovakia	1.2	1.7	1.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	7.9	2.4	2.7	0.0	3.6	2.5
Slovenia	0.6	1.4	1.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.3	0.0	2.6	0.0	5.9	0.7	0.0	0.0	4.0	1.9
Finland	2.4	2.1	0.0	5.5	0.0	0.0	2.9	6.7	0.0	0.0	7.7	5.4	0.2	0.0	1.3	0.4	1.7
Belgium	0.6	1.7	0.9	7.1	0.0	21.4	2.9	6.7	0.0	10.5	0.0	0.0	0.2	5.4	2.5	0.6	1.7
Lithuania	0.0	0.7	1.8	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.4	3.4	0.0	0.0	2.9	1.5
Luxembourg	1.2	0.2	0.9	7.1	3.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.6	0.2	0.0	5.1	0.4	1.4
Estonia	0.0	0.9	2.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.4	3.1	0.0	0.0	1.5	1.3
Malta	0.0	0.3	2.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.1	0.0	0.0	2.5	1.3
Italy	2.4	0.9	0.6	0.0	7.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.8	0.0	0.0	1.3	1.2	0.0	1.3	1.9	1.2
Croatia	1.2	0.3	1.2	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.2	0.2	0.0	2.5	1.1	1.0
Cyprus	0.0	0.0	1.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.4	0.0	0.0	2.1	0.9
Latvia	0.0	0.2	1.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.4	1.9	0.0	0.0	1.7	0.8
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100.0

If so far we have been looking at the structuring of our EU-integration galaxy in terms of the relative weight of each country's national contribution, it is worth inquiring next whether there are any groups of countries constructed on the basis of similarities in their national profiles. To this end, a multidimensional scaling by the primary indicators was performed (Fig. 3).

Figure 3. Mutual positions of the EU member states in the Bulgarian EU integration space space¹³



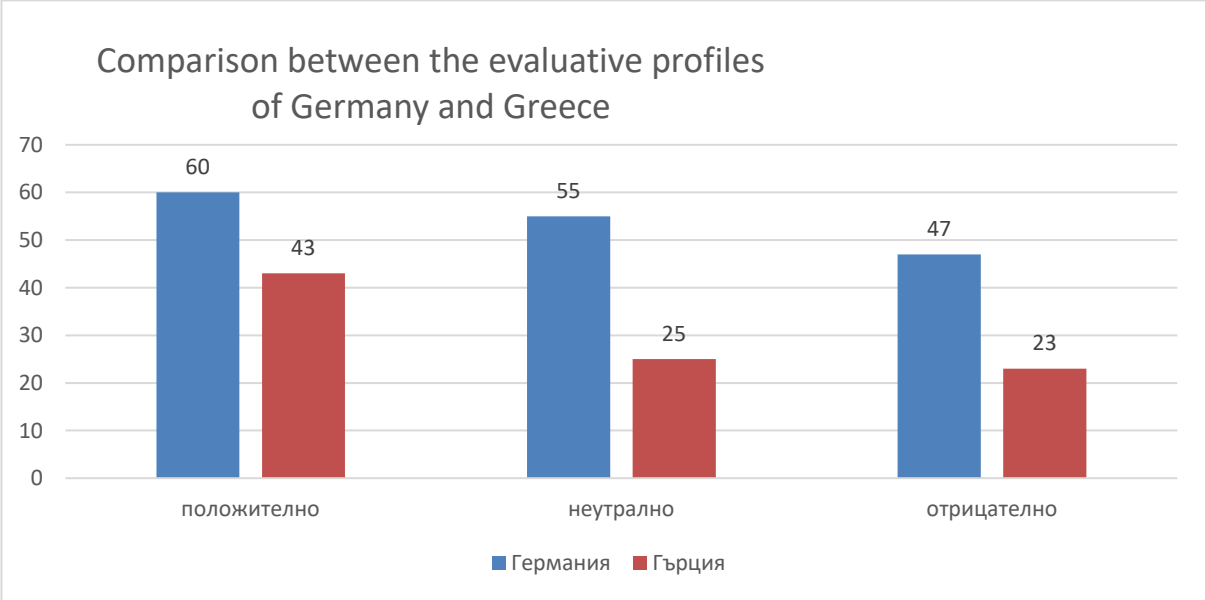
The result from this statistical operation and its visualization only confirms and further clarifies what is already known from previous quantitative analyses. The visualization is very useful because it prevents a possible optical illusion stimulated by the previous graph. Fig. 3 shows that *Romania and Germany are "very far" from each other in terms of the type of participation in the Bulgarian EU integration*. Some countries may look like they form cluster links, but this is an "optical illusion" only, due to the large share of "vacuum" in their way of participation in our EU integration process, i.e. *these countries only appear similar due to the marginal importance they had for the course of Bulgarian EU accession*.

¹³ Bubble size - the number of references; Bubble color - the number of ratings. The multidimensional scaling was done on 19 indicators. the 16 first table and the three estimates from the second table. Both the data processing and the visualizations are done by Assoc. Prof. Kaloyan Haralampiev.

The empirical analysis reveals a clear polarization in the attitude towards Bulgaria's EU accession process. Neutral references gather an overall share of about 26 (25.75)%, while the rest are almost equally distributed in shares of the order of 37% with a negligible numerical predominance of positive references (473:464). Among all 27 national cases, there is not a single one that falls within the normal distributions. This means that all the countries are unequivocally placed (from the accounts of our EU-integrators) in two opposing camps - those who were, at least mildly, in favor of Bulgarian accession to the EU and the rest who were, to say the least, not too enthusiastic about this prospect. While Romania leads in terms of general number of negative references, it has not been the 'big stumbling block' on our way to EU accession. This role is assigned, according to the group discourse of our respondents, to ... France:

According to the aggregate narrative of the respondents, the leading position in terms of predominantly positive attitude towards Bulgaria is held by Greece, which ranks fifth in terms of frequency of mention in all meaningful contexts and fourth in terms of the share of expressed evaluative positions. It is evident, however, that the Greek case is structurally in the same order as the German case, but just slightly more predominantly positive. But Greece is not seen by our respondents as a big (overwhelming) supporter of Bulgaria either (Fig. 4):

Figure 4. Typological homogeneity and relative inequality of participation of Greece and Germany



And after Greece in our conventional EU integration galaxy come six "politically well-meaning dwarf stars":

Figure 4. Comparison of evaluation profiles among countries with minimal attention in group discourse, but with a marked predominance of positive evaluations



Even when we get an predominantly overall positive attitude from the country concerned, goodwill is not that much strong. There is also clear empirical support for the repeatedly mentioned in the interviews thesis that *Bulgaria has received, among the old member states, support mostly from the "NATO's Southern flank"* (plus Ireland).

The empirical analysis establishes that Bulgaria's accession to the EU faces a major *double-fold problem*. On the one hand, we have too many "supposed partners", which respondents talk about in an overwhelmingly negative context - as many as 11 countries. On the other hand, five of them are candidate countries for EU membership and four are our direct competitors in the second group from Helsinki, which received an invitation to start negotiations at the end of 1999. The rest of our opponents are very influential member-states: Netherlands, France, Sweden, joined now and then by Belgium, Austria, and Finland.

Against this contingent "front of resistance" or ill-will, on the other hand, we have to act with three resources:

- the support of the conditional team of "well-meaning dwarf stars";

- the prevailing, but not very pronounced, friendship of Greece and
- the very slightly pronounced tendency towards a positive position of (the predominantly balanced in its attitude towards us) Germany.

In other words, the support of the leaders of the leading NATO countries (the US and the UK), explained in the previous chapter, was crucial not only along the line of strategically distancing Bulgaria from Russia, but also directly for the purpose of successfully joining the EU by overcoming influential political resistances. The analysis of the empirical data shows *that there are no blocs of countries in the EU integration space, nor a stable/common pattern of interaction*. Bulgaria has had to deal with the problems of interaction with each individual country, and we have always had some problems with all of them - and in a large number of cases the problems are prevalent; in some cases they are even outstanding in our relations with the relevant important EU member-states.

The facts presented above provide strong evidence of the dominant political character of the EU accession process in the Bulgarian-Romanian case, with very significant national specificities. According to the statement of a key actor in the negotiation process, "It's not just a matter of ticking the boxes - *acquis* here, *acquis* there. It is not. It was never that" (int. 27). In the remainder of chapter six, the analysis traces the details of each individual national case in terms of the specific relationships at stake.

Romania has had the biggest weight in the accession process, but its contribution to the process is seen in a distinctly negative light, because of being political coupled in a steady tandem, despite the significant differences in the pace of progress towards EU membership. However, there is no political will within the Union to admit Bulgaria on its own, and there is a distinct French interest in our joint treatment (Verheugen 2020).

From all the facts above a conclusion follows that in our case the EU-integration process did have a distinct peculiarity and it is clearly expressed in the way the conditional "German-French engine" was influential. Figuratively speaking, the 'integration engine' is recognized as a 'German motor' to which other parts with different countries of origin, many of them French, are fitted. But Germany, which is generally the great patron of the EU's eastern enlargement and has been *consistent in its moderate support for us*, still has its own claims on Bulgaria (although on the economic chapters "it was relatively easy to work with"). So the final support is very hard won, and this positions Germany in our EU integration as a participant with a lot of influence, but with a very slightly prevailing positive context of meaning, in the memories of the participants in the process.

This specific positioning allows Germany to be overtaken by Greece in the importance of support (which is exactly three times more pronounced: 0.053 to 0.159). *It is noticeably smaller in terms of influence,*

but with a higher prevalence of positive semantic emphases. However, we have also had difficult problems to solve with Greece: cross-border transport infrastructure, environmental issues, opposition to Bulgarian nuclear power, steel-industry problems, etc. *Greece is proving to be a relatively vocal but comparatively weak partner for Bulgaria, with whom we have nothing serious to quarrel about, but much to gain together.*

So it's no surprise that there are countries that outrank Greece, by a factor of three, on the rank of (remembered) goodwill and support. These are only two - Ireland and Spain, which are very different from each other, including in the set of characteristics that are significant for the Bulgarian EU integration. What allows us to see them as a common type of positioning in our EU-integration galaxy is the clearly expressed overwhelming support, which found political expression mostly through the influence of the respective rotating presidency of the Council of the EU. However, while in the case of Spain specific lobbying interests are clearly identified as a background for receiving political support, Ireland is downright puzzling with its disinterested goodwill: "much to the surprise of all those who said: 'What are these Bulgarian-Irish strong ties?'" (int. 1).

