

Political Polarization as a trigger of Hard Euro scepticism: The case of Bulgarian 2024 EP Elections

Milen Lyubenov,
Dragomir Stoyanov¹

Abstract

In Bulgaria, where most of the population supports the European membership of the country, the space for Eurosceptic parties (hard or soft) is not very large. At the same time, as the case of Bulgarian 2024 European Parliament elections demonstrate a variety of political parties resort more and more often to Eurosceptic rhetoric.

Our article focuses on the most vocal Eurosceptic party in the country the political party Vazrazhdane (Revival). Vazrazhdane is a populist radical right party that can be classified as a hard Eurosceptic party. In our article we argue that the hard Euroscepticism of Vazrazhdane is a result not only from the party ideological positions but also of the party strategic considerations. Another important aspect of the observed hard Euroscepticism of the party is the fact that is nurtured by the long-lasting political crisis in the country and the significant political polarisation observed in Bulgaria.

The article explores the hard Eurosceptic discourse of Vazrazhdane during the 2024 European Parliament Elections that happened simultaneously with snap general elections in the country. Our analysis is based on party documents, party manifestos and leaders' and other officials' speeches and interviews in the course of both EP and general elections in 2024.

Keywords: hard euroscepticism; polarization; EP elections; Vazrazhdane

DOI: 10.5817/PC2025-2-145

CC BY 4.0 (<https://www.creativecommons.cz/licence-cc/>)

¹ Milen Lyubenov, Associate Professor at the Department of Political Science, Sofia University 'St. Kliment Ohridski', mljubenov@phls.uni-sofia.bg, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4222-9594>; Dragomir Stoyanov, PhD Researcher, LPS School, University of Sussex. mail: ds481@sussex.ac.uk., ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6528-0272>

1. Introduction

The 2024 European Parliament elections have been identified by several observers as key elections for the European integration project. If European elections are usually perceived as ‘wars fought with dummy rounds in which many are wounded but nobody is killed’ (Krastev, 2024), this time the situation was different. The elections took place at a turning point for Europe. The war in Ukraine dramatically changed the European agenda. Russian aggression has made the topic of EU security and defense a central focus of the debate over the past three years. Other European citizens’ fears are fueled by a general sense of insecurity due to rising prices, the international situation and migration problems (Eurobarometer, 2024). All these issues are the fuel that drives Eurosceptic parties, whether they are soft or hard Eurosceptic.

But the expectations that far-right populist parties would increase their calls to leave the EU after Brexit have not materialized (van Kessel, Chelotti, Drake, Roch, & Rodi, 2020). Instead, they have shifted their strategy, softening their hard Euroscepticism with a ‘lite version’ that has ‘indirect effects by pushing many of the West’s political systems and the mainstream further to the right...’ (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018, p. 284). This strategy proved successful. For example, the Freedom Party in the Netherlands won the parliamentary elections at the end of 2023, and the National Rally in France took first position in opinion polls. Thus, on the eve of the 2024 EP election campaign, the European Council on Foreign Relations issued a forecast of a significant increase in the representation of the far right (Cunningham, Hix, Dennison, & Learmonth, 2024).

If populist radical right parties in Western democracies adopted a moderate course, their Eastern European counterparts adopted a different strategy. The political crisis in recent years in countries such as Slovakia, Romania or Bulgaria has led to the formation of new populist radical right parties such as the Slovak Republican Movement, S.O.S. Romania and the Bulgarian party Vazrazhdane (Ivaldi & Zankina, 2023). These parties are characterized by their hard Euroscepticism, which is also evident in the campaign for the European Parliament elections (Ivaldi & Zankina, 2024).