This fact again brings us back to the important topic of the other participants' own political role in the EU enlargement. For it is becoming undeniably clear *that in the decision-making process in EU enlargements, the national political considerations turn out to be decisive* (Smith 2003; Ludlow 2004; Vassilliou 2007; Verheugen 2020).

If the empirical analysis presented above explains why Bulgaria's relations with the EU member states have been more of an obstacle than an advantage in our preparations for membership, and we already know the relative weakness and scarcity of the resources with which our country carried out those preparations, then it is clear that the role of another key actor must have been decisive for the final success. **Chapter Seven** presents the results of the empirical study, answering the question of why and how the European Commission is in this peculiar role. Since the extraordinary importance of the EC for the EU's Eastern enlargement has been made clear in the academic literature (Grabbe 2006; O'Brennan 2006a, Tatham 2009; Hillion 2011; Gateva 2015), the aim here is to explain what is special about the Bulgarian case. This implies answering the question of how the Commission fulfils a role characterized by contradiction - *it is our best friend who is no friend at all.*

The intensity of the references in the group discourse shows that the EC holds "political ownership" with a decisive input for Bulgaria's EU accession! It has been referred to - on many different occasions and in specific perspectives - more than 800 times: in ten main thematic contexts, each of which has between four and twelve problem circles with a series of individualizing nuances in the emphases put forward.

1. *There is a higher political decision that the Commission is implementing.*
2. *This is how the Commission works with all CCEEs.* The sub-themes here relate to: a) its general political attitude to the *task* contained in the integration of the CECEs; b) the characteristic political *approach*; c) following a certain *pattern of work*; d) *specific steps* indicated in preparation for enlargement, etc.; e) *assessments of the Commission's performance*.
3. The EC's *own institutional interest* is also a subject of attention. More precisely, the complementarity of two different interests arising from the EC's vocation (in the Weberian sense of Beruf). First, the general interest of the Union, for the protection of which the Commission has a special role in its institutional design, but which is at the same time the interest of the Commission itself as a political agent in the EU system. Separate from this, secondly, comes the *Commission's own interest as an institutional subject extending its influence in managing precisely integration processes* (which Verheugen proudly recounts).
4. The largest share of respondents *revealed the multiple role of the EC*: (a) institutional broker in the preparation of negotiating positions and in the course of the negotiations themselves; (b) the EC instructs our preparations for EU membership; (c) assesses the state of play, the degree of compliance with standards, progress made, promises fulfilled; (d) the EC is the most competent expert/interpreter on the general meaning and application of the *acquis*; (e) manages the financing of preparations for EU membership; (f) the EC also manages the enlargement PR; (g) the Commission supports and defends Bulgaria inside and outside the EU in relations with third countries and international institutions; (h) the EC acts as a mighty ally, not simply a broker; i) it is open to our innovations offered.
5. In addition to all this, in the course of the preparations for membership the Bulgarian EU-integrators rely on the Commission to be the "bad cop" we *want*", following whose instructions removes the burden of responsibility for unpopular political decisions.
6. The memories of the Bulgarian European integrators are evidence of an intensive, constant and productive interaction with the EC. All of these facts, especially in the context of the lack of sustained support from EU member states, *gives the impression to our EU integrators that they are receiving indispensable help from the Commission and leads to the assessment that it is our greatest friend in the accession process*. It should come as no surprise that one in five of our respondents were happy to recall specific examples of how the Commission has worked enthusiastically with us and this becomes the basis for building lasting good personal relationships.
7. This is a reason to expect that the multiplicity of institutional levels in the Commission and its structural units will be represented in the group discourse of our respondents, and the respective proportions in the total sum of references will be symptomatic of *the magnitude and character of the contribution of the*

institutional units to Bulgaria's preparations for EU membership.

(a) EC Presidents and deputies. In 800 references to the EC, three Presidents are mentioned a total of 11 times on 10 occasions, and in very particular contexts. Which means: *Bulgaria's accession to the EU was not a high political priority for the Commission Presidents.*

(b) Commissioners. At this level the narratives become more specific. Positive assessments of the involvement of the Commissioners in the partnership with Bulgaria prevail. There is a tendency that *the lower the level of partnership interaction, the more positive is its interpretation, because this is where politics "thins out" and it is the actual work done and support received that matters.*

(c) Directorates-General and Directors. With one exception, recollections are overwhelmingly positive.

(d) Experts, often unnamed. *Memoirs emphasize the volume and intensity of the work and also the constructive partnership.* But the main reason for this kind of answers is another - the huge number of tasks to be solved as well as the standard way of working obliterate personality differences. At the lowest level, where the business work is, there is no personal brightness to make it stand out and therefore nothing to remember. At the highest political level, where there could be a bright personal presence, there was hardly any recorded, in the Bulgarian case.

(e) Chief Negotiator for BG. Bulgaria has not had any "suitable chief negotiator". Not only because a number of figures have passed through this position, but also *because they have precisely figured in their institutional role without leaving any trace of a memorable deed or at least a politically significant initiative.*

(f) Representation in BG. The memories are few, but these references are unconditionally positive and very personal, and this is an important exception to the overall picture.

The only, conditionally generalized, sense in these references puts the emphasis on the *complex institutional differentiation in the organization of the EC, despite which it acts as a single entity, defending unified positions.* From a Bulgarian perspective, this is undoubtedly a characteristic worth noting as distinctive for the work of such a complex political player. There is no doubt that for the Bulgarian actors involved in the process, the leading feature (with some exceptions) is precisely the impressive unity and overwhelming professional integrity of the Commission's work.

Yet every third respondent explains why *the Commission cannot be our friend* in the accession process.

8. The explanations *why the EC cannot be a friend* refer to two circumstances:

a) Friendship implies the unselfish provision of *unconditional help*, without any reservations, and even the most well-intentioned partnership with Bulgaria in the broad spectrum of the EC's actions does not allow it to be interpreted in such terms;

b) The Commission's behavior of support always *remains within its institutional mandate and the political mandate given by the member states, i.e. there are external barriers to its behavioral repertoire.*

9. An entirely different reason why the Commission's role cannot be interpreted through the prism of friendship *is the many internal obstacles to its work.* Of these, the most important are the *specific wrong actions* or, more generally, *a misguided political approach.* There are claims about specific actions of individual Commission representatives, but there are also clear criticisms of the approach to some sectoral policies and also of the political approach to enlargement orchestrated by the Commission; there are claims about specific experts, but also about the quality of the expertise provided in general (int. 4, 17, 24). There are critical remarks about the EU accession preparation policy of all CECEs, but there are also comments about inadequate actions of the Commission specifically towards Bulgaria - either due to bureaucratic clumsiness (int. 28, 38 and 40) or due to political bias (int. 27, 30, 33, 34, 42). These views do not dominate the group narrative, but are most often additional reservations against universalizing the goodwill and usefulness of partnership with the EC. Such a generalization would hinder an understanding of the real complexity inherent in the political task of a multilevel and heterogeneous relationship with the Commission.

10. Clash between different models of institutional culture. In this type of memoir, a long series of micro-crises in the relationship between Bulgaria and the EC comes to the fore, which stems from the incompatibility between cultural models: (a) the categorical incompatibility between "real socialism" and "Western capitalism", which was suspected of "spying on our successes" (according to an ideological interpretation of high-ranking state officials); (b) the cacophony of divergent signals from the inherited administrative apparatus, part of which has embraced the cause of European integration, but another part actively resists this political orientation; (c) the untranslatability into Bulgarian of the practices that are the basis of the language usages enshrined in the EU documents and should find an equivalent in the Bulgarian normative environment; (d) the attitude to "copy from somewhere" because we have no idea how to do it; (e) the attitude to "lie" to the Commission (int. 1, 11, 27, 40), driven by the expectation that that would pass unnoticed number can pass;¹⁴ (f) the rapid disclosure of the imitative Europeanisation, remaining only on paper, etc. In this respect, it would be most dangerous if a single action or even a single stage in the formation and unfolding of this interaction were to be generalized as the sole definition of the inconceivably complex set of relations that have given substance to this qualitatively time-varying integration partnership.

¹⁴ In this respect, *one of the main practical recommendations to the principles on which the Bulgarian preparation for EU membership should be built* is quite symptomatic: "It should not be thought that a country with limited resources like ours will be able to hide anything from the bureaucracy in Brussels, which has a capacity of many thousands and which receives diverse and accurate information about our real problems" (CID 1999: 34).

Besides, the *Commission changes* over time. In some of the cases where the qualification that it has been "Bulgaria's best friend" is objected to, the respondents' thesis does not reject either the usefulness of the assistance or the goodwill, but the unambiguity of the characterization is challenged. For it was the *diversity and ambiguity of the Commission's role that was significant for the participants in those processes*. One major reason for the inappropriateness of generalizing a singularly taken quality *is precisely the transformations that both its role and the manner of its performance undergo over time*. These relate both to the *nature of the relationship between the partners*, to the *political priorities* in terms of content, and to the content of the specific procedures in which the interaction takes place, i.e. its *instrumentality*. And also to the acquisition of experience through which, for example, the status of the rule of law in the relationship with Bulgaria changes (interviews 4, 8, 19, 27, 29, 44).

The shortest but accurate answer to the question "how was the EC involved in the preparation for EU membership?" would be "Differently". But this does not apply only to the sequence of historical stages or the different phases of preparation within an accession round. It also applies to the interaction of even a single phase of the partnership with a particular country, in this case Bulgaria. At a higher level of generalization, the *partnership in the course of EU membership preparations includes, as its internal moment, mutual learning between the partners and numerous adaptations of the applied policy approach as a consequence of that* (Gateva 2015).

In final account, it is proven that the central and extremely complex role of the Commission makes it a unique actor in the Bulgarian EU integration, whose importance is simply incommensurable with anything else. Apart from it, only the European Council, the European Parliament and the Council of the EU have received attention (but mostly through the role of rotating presidencies, which have the ability to influence the pace of the accession process). Therefore, the specific way in which these institutional actors figure in the group narrative of Bulgarian integration into the EU is not surprising. Unlike the EC, which receives a lot of attention, the other institutions are mentioned only in passing.

There are two sides to the explanation of the notion of the supreme importance of the EC in Bulgaria's preparations for EU membership. On the one hand, there is the logic of the very controversial task that the EU has to solve in the course of the process and the EC has a set of key advantages to do the job. The well-intentioned and active use of this complex, especially against the background of the lack of influential patrons for our relatively weak candidacy, makes the EC appear like Bulgaria's "best friend". On the other hand, based on the same starting premises, one arrives at the significant shrunken appearances of the European Council, the Council and the European Parliament in the Bulgarian European integration process, in the context of which the EC further stands out.

Due to the late start of the practical steps towards EU membership, the country's starting position is markedly unfavorable. Apart from the lack of economic interest in partnership, EU member states and institutions have a negative value attitude towards Bulgaria, which has turned into a persistent suspicion. Both preconditions mean a weak potential for EU integration, in addition to the economic catastrophe and criminalization of the mid-1990s. Hence the need namely for a friend, not just a partner, in the process of preparing for EU membership. Because of the lack of a patron state, the EC proved to be the most active and productive advocate of the Bulgarian cause. The latter has been included in the political agenda of the Union a) under the pressure of the situationally expanded priority of European security in 1999 (the "Kosovo crisis"), but also b) under the pressure of the influential NATO members, the USA and the UK, after our accession to the second Gulf War, induced by the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attack. But most important is c) the changed attitude towards EU enlargement under the presidency of Romano Prodi and the change of priorities in this policy towards equal opportunity for all CEE, in line with the views of Commissioner Günther Verheugen.

For us, the Commission's highly significant role stems from the specificity of its own position, configured by the confluence of interrelated factors: a) a strong institutional interest in the success of the EU's Eastern enlargement; b) specific institutional competence and accumulated know-how for partnership with post-communist countries, as well as the authority to fulfil the multiple roles of instructor, competent advisor, evaluator, disposer of the instruments to support membership preparations and fair broker. Even the last - the honest standing for objectively defensible positions of the candidate country - is no small feat if we take into account the need to overcome the negative image of the country and the strong opposition of influential member-states. Due to the combination of the real great importance of the EC in a series of dimensions and the practically proven benevolent support from its side, the generalized perception arises in the minds of a large part of the Bulgarian EU integrators that it is precisely "Bulgaria's best friend". However, the dependence of the assessment of the EC's role on an expectation of "friendship" has a flip side. This perspective further focuses attention on cases of sluggish decision-making, bureaucratic irresponsibility, mistakes or misunderstanding. Such weaknesses in the EC's role are a problem in themselves, but in the context of 'expected friendship' they are particularly painful.

The attitude towards the role of the EC radically depends on the comparative context of the evaluation. It was clarified already that Bulgaria's unfavorable starting position is the reason for the disproportionality in the sentiment towards Bulgaria from the member states, expressed in a combination of a lack of a strong and predominantly positive attitude among the most influential member states and the widespread and persistent negative attitude towards us from just such countries (the Netherlands, France,

Sweden), joined on particular issues by Germany, Austria, Finland, even Greece. It is precisely in this context that even the goodwill of the Commission acquires a special value, as we find the same from the analysis of the group recollection of the role of the other main EU institutions in this process. For both in the European Council and in the European Parliament the same countries are represented, which, to say the least, do not make our job (of preparing for membership) easy. Overcoming the strong reticence in the Council towards Bulgaria's candidacy was very difficult and uncertain, as well.

As a result of all this, the Commission appears as a kind of Everest, both because it is the institution that is extremely important in Bulgaria's preparations for EU membership by its specific roles, but also because it stands out even more in the double comparative perspective: a) in relation to the role of the other most important actors in the process (member states and the other main institutions) and b) in relation to the evaluative prism of the Bulgarian EU-integrators, which served as an additional magnifying glass to these differences.

After the explanation of the foreign policy framework for the EU accession, the next three chapters present the results of the analysis of the information on the *modus operandi* that leads to the solution of the historical task of gaining EU membership. However, the solution is conditioned by the specific local interweaving of polity, politics and policies.

Chapter Eight reveals the most important features in the way Bulgaria dealt with the European integration challenge. Due to the coincidence, but also the build-up over time of a long series of circumstances¹⁵ - a) a relatively late, and b) very low start of preparations, c) in an environment of serious skepticism, even cases of open resistance from influential member states, (d) a continuous aggravation of the conditions for membership set by the EU, and (e) a sharp deterioration of the general international climate and a drop in the euphoria on EU enlargement, and also (f) seeing EU membership as an end in itself, but (g) very scarce potential to achieve the set objectives, etc., - the *successful solution of the task at hand has, as its decisive prerequisite, the maximum minimization of its scope and content*. This is a common condition for all post-communist societies in the CEE, and also for the EC, as explained in Chapter Two. But in the Bulgarian case, this condition indeed becomes a "condition *sine qua non*". In order to make the task feasible at all, the preparation for EU membership *must be limited to* the "harmonization of Bulgarian legislation with European legislation" (acquis transfer). Let us not forget that the EC, at least until the late 1990s, also promoted such

¹⁵ Compare Bechev 2020, pp. 162 et seq.

a narrow understanding of the nature of the integration task. And it should be recalled that it also had a long list of reasons for pursuing such a policy: a) such a transposition is indispensable for the creation of a single socio-economic space in the EU in which to pursue common integration policies; b) legal transposition is an absolutely urgent imperative in post-communist societies; c) such a task is within the Commission's remit - as an experience of previous enlargements, but also as a perimeter of its institutional powers; and d) it thus creates an instrument with which it can influence process, i.e. the monitoring which by e) the EC acquires a device for common treatment of all candidates on conventionally 'objective terms'; f) in the context of having no means of coercion for due reforms; g) last but not least, under the pressure of the EC's private institutional interest to achieve the goal of successful Eastern enlargement for the purpose of which it had to make the very task of the national governments feasible.

Under these preconditions it is normal to encounter the fact that the preparations for EU membership in Bulgaria were concentrated on the swift conclusion of the negotiations, which - quite understandable then (but illusory) - also *seemed to be* the end of accession.¹⁶ *In the then international, socio-structural and value-laden context, it was absolutely unthinkable to ask whether EU integration (could or should) have any other content than that required by the EC.* In Bulgaria, which in the second half of the 1990s very painfully and precariously broke away from the turbulence of the Transition, there are not even individual experts or political parties, let alone the general citizenry, who understand what should be the essence of the due Europeanisation of public life. The analysis of the group discourse proves that *the preparations for membership are concentrated on the conclusion of the negotiations*, with attention focused on the sources for the negotiating positions.

Civilizational transformation should be Europeanization in content, but on the other hand, it should be very much aligned (if not coinciding) with a *specific national strategic agenda for a system of sectoral policies leading to sustainable societal development*. This implicit task is precisely the political-institutional transformation of national society, for which there are certainly no universally valid prescriptions. That is why the EC insists that each national society should have its own National Development Plan and that preparations for membership should be intrinsically linked to it. However, the substantive issues of sectoral policies leading to sustainable societal development have not been a meaningful framework of EU membership preparation in Bulgaria, because it followed a different logic - preparation for legal integration only (Int. 4, 33

¹⁶ "And so it was terribly important, in fact the smartest decision that the government of the day had taken as a negotiating tactic, to complete the negotiations as soon as possible - to sign the Treaty as soon as possible and to have a date for membership" (int. 3).

and 47). *There is not a single recollection that preparations for EU membership should include structural reforms of any sector of public life discussed at governmental level. Since the content of preparations as sectoral policies is microscopic, questions about the format of the process become paramount - as a substitute for content. This is how - directly and unambiguously - the majority of respondents understood the question of how national negotiating positions are formed. For them, the question of "how" automatically foregrounds precisely the technological administrative procedure of decision-making, in which the substantive side of the work being done can be recognized in no way.*

In this situation, the only reference, in terms of content, are EU directives and regulations. But how are they "translated into the language" of legal norms, which are of a completely different order in post-communist societies? How could experts know what the 'translation' is to the non-existent realities in our country (int. 40)?

The answer to this important question is found in the narratives, which clearly tell us that the *experience of the 10 countries that had gone before us along the same path was being used*. The position thus formulated, however, goes back to the political meaning of the whole exercise. Because in the new regulation of social relations, in the legal form harmonized with the European standard, the interests of various public sectors and economic branches collide, and therefore the government's decisions are crucial. As is clear from the recollections of the participants, any decision taken was the result of *someone imposing their will over competitors, i.e. overt party-political discretion*. There is abundance of specific references in the memoirs to scandals at government meetings. *In no memory of the actual procedure of forming Bulgarian negotiating positions is there any reference to any consideration of substantively specific strategic national objectives.*

In the reconstructed process of preparation for EU membership several important accents stand out: a) the *diverse actors* in the process - Bulgarian and foreign, but also central and marginal, according to their contribution to the final outcome; b) particular *crisis moments* in the formation of Bulgarian positions; c) *iteration* in the interactions of negotiation process.

Given that the preparation for the negotiations is 80 or 90 per cent an internal problem (or at least - a challenge) for the national society (int. 41), it is expected that this would be where the more frequently mentioned crisis moments at the highest level of governance are focused. The partnership with the EC turns out to be another possible source for the same, as clashes on the EU integration field are not generated only by conflicting interests within and between public policy sectors locally.

"It's no secret - the English came with one model, the Germans, with whom I communicated, came with another model, the Belgians - with a third, the French... and in Bulgarian we did exactly that.. In order not to

insult anyone from the old member states, we took something from everyone. This mish-mash of our justice system, which we are still eating to this day, is one of the reasons why we have so many problems in this sector" (int. 17).

The lack of internal substantive guidance and political know-how makes the borrowing of foreign experience crucial to the process. But *the innovations sought cannot follow any standard or established model because there is none at European level. There are competing models behind which there is lobbying* (int. 7, 17, 28, 41). Thus, the internal complexity of domestic lobbying interests clashing at the highest political level is further complicated by the clash of foreign interests.

The study found that 'foreign experience' was a "central player" on the field of Bulgarian integration in the EU, in particular in the preparation of the Bulgarian negotiating positions. In many cases, a negotiating chapter has been closed on the basis of *the adopted position imposed from outside*. This, however, does not diminish the significant contribution of local actors to EU integration. The distinctions among them are important.