Hard Euroscepticism in Bulgaria is associated mainly with Ataka (Attack), part of the Bulgarian National Assembly for 16 years (2005-2021) and Vazrazhdane (Revival), which can be considered as the successor of Ataka. Vazrazhdane’s electoral rise began in 2021 and developed simultaneously with the unprecedented political crisis in the country, which led to 7 parliamentary elections within three and a half years. It is this political crisis that makes the Bulgarian case particularly interesting to study. The aim of the article is to examine the features of Vazrazhdane’s hard Euroscepticism during the campaign for the 2024 European Parliament elections. The main research question is to what extent the party system polarization in Bulgaria triggers the hard Euroscepticism.

In the sections that follow, we first outline the theoretical framework of our study based on the literature of party system polarization and party Euroscepticism. Then we describe the characteristics of our methodological tools, which is qualitative content analysis. The next section is dedicated to our analysis, starting with domestic political context. We find that the unprecedented political crisis in Bulgaria has exacerbated party polarization, leading to the emergence of new populist radical right parties, some of which, like Vazrazhdane, are hard Eurosceptic. The analysis continues with a section dedicated to the political discourse and leading priorities of Vazrazhdane during the 2024 EP campaign, related to hard Euroscepticism. Finally, we discuss how the polarization of the party system in Bulgaria influenced the electoral success of Vazrazhdane. We also make some assumptions about the future perspective of the party.

2. Theoretical framework: Party system polarization and Euroscepticism

In recent years, the polarization of party systems in European democracies has increased significantly. Thus, Casal Bértoa and Enyedi (2021, p. 211) argue that ‘almost two-thirds of the most polarized elections have taken place in the twenty-first century’. One of the most common explanations for this trend is the electoral rise of the populist radical right parties, which are largely anti-political-establishment oriented (Abedi, 2004).

Polarization is a widely studied phenomenon, whether it refers to political cleavages (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967) or ideological struggles (Sani & Sartoti, 1983). As argued in the party system literature, party system polarization depends on higher levels of fragmentation, greater ideological distances between parties and the presence of relevant anti-system parties (Sartori, 1976). If in the times that Sartori studies, European party systems with polarized pluralism were more of an exception, the last decade has seen the opposite dynamic (De Vries & Hobolt, 2020). In their latest contribution, Emanuele and Marino (2024: p. 1) argue that the ideological polarization in Western Europe has been intensifying in recent years because of a ‘progressive shift in electoral support from ideologically moderate mainstream parties to more extreme challenger parties’. This type of parties, whether populist radical right (Albertazzi & van Kessel, 2024) or radical left (Wagner, 2022), have changed the political landscapes in Europe and increased the polarization of party systems (Poguntke & Holfmeister, 2024). This process is even more distinct in Eastern European democracies, where the initially weakly institutionalized party systems are much more open to new anti-establishment party contenders (Casal Bértoa & Rama, 2021). Many of them are both populist radical rights and Eurosceptics (Mudde, 2007; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017; Rovira Kaltwasser, Taggart, Ochoa Espejo & Ostiguy, 2017; Mudde, 2019).

Party polarization is most often studied through Downsian spatial model (Downs, 1957; Dalton, Farrell, & McAllister, 2011; De Vries et al., 2021). It looks at the individual preferences of political actors, whether they are parties or voters, considering how large the distances are between them - the larger they are, the greater the political differences between them. In recent years, much of the research on this topic has sought a connection between polarization and voter turnout. Dalton et al. (2011, p. 72-73) argue, that 'higher levels of party polarization within a system increase turnout, but decrease campaign activity'. This is confirmed by other research. Ellger (2024) studies that the polarization of the party system increases voter mobilization. Muñoz and Meguid (2021, p. 8) pay attention to the fact that polarization stimulates voter turnout when one party is close to the voter's preferred policies and another party is ideologically too distant. On the other hand, if voters feel that the parties do not meaningfully represent their preferred policies or that there is no significant difference between the parties, they may abstain from voting (Muñoz & Meguid, 2021). Rossteutscher and Stövsand (2022) show another pattern. They prove that the polarization of the party system suppresses voter turnout. Their research confirms the hypothesis that 'party-system polarization decreases turnout among moderate citizens and non-partisans and increases turnout of more extreme voters and partisans' (Rossteutscher & Stövsand, 2022, p. 916). These arguments would be even more valid for the European Parliament elections, which are perceived as second-order national elections (Reif & Schmidt, 1980). Lower voter turnout in European Parliament elections increases the absolute weight of radical anti-establishment parties from the far left or far right spectrum, whose voters are much more motivated to participate in these elections than moderate voters.