The primacy of the government in preparing for EU membership has advantages and disadvantages. Advantages, insofar as the freedom for discretionary decision-making creates room for personal inputs - for ambition, innovation, pushing one's "iron will" (or, to put it mildly, for "orchestration" (int. 24) or, more bluntly, for "commanding" (int. 28)), which *is especially valuable when the natural course of public life does not tend in the same direction*. Disadvantages, because there is no guarantee that every government will be committed to the same cause, and subjectivism, which has become a working principle in politics, always turns out in the end to be counter-productive to the intended goal. Hence the fact of contradictory attitudes towards the governmental role in EU integration that our research has established.

From a typological point of view, we can distinguish the following types of main semantic emphases in the memories: a) focus on the *role of key structural units within the government*; b) the government as a *subject of reform initiatives and concrete actions*; c) as a *battleground between conflicting interests and different political stakes*. Moving on to the personal composition of the governments, we find that there are no individuals who are remembered as opponents of EU integration, however, only few have stood out as prominent enthusiasts of this idea - among all the 150 or so ministers during the period under review, a total of 13 are remembered. Meglena Kuneva with nine references (plus four more, but in a negative way); Solomon Passy with five, and right after him - Irina Bokova with four. Nadezhda Mihailova and Meglena Ploughchieva are next with three each. Next in line is a group of politicians with at least two references each. Bulgaria has had some good luck, at least, with foreign ministers.

The reason for this empirically derived (about ambiguous results for the role of political leadership in

Bulgaria) is more than clear. *The preparation for EU membership is not conceived as a deep Europeanisation of the whole society or, at least, of its main public policies.* Preparation is conceived as something external to the core activity (of ministers and ministries) of the ongoing management of local sectoral policies, none of which are oriented towards being reformed to become an integral part of the EU's common policy space.⁷

Unlike the majority in the ministerial corps, all three chief negotiators are remembered by all respondents in this very role and, overwhelmingly, in a good way.

In addition to the actors discussed above, the "working groups" and "negotiating teams" have been identified as key actors. When respondents talk about working groups, the main semantic emphasis falls on the substantive work, on the institutional relations with other units in the process of preparing the negotiating position, i.e. *on the purely business aspect*. Conversely, when the expression 'team' is used, the above meaningful aspect remains very much in the background and on the periphery of the view expressed, because it is not the functional but the *value-emotional stake* that is the leading one.⁸ Taking into account this important difference in the two modes of word use, we identify a distinct disproportion in the share of each in the group discourse of our EU-integrators: working groups are mentioned 171 times and negotiating teams 317 times. *This evaluative-emotional characteristic of the narratives* about our European integration process has a direct link to the *substantive character of the process itself*, (which will be discussed in the last chapter).

The central role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs clearly looms over everything and not by virtue of the fact that EU accession throughout the process (and also to a large extent so far) has been only "foreign affairs". The MFA has made a threefold contribution: a) the main institutional ownership of the integration process, which is particularly important given the fact that between 1991 and 2007 there have been 10 governments; b) a political entrepreneur, i.e. a subject of ideas and actions that are not routine and spelled out as powers and responsibilities of its experts and diplomats. An important caveat is due here - the accounts of our respondents never refer to the MFA as an institutional subject of initiatives, but *only to its individual representatives who "seized the moment" or flew in through any suddenly opened "window of opportunity"*. In the Bulgarian case, there are specificities stemming from a) the initial negative image that has to be overcome; b) the overwhelming lack of interest in Bulgaria's accession; c) the lack of influential patron states

⁷ "It all depends on the amount of work on the respective chapter, on the preliminary work before the actual negotiations, which should have been done (or later it turned out that nothing was done). Basically, that's what ... [was important]" (int. 36). "...I must not mislead you into thinking that the main task of ministers is to deal with the European issue and the opening and closing of chapters. Now, if you ask me, I have no recollection of a chapter on competition. I knew why then, but now I don't remember because it was not so important." (interview with a deputy prime-minister in charge of economy, named by his colleagues to be outstanding EU enthusiast).

to stand behind our cause unchallenged, and d) the repeatedly reinforced - after Bulgaria and Romania dropped out of the first wave of the Fifth Enlargement - overriding political imperative to speed up the negotiations.

In this sense, the prevailing acquiescence to the demands on Bulgaria was seen as a key political means to conclude the negotiations. Yet, the integrity of the picture requires that those contributions to the Bulgarian EU integration, which are of lesser relative weight, should be included in it.

Cooperation with NGO structures has been problematic. Four types of skepticism registered ('all the line ministers have nothing to tell you about this topic', 'I can't say they were really involved much', 'I don't recall there being [involvement]' and 'there must have been, but nothing to make an impression') and these focus the analytical senses on the nuances in the more substantive responses received.

The aggregate discourse recognizes as participants in the integration process a multitude of institutional entities of two distinct types: a) business/industry organizations, to which should be included also the rarely mentioned trade unions/syndicates and b) non-profit organizations, including universities, the agricultural academy and Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. It is noteworthy, however, that both forms of partnership are overwhelmingly referred to in general terms, and not so much by reference to specific examples and actors (17 times for NPO representatives and 14 times for industry representatives). However, 28 particular civil society structures are mentioned at least once and 13 are mentioned more than once. The European Institute leads with six mentions, but the Bulgarian Industrial Association, the Helsinki Committee and the Centre for European Studies also have more than three mentions each. *Bulgarian civil society has not been radically excluded from the preparations for membership, although there have not been many memorable appearances.* Nevertheless, the *positive experience of the partnership between the public administration and civil society structures dominates almost twice over the negative one.* The negative comments, regarding the *effectiveness of the NGO sector's participation* in the dialogue with the government, focus on the deficit of specialized professional expertise, also the lack of expert policy-competence as a way of working, but above all - the lack of self-organization and coherence in the sector's structures. Due to the predominantly state-political character of Bulgaria's EU accession, 'operationalized' as a techno-administrative procedure (Dimitrova 2020, cf. int. 4, 24, 29, 44), the voice of the fledgling NGO sector has not been decisive. Which in turn leads to the evaluation of a *successful* outcome not so much through the work done on a purely expert level, but through the broad national consensus on the subject.

⁸ "... I always want to start by thanking the people who started the process of negotiations with the European Union - a great team! Not so big at the beginning, but later on - a huge team of invisible workers. [They] also prepared us, who were more in the spotlight, so that Bulgaria could actually be invited on 10 December 99" (int. 31).

Then comes to the logical question: what were the political instruments to solve the very difficult task of EU accession?

The basic conceptual and methodological position of this study is that, in order to find a solution to the initial contradiction of the EU's Eastern enlargement (it must happen, but it cannot happen), it *must go through phases of unfolding, each of which both preserves it to some extent, but also transforms it in quality*. In sum, the resulting picture looks like this:

Bulgaria's historical outcome *is a consequence of the differential contribution of a complex, dispersed political subject and of the initial phase's formative impact in the process*. In the late 1990s, the task of financial stabilization of our country, as a prerequisite for everything else, was an absolute priority, swallowing up other political tasks (Kostov 2019). Then the necessity, imposed by the European Commission, for Bulgaria to make its own National Development Plan, linking preparations for EU membership with the strategic priorities of socio-economic development, did not meet much enthusiasm, although not one but two plans were made (the second was for regional development, which failed to harmonize with national development). The plan was made painfully, after a series of unsuccessful trials rejected by the Commission, and was hastily forgotten. The reason was not only the change of government, but, above all, the fact that the plan itself was written *pro forma*. Which is perfectly understandable if the political goal is conceived as "EU accession", which is supposed to be the solution to all private socio-economic problems.

Moreover, the only handful of experts relatively prepared for the goals of EU integration have gained their experience from the work on screening in the framework of the Europe Agreement with its two characteristic dominants: a) trade integration and b) transfer of the *acquis* into Bulgarian legislation (as the only means to achieve this first and seemingly only goal). The National Programme for the *Acquis* Adoption is therefore given the utmost importance because it is the main basis on which the negotiating chapters are closed.

Institutionally, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs lost its monopoly on EU integration, which is gradually ceasing to be "external relations" and is becoming "internal affairs" - first in the sense of preparatory work, which is in the Ministry of Interior's portfolio because of the border control problem, but also the security problems, which has now become EU integration policy. Secondly, and more importantly, even at that time EU integration directly affected dozens of sectoral policies in all spheres of public life, and most of them combined competences and practices at the intersections between different ministries.

There are two key actors in this mechanism - the Working Groups (WGs), in which the specific content of the positions on each of the negotiating chapters is elaborated, and the MFA, which ensures the

mediation with the EU institutions and with the member and candidate countries. And this turns out to be extremely important, because the content of the Bulgarian negotiating positions is formatted mainly in two ways: a) using the experience of the CEECs, which have gone the same way before us, and b) using the well-intentioned advice and proposed solutions from the EC. This makes the Bulgarian position in the negotiation process not very strong because you cannot challenge the position of the one who instructed you what to do. The government, which otherwise has the first say in setting the framework of work in the WG (but also the last say in the inter-ministerial coordination), is both a source of inspiring political will in the public administration and the center of heavy clashes between line ministries, because there is no common strategic framework to order relations between them. Thus, party political considerations prevail over expert opinions, recalling that less than 10 per cent of ministers from all cabinets are remembered as committed to the cause of EU integration, with foreign ministers being the most clearly recognizable among them.

Hence the very narrow opportunity for NGO participation in the country's preparations for EU membership. At best, civil society representatives are drawn to participate precisely on the basis of their expertise on specific sectoral issues. But that was done according to the local peculiarities of the NGO sector itself - with the characteristic deficit of competence on European public policies, plus the inevitable clumsiness of public discussion of such issues, all the more uncomfortable looking in the context of the high priority of a rapid conclusion of the negotiations.

However, the narrowly understood objective of EU integration as "entry into the EU through the signing of the Treaty of Accession" was met, and in line with the target date of 1 January 2007. But the goal so defined has a price to pay - the treaty is signed because the task of transferring the entire *acquis* (with zero transposition deficit) has been completed without the due work on Europeanizing reforms of the overall public life. *Thus, the (initially absolutely unthinkable) task of ensuring the entry into force of the already signed treaty arose most of a sudden.* And a new phase in the unfolding of the process was reached, in the course of which the Foreign Ministry again acquired a central role in overcoming the resistance to Bulgarian EU membership - through the mobilization of all possible means, including the shadow links along party lines. *Foreign party support was actively sought and received (most openly through the European Socialist Party),* yet it was not support for Bulgaria from just one European political family, but from the vast majority of the main European political parties.

The new and different over-efforts after 2005 led to a relative relaxation of what had become an inevitable form of continued pre-accession conditionality in the post-accession phase (such as the CVM⁴⁸

which has still not been formally terminated). Because the work on the supposed Europeanisation of Bulgarian society has remained unfinished, and it cannot be done with political enthusiasm alone, without specialized institutional apparatus and financial instruments. Hence Bulgaria's disappointment with a) the role of Bulgarian diplomacy, which in practice has achieved the maximum, but it *looks sub-optimal compared to the internal feeling of "job completely done"* and b) the unjust EU, which applies to us - politically biased and unjustified - a repressive policy.

The position of our EU-integrators, expressing such a view, is completely intrinsically consistent. However, *it has been simply frozen at the initial stage of the process, when it was formed under the influence of the complex of historical circumstances and the particular habitus of its bearers*, and not according to the logic of the real task of Europeanisation of a post-communist society. That *such a position was extremely politically convenient during the second phase of the preparations for the purpose of minimizing the political task until the EU Treaty was signed* is an additional matter. However, this feature is an important part of the answer to the question "how did Bulgaria become a member of the EU" because *it is an element in the mechanism that produced the conditional success of the preparations for membership - a signed Accession treaty but incomplete integration. It must be underlined that the real problem is not the post-accession conditionality imposed on Bulgari (and Romania) through the mediation of the European Commission, but the necessity that to be done*. This reason lies in the applicant society itself, which has chosen (under the pressure of circumstances) the way to go about its EU accession and, later on, membership.

Chapter Nine offers an explanation of the extraordinary difficulty of Bulgaria's EU accession already presented. The first thing that stands out is that, with the exception of the "four easy chapters", *in all other cases there was simply no general rule*. The temporal structure of the negotiation process, which substituted the Europeanization of the society, varied greatly from chapter to chapter.

But it is not true, at all, that the number of negotiated transition periods influences significantly the length of the negotiation process, as the logic of rational institutionalism suggests. The longest negotiations were in the chapters Competition (39 months); Regional Policy (31 months); Financial and Budgetary Affairs (32 months); Justice and Home Affairs (28 months), while in the chapters with the most - with 10 transition periods each! - the negotiations took 23 months for Environment and 11 months for Taxation, respectively. The potentially difficult chapters, where two transition periods are negotiated each, Free Movement of People and Free Movement of Capital, took only 8 months to negotiate (with

an average negotiation process of 12 months). The coefficient of determination of the number of transition periods and the length of the negotiation process is 0.050 for the period of the negotiations themselves and 0.039 for the period from the deposit of Bulgaria's negotiating position to the conclusion of the negotiations, i.e. an extremely weak relationship. Generally speaking, *the reason for the striking unevenness (measurable in times, not in percentages) in the difficulty of the negotiations and in their burden for the participants are the irregularities of the tasks of Europeanisation of the respective policies, i.e. of achieving commensurability between Bulgarian and European public practices in the respective sectors of public life.*

We have to agree with the respondents who state that it is not possible to answer in a nutshell why the duration of negotiations varies, as *"hard" can have many different dimensions, and it also depends on a variety of different factors.* Just to list the most important: the attitudes of our Western European partners; the continuous development of the EU policies, the expansion of the *acquis* and its entry into new sectoral policies; the clash of antagonistic interests in "sensitive sectors" (agriculture, textiles, steel industry); crisis financial issues, etc. The specific characteristic of the most important examples for bottlenecks in the accession process are instructive by themselves, because of the specificity of their content, but even more so as illuminating the substance of EU integration. Above all, *of the political mechanisms* through which this task has been accomplished.

1. Visa regime and Schengen. This topic was not initially present in the research design, but it spontaneously erupted in the narratives of 20 Bulgarian EU integrators (int. 15, 19, 29, 31, 32, 35, 38, 41, 44), and for several respondents it turned out to be one of the central topics in their personal memories. The unusual significance of this issue stems from the fact that *a large number of relations of material and symbolic order intersect in it, so that the political stakes become too high and, accordingly, the success achieved is appreciated highly, including with very strong positive personal emotions. The fall of the visa regime has had an immediate practical value, but also an even higher axiological meaning of newly acquired, due human dignity. That achievement has a very high intrinsic value, and it is further enhanced because it is among the few testimonies of a break with the past.* The fall of the visa regime is a political testimony to Bulgaria's ability to deal with such an important problem for European security, which is why that political decision encountered very strong resistance, and yet *its radical politicization by the Bulgarian government was the crucial domestic precondition for the success of the solution even in its most technical dimensions.*

2. Energy and "of course, the hyper-political issue of Kozloduy NPP" (int. 9). The closure of the NPP's small reactors was set as a precondition for starting negotiations with Bulgaria, with no legal basis and no real security problem, and without it being possible to publicly voice the behind-the-scenes, diverse national financial interests, reinforced by the support of Western public-political sentiment against nuclear power. The hyper- importance of this issue stems from the fact that it *also concentrates many, different and increasingly important political stakes, making it a 'hyper political issue'*. Hence, the question of keeping a political commitment becomes a "religious question" (Solomon Passy), rather than a technological-expert question that can be negotiated rationally and compromise solutions found. In this extremely unfavorable context, negotiating on the Energy Chapter would, at best, delay the negotiations and would itself derail the overall EU integration process. Which leads to the capitulation "to the pressure of Brussels", which, however, cannot be acknowledged before the Bulgarian public.

3. Agricultural and related policies also turn out to be impregnated with political relations, and for this reason the negotiation peripeties over the Chapter Agriculture are even more frequently mentioned even compared to the crucial visa issue or the battles over Bulgarian nuclear energy. This Chapter is referred to in one way or another in the memories of 30 respondents. Here again, as in the previous cases, it is clearly seen that the "complexity of the matter" determining the difficulty of the negotiations in fact stems from the intertwining of a multitude of disparate relations with a wide scope and affecting "sensitive issues", i.e. essential domestic and external interests. Negotiations on this chapter are a kind of "unit of measurement" to qualify the difficulty of the other chapters - a matter with the most voluminous and very differentiated European legislation by sub-sectors; a common European policy with the largest share in the EU budget and, consequently, the most money for Bulgaria under this heading, however with the highest acuteness of sensitivity on these issues; this is the sectoral policy in which our competition with other EU countries is most pronounced; extremely unfavorable starting positions due to the damage on the sector by the national economic policy in previous decades; interweaving with the issue of "land purchases by foreigners", ethic and political party concerns, etc. There is no simple unifying theme for all these diverse and divergent substantive and value dimensions, and the importance of each of these intersecting aspects explains the popularity of the topic among our European integrators.

4. Chapter Competition and the "Sick Issue of Kremikovtzi". In contrast to the cases discussed above, this issue attracts the attention of a significantly smaller number of European integrators - only 17,

which is even paradoxical, since this negotiating chapter took the longest time. Kremikovtzi is the most emblematic case, vividly highlighting the essence of the EU integration problem - the status quo is fundamentally incompatible with the standards of EU integration policies and, in particular, with the rules of a free market economy, which must withstand competitive pressure without state aid. However, this is a steel plant loaded with huge party-political, symbolic capital and with gigantic debts. But the problem is not just about the tens of thousands of workers (in the textile industry there are more than twenty times as many) who would be left without income and social fulfilment, but a cluster of other serious issues: the very dangerous air pollution, which is a cause for concern not only locally but also regionally in Europe. On the other hand, the Transport chapter is also affected in a crucial way, because Kremikovtzi is supported through direct state aid, but also through permanent subsidies for state rail transport. When Kremikovtzi stopped, "40 per cent of BDZ's revenues evaporate" (int. 7), i.e. the whole transport system of Bulgaria turns out to be intimately linked to the service of the plant. Moreover, unemployment benefits and the retraining of tens of thousands of workers is a very serious problem for the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy (without raising at all the party-political and electoral dimensions of that crisis situation).

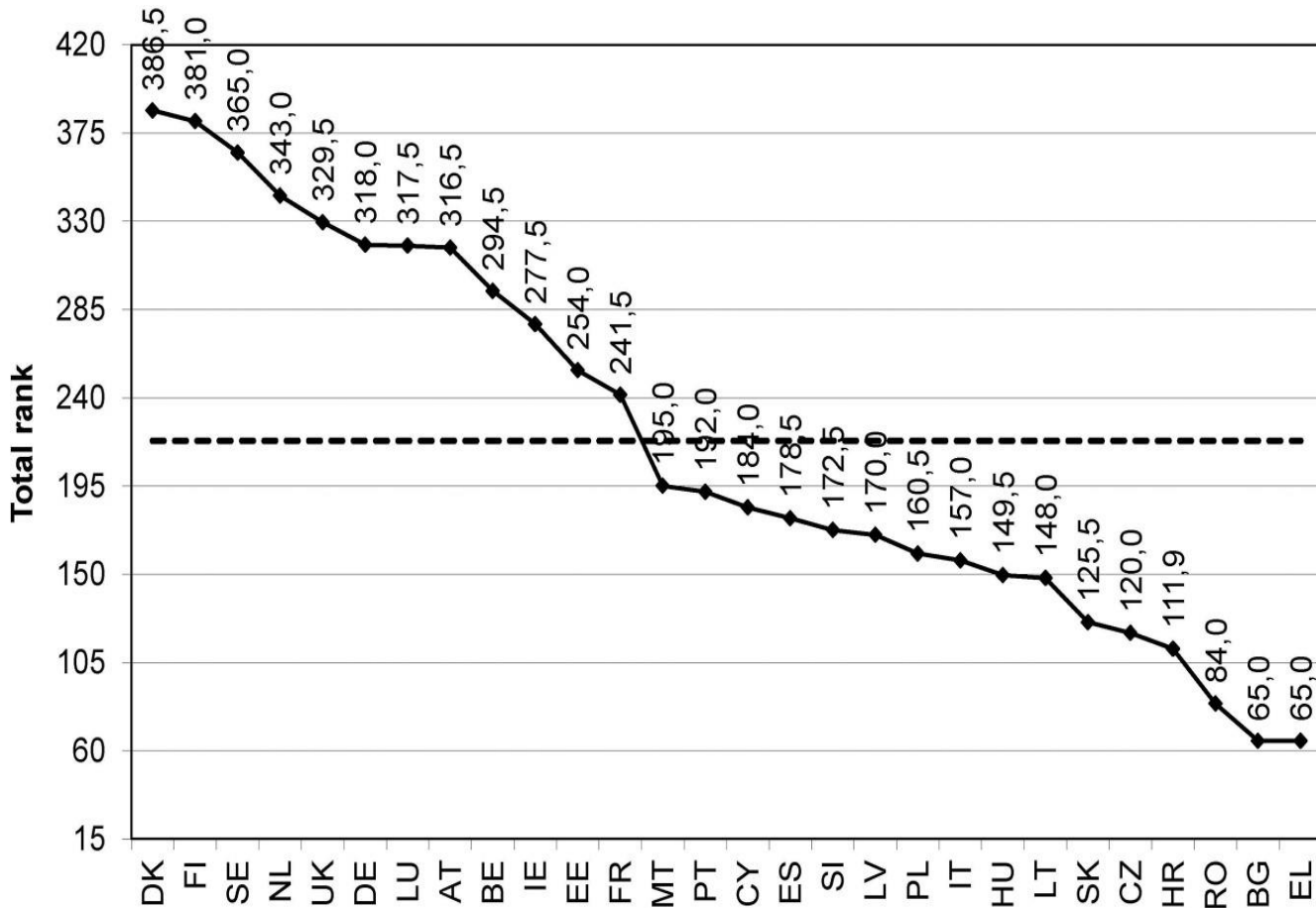
5. Justice, rule of law and the CVM - unlike the previous four cases, this is an issue that was particularly difficult to resolve in the process of preparation for EU membership, but at least then it did not attract the attention of the Bulgarian public.¹⁷ This is because it had no idea, at all, of its fundamental importance, as it is of a societal systemic nature. However, the EC, too, only gradually developed a sharpening sensitivity on this issue.¹⁸ On the one hand, the attention given to it is impressive, since it is referred to, in one way or another, in 27 interviews, i.e. nearly 60 per cent of the total. On the other hand, its discussion is even more diffuse and dispersed than the above cases.