Following these theoretical assumptions, we consider that party system polarization in Bulgaria after 2020 radicalized political discourse. The political crisis led to a drop in voter turnout to 34%, which was recorded in the 2024 snap elections (Central Electoral Commission [CIK], 2024). The lower voter turnout increased the chance of smaller protest formations to overcome the 4% electoral threshold. There are no signs that the major parties in the country are winning elections with over 1,5 million - 2 million votes, as has happened in the recent past (Lyubenov, 2011). Shrinking voter turnout and fragmentation encapsulated the parties around only the narrowest core of supporters. Having lost the electoral periphery of moderate voters, the parties radicalized their speech, directing their messages only to the hard and most radical cores, which further intensified polarization. Thus, the political crisis in Bulgaria opened space for new anti-establishment and Eurosceptic formations.

The first academic article discussing the party-based Euroscepticism was 'A touchstone of dissent: Euroscepticism in contemporary Western European party systems' (Taggart, 1998). Soon this article has been followed by other academic publications discussing the new phenomenon of Euroscepticism. Academic re-

searchers tried to approach this new problematic by first looking for a definition of the problem. In 2002 Taggart and Szczerbiak proposed definition of two types of Euroscepticism, which they described as ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ form of the party-based opposition to the EU (Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2002). In their next publications (Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2004, Szczerbiak & Taggart, 2008) the authors sharpened their definition but the two-dimensional approach towards party-based Euroscepticism remained. In a publication Kopecký and Mudde (2002) criticized the two-dimensional approach of Taggart and Szczerbiak (2002) by defining four types of party approach to EU (Eurorejects, Eurosceptics, Europragmatists and Euroenthusiasts). The same year, Flood (2002) contributed to the debate defining six approaches to European integration among which rejectionist, revisionist, and minimalist. Over the years other social researchers attempted to define this phenomenon, but the most widespread definition remained Szczerbiak and Taggart one. They define hard Euroscepticism as a principled opposition to the EU and European integration, expressed by political parties that believe that their countries should withdraw from the EU, while soft Euroscepticism is expressed in ‘qualified opposition’ to the EU policies and decisions of European institutions. (Szczerbiak & Taggart, 2008: pp.7- 8). In a recent study covering 30 European democracies and 77 parties, Szczerbiak and Taggart (2024) found a strong association between anti-establishment discourse and Euroscepticism. They find that despite the dependence between the two categories, there are also political parties that are Eurosceptic but not anti-establishment and vice versa.

Although we do agree with Heinisch, McDonnell and Werner (2021) observation that in some cases is difficult to define one party as unequivocally hard or soft Eurosceptic, we argue that the case of Vazrazhdane is an example of the first. The hard Euroscepticism came for the first time, in the Bulgarian party competition, right before the accession to the EU in the face of far-right party Ataka. Norris and Inglehart (2019, p. 239) define the party as authoritarian populist, positioning it close to Jobbik, due to its xenophobic and ultra-nationalist positions. Fifteen years after the birth of Ataka a new hard Eurosceptic party entered the party competition – Vazrazhdane. The party can be described as a twin party of Ataka. The party’s positions largely echo those articulated by its far-right predecessor in the past. The perception that Bulgaria has become a ‘colonial state,’ losing its sovereignty with its membership in NATO and the EU, the insistence on renegotiating the conditions for EU membership, the calling of a referendum on leaving NATO, the pro-Russian orientation, are all common features of both political parties. Even in symbolic political gestures, many similarities can be seen. Vazrazhdane displays a disrespectful attitude towards the symbols of the European Union. The party’s MPs always sit down demonstratively while listening to the European anthem at the opening of each parliamentary session of the Bulgarian National assembly, a practice Ataka started after 2005. As a classical PRRP Vazrazhdane succeeded to mobilize party support, addressing issues as migration, LGBT rights, ethnic