One of the most important semantic emphases in the memories of our European integrators, who discussed the problem of judicial reform in our country, is the emphasis on this very aspect *in the constant development of the EU enlargement policy* (int. 19 and 29). As can be seen from the graph below (Fig. 5), on

¹⁷ "But in Justice and Home Affairs there was no such debate, no information in the public domain, no activity" (int. 2, cf. int. 15). "What's been a frustration for me, personally, with the whole process is that many of the key reforms and key chapters - like the 'justice and home affairs' chapter - have remained blurred in the public's mind - because of other debates, including the debate around blocks one to four" (int. 30). Unlike the general public, the expert community is fully aware of the gravity of the problem (see Nikolov, Simeonov 2009: 79).

¹⁸ "... The EC explicitly notes that neither the rule of law is ensured in Bulgaria, nor the rights of individual and legal persons are adequately protected, as the implementation and enforcement of EU legislation is far from the way required for membership. The EC therefore concludes that profound reforms are needed before Bulgaria is able to implement this legislation and meet Member States' standards for the administration of justice and the enforcement of the law' (Popova 2001b: 172).

Figure 5: Ranking of EU countries on an integral anti-corruption indicator from 2014 EC's report



Source: Haralampiev, Dimitrov 2016.

the conventional integral indicator "anticorruption", characterizing the overall image of national societies through the quality of the rule of law,¹⁹ the EU countries are very different - there is no typical common case against which several individual exceptions stand out. But it is also evident that there are striking disparities. If, on the one hand, there are no perfect societies in the EU, completely immune from the phenomenon of corruption, then, on the other hand, when the difference between the best and the worst cases is on the order

¹⁹ In our previous research, we have empirically demonstrated that rule of law, as measured by the fight against corruption, is precisely an integral indicator of the quality of life in European societies, insofar as it is the only one among 33 other interrelated indicators of public life that correlates particularly highly with all of them (Haralampiev, Dimitrov, and Stoychev 2015).

of six times (!), this is not a common ranking of similar varieties. Such a ranking of the results proves that there is, figuratively speaking, a 'species difference' between the countries in the EU, and for that reason the Union very late accepted the idea of the need for a common policy, targeting safeguard of the fundamental EU principles.

The analysis of the group discourse on this topic reveals a very distinct polarization in the views of our European integrators about CVM, *according to their understanding of the goals and meaning of EU integration*, which has already been presented in Chapter 8:

- either an absurd double standard towards Bulgaria, if EU accession is only the "harmonization of law" (since the preparation ended successfully with a signed Treaty of Accession on the basis of a zero transposition deficit) (int. 4, 33 et al.);

- or a testimony of incomplete Europeanisation, if accession is expected to mean fulfilment of the commitments of EU membership and European quality of the local social life (int. 8, 28, 29, etc.).

It is also noteworthy that the polarization follows another dividing line: the resistance against the post-accession conditionality, embodied in CVM, comes from the "left"; in contrast to the view of this EU policy as very important - from the "right". This is why "this was perhaps the most political chapter in the negotiations with the European Union" (int. 15).²⁰ But it is also true that:

"Until Bulgaria fulfils the measures required under the CVM, Bulgarians do not have the rights and freedoms of European citizens. [...] Negotiations should have started with the demand that Bulgarian institutions tackle organized crime and corruption. To obtain certain warranty that the prosecution and the judiciary can guarantee the rule of law in the country. " (int. 8).

The analysis of the information on this issue clearly highlights the most significant impact of the reforms on the negotiation process. The crisis problem is that *there is a qualitative mismatch between Bulgarian society and European standards, which is why widespread, in-depth reforms are required as a prerequisite for EU integration*.²¹ Yet, the very differences in the emphases in meaning put forward by our respondents are significant in terms of

a) *the extraordinary complexity of the problematic situation and, consequently,*

²⁰ Compare: 'All these things relating to the whole area of "Justice and Home Affairs" are number one, and I will quote an undoubtedly very competent senior official of the Commission at the time who said, "This chapter is a political chapter"' (int. 19).

²¹ The EC discovered very late that the transfer of *acquis* does not entail practical application and corresponding reforms (int. 29), but it is a fact that during the negotiation process this problem has been increasingly addressed even in official EC documents (O'Brennan 2006a).

of b) the *excessive difficulty in the political task* of preparing for EU integration, leading to delays in the negotiations and incompleteness in the preparations.

The task of joining the EU turns out to be a difficult issue in the Bulgarian case because resources, as a whole and in each of its parts, are scarce. The problem is that *there is too much space in the very character of this work, which in the outcome depends on personal excellence in combining expert, political and diplomatic competence at the same time*. In Bulgaria in the mid-1990s, such a combination could not be the rule. Moreover, the work is both *large* in volume ("in all fields and along all lines" int. 13; "They are thousands of regulations, instructions" Int. 37), and *different* in character, and diffusely permeating *a long series of different spheres of public life*. The most significant, however, is the multiplicity of resistances to reform: a) because of the systematic linkages among sectors of society that frustrates attempts at partial reforms; b) *the corpus of national legislation also has its own legal systematics* - it is related to that of society, but it also *has its own legal specificity*, manifesting itself at different levels: constitution, codes, laws and regulations, substantive and procedural law. The national legal system forms its own tradition (or - inertia), a particular legal culture and legal attitudes or values, against which innovations seem *ridiculous and inapplicable*, not only new or different. Last but not least are (c) the resistances from individual and group opponents. The most important variety of resistances are those, *suggesting an entirely diversified arsenal of policies to deal with them*. And EU integration is a task involving the whole spectrum of resistances, in addition to obstacles to reform "all areas and along all lines".

To summarize the analytical findings presented here, the weight of each negotiating chapter has too many and different dimensions. The speed of work on the transposition of legislation does not depend only on its volume and complexity, but above all on the readiness of Bulgarian society to absorb the innovations, which implies a different volume and resources of preparatory work in Bulgaria. However, *the common root of the problem of difficult negotiations lies in the essence of the civilizational challenge* inherent in the task of Europeanization of Bulgarian society. It is at least two-sided.

On the one hand, there is the *overwhelming work* that needs to be done to implement reforms that guarantee a lasting Europeanisation of public policies. This work is at the same time *complex, wide-ranging, unfamiliar* and *under-resourced* (by institutional, human, financial means). Plus, it is also *heterogeneous* (requiring both the drafting of strategic management documents, the adoption of new legislation and its effective implementation) and *diffusely permeating simultaneously a series of public sectors* that have never been integrated before, etc.

On the other hand, Europeanization should overcome a cascade of resistances "of the matter" that has a qualitatively different content than the expected one, but also has a systematicity of social relations in it (so that it cannot be reformed by piece-meal), not forgetting the "saturation threshold" of reforms, beyond which the intensity of change passes into chaos or unmanageability. It contains, also, a clash of interests that leads to a conscious resistance to the status quo - not just of individuals, but of whole guilds or economic branches.

Bearing all this in mind, we must take into account the *supranational politicization of the negotiations* (as is the case with the visa regime or with the closure of the 3rd and 4th units of the Kozloduy NPP). But this aspect of the negotiation burden is two-sided, also. Because we are talking, on the one hand, about powerful interests of the EU member states that conflict with the Bulgarian ones. However, on the other hand, this politicization, hidden behind talks about safety standards and the common interest of the EU, is not unrelated to the above-mentioned "root of the problem" of Europeanisation, because *local practices and standards allow the Bulgarian positions to be convincingly challenged politically with substantive arguments.*

Thus, the subjective side of the then experience in the mundane work of preparing the country for EU membership, expressed in the metaphor: "swimming in sulphuric acid", becomes easily understandable. The human unbearable-ness of the process (due to the demand for superhuman efforts and self-denial in the routine work year after year) is now clear. That was a supplementary *personal urgeto complete the process A.S.A.P., in addition to the state-political imperative demanding the same.*

The last, **Tenth Chapter**, is a recapitulation of the results of the analysis of the memories of the Bulgarian EU integrators. The interview provided them with an opportunity to express their understanding on possible alternatives for the implementation of the EU enlargement policy and, respectively, of Bulgaria's accession policy, insofar as almost 20 years after the conditional end of the EU's Eastern enlargement, there are enough reasons not to be fully satisfied with its outcome. We would like to remind that *the understanding of the Bulgarian integration into the EU is important first of all for making sense of the mechanisms of the enlargement policy in order to identify opportunities for its optimization.*

As expected, the views of the Bulgarian EU integrators outlined a wide spectrum of disagreements, which can be typified as a) a majority of opinions, according to which the historical process is without alternatives and b) a minority of views, according to which alternatives are conceivable. What is interesting in these typological opposites are actually the nuances of difference in their argumentation.

Some respondents frankly admitted that they do not know any answer or do not understand the question itself (Int. 19, 46), yet, for others the question is meaningless because, according to them, the past ⁵⁶

could not have variants (Int. 4, 47). Still others believe that there is no reason to look for alternatives to the actual process, arguing either that what has been achieved is an unqualified national success or that since the ultimate goal of the accession process was “EU entry”, it has been achieved. Knowledge of the actual situation in recent years belies these assumptions: the outcome of the Eastern enlargement is far from what was expected, especially in the sphere of spreading democratic values and consolidating the rule of law, and Bulgaria's (and Romania's) EU membership remains conditional (due to the unmet objectives of the CVM).

For another part of the respondents the search for alternatives for the implementation of the enlargement/accession policy is pointless, as it has been pre-set by the EC's political approach and the achievement is the maximum against the standards of this policy. In this case, the political substance of the approach is taken as a gift of nature or God's will, to which we should simply adapt or comply.

Typologically speaking, the next view is no different: in it the emphasis is on the ultimacy of the efforts invested in the process, hence, there is no other way of thinking about the EU integration.

Somewhat different are the opinions, which recognize that the achievement of the implemented policy is sub-optimal, but, nevertheless, consider the implemented process as having no alternatives. There are two significant variations here: a) under the then extremely unfavorable domestic and foreign policy preconditions, what was achieved was on the verge of all capabilities, notwithstanding the fact that the outcome today is sub-optimal; b) under the then preconditions, it was very likely that Bulgaria would drop out of EU enlargement (indefinitely) and in this sense the ultimate, intrinsic political success derives from overcoming that strong probability.

The problem with this kind of interpretations is the logical contradiction that, on the one hand, the political essence of EU accession is understood, i.e. the dependence of the process on the decisions taken and the choices made, while at the same time it is thought of as univariate. The questions of choice of specific approach, tasks, political instruments seem to be non-existent, which condemns the EU enlargement policy to remain in the vein of the hitherto contested experience.

In the camp of the EU integrators, who admit, however, that the process could have been different, there are also significant differences in meaning: (a) it could have started earlier with the post-communist reforms and, therefore, with a higher initial resource, hence, the outcome would have been better (11 people mention this problem); (b) it could have been that the rush was not the top political priority and, therefore, the preparations for membership could have gone into the depth of public life; (c) it could have been that "rooting the changes" by involving the general public in the process counteracted the degradation of Europeanisation after accession. The most radical in the search for alternatives are those views that see the error of EU ⁵⁷

membership preparations in the uncritical acceptance of the EC's approach and recommendations, which in a number of cases have been questionable (int. 6, 17, 27). From a substantive point of view, this position puts the emphasis on the rule of law as a fundamental prerequisite for the success of Europeanisation (int. 8, 15, 28, 29). Only in one case do we find an understanding that the process should be conducted in a completely different way through a thorough rethinking of the substantive relationships among politics, policies, policies (int. 39).

Chapter Ten contains the conclusion of the study and, therefore, it provides arguments for the heuristics of the analysis:

- 1) The cognitive advantage of the study lies not only in the substantive density of the empirical picture revealing the interweaving and tensions between enlargement and accession, but especially in the proposed explanation of *the peculiarities* of Bulgarian integration into the EU.²² The heuristic is justified by the ability of the proposed concept to comprehend the specific details as revealing the general character of the process. This is done in regard of the characteristic peculiarity of the experience of participation in the accession preparations as 'War'. The strange abundance of war metaphors derives from the uncertainty, the high political stakes, the highly differentiated and very persistent internal and external resistance, and, consequently, the personal super-efforts²³, but in turn, also, there is a specific mode of conduct, which results in the peculiar doubling the uncertainty of the process and its outcome.
- 2) In terms of policy implications, the result of the study provides substantive and methodological standards for assessing the degree of adequacy of the New Approach in the EU enlargement policy towards the Western Balkan countries through the identified key features of origin of this policy, which has been applied to the CEECs (a) under the pressure of the then situational circumstances and (b) in substantive inconsistency with the task of Europeanization of the societies in these countries.
- 3) With regard to the scholarly field dealing with EU enlargement policy, in a spirit of continuity with the research orientation towards an anti-positivist approach (recommended by Hughes and his colleagues), the empirical findings explain the inadequacy of the rational institutionalist paradigm through a) the dialectical interaction between enlargement and accession; b) the formatting of the processes by 'path

²² "The empirical truth of this period has proved to be considerably far messier and generally at odds with the literature on enlargement and Europeanization of the first decade of the new century ..." (Bechev 2020: 160).

²³ Bulgaria's EU membership has *happened*. It did not come about as a result of any necessity; nor was it produced as a result of objective tendencies brought into play, i.e. it was not the result of our political control over the process. The task of Bulgaria's accession to the EU is thought of as a risk, a stroke of luck, a chance, 'a briefly open historical window that could close at any moment' (int. 29, cf. id. 7, 13, 17, 23, 26, 28, 31, 34, 35, 43 i.e. such a view is shared by one in four).

dependence' rather than rational calculations; c) the mutual misunderstanding of the integration interaction due to following the "formal rationality" of the EU perspective and the "value rationality" of the Bulgarian perspective; d) the superficiality of the *acquis* transfer, which the positivist paradigm considers the 'nature of enlargement policy', behind whose curtain the real drama of the proper politics that is the essence of the process is played out; e) the justification of the perspective of the historicized "expanded ontology of consciousness" (Mamardashvili) as the one adequate to the specificity of the subject.

The general conclusion from the study is that the EU enlargement policy has been produced by forces of the historical circumstances, rather than being based on a deep understanding of the political task at hand and on any argumentation about the adequacy of the political approach (and its toolkit) to the specificity of this task. The expectation of a more effective EU enlargement policy in the years to come, therefore, presupposes a very different understanding of the substantive task and of the appropriate policy approach.

CITATIONS:

- Ágh, A. 2008. "Democratization and Europeanization of the ECE Countries. In. and J. *New Members, New Candidates and New Neighbours*. Budapest: 'Together for Europe' Research Centre.
- Avramov, R. 2007. *Communal Capitalism*. Volumes 1, 2, 3. Sofia. Centre for Liberal Strategies.
- Avramov, R. 2016. Bulgaria in Europe - Societal Legacies, Models and Targets. A Personal Outlook, in *Challenges of the EU Eastern Enlargement, Governance and Culture in the Black Sea Region*, 21/2016.
- Balázs, P. 1997. "The globalization of the Eastern enlargement of the European Union: symptoms and consequences". In: Maresceau, M., (Ed.). 1997. *Enlarging the European Union: the relations between the EU and Central and Eastern Europe*, NY, Longman.
- Bechev, D., 2020. Living on the Periphery: Bulgaria's Geopolitics Reconsidered. *Southeastern Europe*, 44(2), pp.157-176
- Bozhilova, D. 2008. *Bulgaria's quest for EU membership: the Europeanization of policies in transition*. Author House.
- Center for the Study of Democracy. 1999. *Preparations for Bulgaria's EU Membership Negotiations. Some Lessons from the European Union Enlargement Process. Challenges in Bulgaria's preparations for the European Union membership negotiations*. Sofia. CID.
- Cirtautas, A. M. and Schimmelfennig, F. 2010. 'Europeanisation Before and After Accession: Conditionality, Legacies and Compliance', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 62: 3, 421 - 441.
- Dimitrova, A. and Dragneva, R., 2002. 'Bulgaria's road to the European Union: Progress, problems and perspectives'. In *Perspectives on the Enlargement of the European Union* (pp. 139-164). Brill.
- Gateva, E. 2015. *European Union enlargement conditionality*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Grabbe, H. 2006. *The EU's transformative power. Europeanization through conditionality in Central and Eastern Europe*, Palgrave Macmillan, NY.
- Haralampiev, K. and Dimitrov, G., 2016. 'Quantitative research approaches in support of the new EC framework to safeguard the rule of law in EU.' *Regions and Cohesion*, 6(3), pp.20-51.
- Haralampiev, K., G. Dimitrov, St. Stoychev. 'Measuring Sociopolitical Distances between EU Member States and Candidates'.
- Hillion, C., 2014. The Copenhagen criteria and their progeny. *EU enlargement (Oxford, Hart Publishing)*.
- Hillion, C. 2011. EU enlargement. In P. Craig and G. de Búrca (eds), *The Evolution of EU Law*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 187-216.
- Hristov, Iv. (ed.). 2012. *The (Un)accomplished Rule of law society in Bulgaria*. Sofia, Centre for Academic Studies.

- Hughes, J., G. Sasse and C. Gordon. 2005. *Europeanization and Regionalization in the EU's enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe. The myth of conditionality*, Palgrave Macmillan, NY.
- Kanev, D. and Todorov, A. (eds.). (2014). "The Quality of Democracy in Bulgaria", Sofia, Iztok-Zapad.
- Karamfilova, E. 2012. *Bulgaria - EU member: institutional (auto)portrait*, Sofia, Sofia University Press, "St. Kl. Ohridski".
- Kochenov, D. 2014. "Overestimating Conditionality." In: Govaere, I., E. Lanon, P. Van Elsuwege, and St. Adam (eds.). *The European Union in the World: Essays in Honour of Marc Maresceau*. Martinus Nijhoff.
- Kostov, I. 2019. *Evidence of the Transition 1989-1999*. Sofia, Ciela.
- Landaburu, E., 2007. 'The need for enlargement and differences from previous accessions'.in: Vassiliou, G. (ed.). 2007. *The accession story: The EU from 15 to 25 countries*. Oxford University Press, UK.
- Ludlow, P. 2004. *The making of the new Europe: the European Councils in Brussels and Copenhagen 2002*. EuroComment.
- Mamardashvili, M. 2004. "Classical and non-classical ideals of rationality". In *Classical and non-classical rationality*. Selected. Sofia. Iztok-Zapad.
- Maresceau, M., (Ed.). 1997. *Enlarging the European Union: the relations between the EU and Central and Eastern Europe*, NY, Longman. 3-22.
- [Mihaylova, E. 2015. The Law, the Transition, What happened and what to do?,
https://www.bogdanbogdanov.net/bg_forum.php?page=discussion_show&discID=125.](https://www.bogdanbogdanov.net/bg_forum.php?page=discussion_show&discID=125)
- Moravcsik, A. 'National interests, state power, and EU enlargement'. *East European Politics and Societies*, 17(1), pp.42-57.
- Nikolov, K., Simeonov, K., 2009. 'The Effect of EU accession on Bulgaria'. *Enlarging the European Union: Effects on the new member states and the EU*, p.74.
- O'Brennan, J., 2006a. *The eastern enlargement of the European Union*. Routledge.
- O'Brennan, J., 2006b. 'Bringing Geopolitics Back In': Exploring the Security Dimension of the 2004 Eastern Enlargement of the European Union. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 19 (1), pp.155-169.
- Popova, P. 2002. "Accession Negotiations", in *Monitoring of Bulgaria's Accession to the European Union, 2002*, Sofia, Sofita Inter.
- Piedrafita, S. and Torreblanca, J.I., 2005. 'The three logics of EU enlargement: interests identities and arguments'. *Politique européenne*, (1), pp.29-59.
- Pridham, G. 2007. 'Unfinished Business? Eastern Enlargement and Democratic Conditionality'. *Fride, Working paper* 36, April.
- Plachkova, A. 2020. *Democratization through Integration? Lessons from the Eastern Enlargement of the European Union*. Sofia, University of Sofia St. Kliment Ohridski.
- Popova, L. 2022. *Socio-historical Construction of the Political Process of Bulgaria's EU Accession*, Dissertation for the scientific and education degree "Doctor", Sofia University "St. Kl. Ohridski".
- Punev, B. 2022. *Constitutionalism and Political Culture*, Sofia, Sibi.
- Radaelli, C. 2004. "Europeanization: Solution or Problem", *European Integration online Papers (EIoP)*, Vol. 8 (2004), N° 16
- Schönfelder, B. 2005. 'Judicial independence in Bulgaria: a tale of splendour and misery'. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 57(1), pp.61-92.
- Smith, K. 2003. 'The evolution and application of EU membership conditionality'. Cremona, (Ed.). (2003). *The enlargement of the European Union*. Oxford, Oxford University Press. 105-139.
- Tatham, A.F., 2009. *Enlargement of the European Union* (Vol. 4). Kluwer Law International BV.
- Todorova, V., 2020. "The Rule of Law in Bulgaria: State of Play and Trends (after 2010)". *Southeastern Europe*, 44(2), pp.233-259.
- van Meurs, Wim, Robin de Bruin, Liesbeth van de Grift, and Carla Hoetink. (2018). *The unfinished history of European integration*. Amsterdam University Press.
- Vassiliou, G. (ed.). 2007. *The accession story: The EU from 15 to 25 countries*. Oxford University Press, UK.
- Verheugen, G. 2020. Interview on Bulgaria's EU accession, in Popova, L. 2022. *Socio-historical Construction of the Political Process of Bulgaria's EU Accession*,
- Wood, S. 2017. *Germany and East-Central Europe: political, economic and socio-cultural relations in the era of EU enlargement*. Routledge.

ACADEMIC CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY:

1. A major result are the factually dense description and the typological analysis of EU integration as a *political interaction* between Bulgaria, which has implemented *its accession policy*, and the EU, which has implemented *its enlargement policy*, based on *8638 different meaningful accents identified* in the *Archive of Memories of Bulgarian EU Integration*, created for the purpose of the study (which also has its autonomous socio-political, historical and cultural value).
2. The history of Bulgarian integration into the EU is presented in an interpretive perspective in which a) *the logical totality* and b) *the concrete details* have a common significance, because the totality gets its essentially specific character through the connections between the significant details, but each of them is meaningful through its belonging to the systemic entity, of which it is an element.
3. *The historio-political logic by which a "gap between the requirements of accession and the obligations of EU membership" was revealed and explained* at the level of the initial design of the enlargement policy, directly *determining, both, the pattern, which by the preparations for EU membership were conducted, and its unfinished outcome.*
4. *The aforementioned political interaction is explained by the concrete counter-actions of a complex network of actors*, on the EU side - mostly member states and institutions, among which the European Commission stands out, with its own multilevel structure, having a different share of participation in the interaction, and on the Bulgarian side are the diversified inputs from the government, individual ministries, the institutional mechanism for inter-institutional coordination, MFA and diplomats, integration teams and working groups, as well as structures of the non-governmental sector.
5. *The particular qualitative evolution of the historical process is clarified, stemming from the gradual finding of a political solution to the driving contradiction that EU accession 'must happen because of the strategic interest of European security, but cannot take place', because of the civilizational difference between the post-communist societies, Bulgaria in particular, and the Western European societies on whose economic and political partnerships the EU is built. The basic contradiction is transformed in a series of controversies in the course of the Eastern enlargement, which led to its controversial results.*
6. In particular, the *very special, politically decisive* significance of *Bulgaria's accession to NATO is explained as part of the solution to the security problem in Europe*, which also has non-military dimensions in the fight against international trafficking (of people, weapons, drugs, smuggling). However, it is in this perspective that the problem exposes the inherent weakness of Bulgarian society due

to its double internal insecurity due to (a) a high degree of criminalization of the economy, politically patronized organized crime and corruption and the resulting inefficiency of the judicial system, and (b) a very problematic relations with Russia and its policy towards Europe and the region of South Eastern Europe, in particular. Consequently, *the analysis provides also an explanation of the EU's extraordinary sensitivity precisely to the rule of law problem in Bulgaria (and Romania).*

7. The research results, which are presented in the dissertation, reveal *empirically an extremely differentiated political attitude of the EU countries towards Bulgaria's accession, creating an unfavorable foreign policy context that Bulgaria's accession policy had to cope with.*
8. Considering this context, the semantic and axiological profile of the integral interpretative scheme of the Bulgarian EU integrators is identified and interpreted, which explains, both, the *particular political role of the EC in the accession process as "our best friend who is not our friend at all"*, but also the role of the dynamics in the geopolitical situation for the unfolding and timing of the EU's Eastern enlargement.
9. *The particular historical and political logic is clarified, by which EU accession has been conceived in abstract-value categories, with a focus on signing the Accession Treaty in the shortest possible time, and hence, for that purpose the political effort in accession preparations is concentrated and almost exhausted by the legal harmonization with the acquis.* This political minimization of the task is the price for its *conditionally* successful solution, insofar as the treaty has indeed been signed, but at the price of the transformation of pre-accession conditionality into post-accession conditionality (Cooperation and Verification Mechanism), which has not been officially terminated yet.
10. The Bulgarian path to EU membership *categorically refutes the basic assumption of rational institutionalism*, according to which the duration of the negotiation process (conceived as the essence of the preparation for membership of a candidate country) is a function of the number of transition periods for the implementation of the acquis. (The analysis proved that the number of transitional periods provides for just 5 % of the determination of the negotiation process.) On the contrary, the *Bulgarian case proves that the main reason for the length of the negotiations by chapters is the weight and complexity of inherent political problems, beyond the legal norms.*
11. The research findings are significant in two dimensions, mainly:
 - *Politically, it is a conceptual-methodological framework for assessing innovation in the EU enlargement policy towards the Western Balkan countries;*

- In *academic terms*, a *factually grounded, dialectical, historicized alternative to the positivist orientation* in mainstream EU enlargement policy studies is proposed, because, according to the positivist logic the EU enlargement policy has a "nature", which is "rules transfer" that the enlargement conditionality treats as Europeanization of national societies, and this is wherefrom practical problems in the contemporary consequences of this policy derive.

None of these research achievements, and even less their synthesis, has any precedent in Bulgarian political science, and as far as we know, in political science globally.

APPENDIX:

QUESTIONNAIRE for a semi-standardized interview with the participants in the process of Bulgaria's preparation for EU membership:

- I. What is your most vivid personal memory of the process of Bulgaria's preparation for EU membership?
- II. In your opinion, what should be known about Bulgaria's path to EU membership, but - for one reason or another - is still not known?
- III. In the beginning, was there any specific vision for Bulgaria's EU accession goals, beyond the general idea of not falling behind the other former socialist countries? Do you recall there being an official forum where such a vision was discussed?
- IV. Was there any sustainable "division of labor" in the teams working on the preparations for membership - for example, those in Sofia as opposed to those in Brussels; or working at political and expert level, or something else?
- V. Why, in your opinion, are negotiations on some chapters completed in less than a year, while on others negotiations drag on for more than 3 years? What was the most difficult part of the negotiation process?
- VI. How was, in practice, our country's position on a particular negotiating chapter, about which you have impressions, worked out? Who were the direct participants in the drafting of our position? Is there a link between the National Development Plan and the work on the negotiating chapters?
- VII. Do you recall any involvement of NGOs or sectoral organizations in the preparation of the Bulgarian positions?
- VIII. Were there ministers, regardless of which cabinet, who saw Bulgaria's EU membership as their personal political priority? Can we talk about a personal imprint on the way the chief negotiators, Al. Bozhkov, Vl. Kissov and M. Kuneva led the negotiations?
- IX. For the first programming period of our EU membership, there was a budget of around EUR 11 billion for the operational programs, in line with our political priorities. How were these defined?
- X. Was there support for Bulgaria from some EU member states? Was there a country from which we could more actively draw know-how for our preparations? Whose resistance did we have to overcome? What from did it arise?
- XI. To what extent is it true, in your opinion, that the EC has been Bulgaria's greatest friend on the road to EU membership?
- XII. In your opinion, is the expression "Euro-Atlantic integration" more a reflection of a real close linkage of the accessions to NATO and to the EU or is it just a convenient linguistic formulation?
- XIII. Do you recall geopolitical circumstances or forces strongly influencing the pre-accession process?
- XIV. In your opinion, did Bulgaria manage to prepare for membership during the negotiations? Do you think that there is something in the process of preparation and then in the EU accession itself that could have been done "differently"?
- XV. Who, in your opinion, are the three experts who are key to this process and must be involved?
- XVI. Could you provide us with a brief biographical sketch of your experience in the European integration that you would like to be presented in the public record?
 - Type of Education - Natural Sciences
 - Engineering Sciences
 - Economic Sciences
 - Law
 - Social Sciences
 - Humanities
 - Medical and Related Sciences
 - Other
 - Position held before entering into the European integration
.....
 - Positions held during the integration process
From..... to -
 - From..... to -
 - From..... to -
 - Current position

We sincerely appreciate your cooperation!