minority groups in the country, and EU integration (Vazrazhdane, 2021). The party insists on a referendum for the Bulgarian membership in the Union. Thus, this type of Euroscepticism was developed in a strong pro-European environment and referendum call was used as a *'the discursive "proxy" of a referendum to hide away that they want to exit'* (Havlík & Hloušek 2025, p. 4).

Referendum democracy is a specific feature of the populist radical right (Mudde, 2007). However, referendums are sometimes used as a tool to increase political polarization. For example, Enyedi (2016) introduces the concept of populist polarization by anti-establishment parties for purely strategic purposes. Following this categorization Casal Bértoa & Musiał-Karg (2025) introduces the term 'populist polarizing referendum,' which resembles cleavage referendums. These types of referendums 'aim to exacerbate existing political divisions, reinforce divisive narratives, marginalize the opposition, and consolidate power' (Casal Bértoa & Musiał-Karg, 2025, p. 2). If Casal Bértoa and Musiał-Karg view polarizing referendums as a tool for ruling parties to consolidate their power, the opposition could also initiate referendums to strengthen its electoral influence and support. This was the case with the attempt of Vazrazhdane to organize a referendum against the adoption of the euro in Bulgaria, by organizing a petition supported by over 600,000 people. This initiative was declared unconstitutional by the Bulgarian Constitutional Court, but it deepened the division in society on this issue.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine is a critical juncture that has exacerbated the historical divisions in Eastern Europe between pro-Russian and anti-Russian attitudes. The war has provoked mixed reactions among populist radical right parties in the EU (Ivaldi & Zankina, 2023). Parties such as the French National Rally (RN) or Salvini's Lega in Italy, which maintain close ties to the Kremlin, are distancing themselves to avoid potential damage considering the upcoming general elections in both countries (Ivaldi & Zankina, 2023). However, some populist radical right parties from Eastern Europe reacted differently. Political parties such as Bulgarian Vazrazhdane and the Czech Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD) 'have become even more avid defenders of Putin, maintaining or even growing their electoral support' (Ivaldi & Zankina, 2023, p. 349). Even before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Vazrazhdane held openly pro-Russian positions, which often sounded like official Russian propaganda. The war did not change the image and behavior of Vazrazhdane. This is no coincidence and has its own simple explanation, related to the widespread historical sympathies towards Russia in Bulgarian society (Zankina, 2023; Otova, 2024). The foreign policy cleavage 'West vs. Russia' has always occupied a central place in Bulgarian politics (Todorov, 2007; Stoyanov, 2019).

Following these categorizations, we suggest that a new indicator of hard Euroscepticism should be added, and this is the assessment of the war in Ukraine and Russia's contemporary policy towards the EU. We consider this to be par-

ticularly important in the current geopolitical context. The war in Ukraine has not only changed the security environment but also turned Russia into a major strategic adversary of Europe, which, through targeted actions such as hybrid warfare and disinformation campaigns, seeks to weaken the EU, disrupt its unity. Therefore, we believe that a particularly important indicator in the study of hard Euroscepticism will be the positions of political actors which justify Russian aggression in Ukraine, blame Ukraine or the West for the war, or express support for the Putin regime.

3. Methodology and Operationalization

The subject of analysis in this article will be primarily the election campaign of the Vazrazhdane party. After Ataka did not register to participate in the elections on June 9, Vazrazhdane is the only one of the relevant parties in the country that can be defined as a hard Eurosceptic. The remaining parties on the radical right spectrum such as VMRO- Bulgarian National Movement (VMRO-BND) or new parties such as Velichie (Greatness) and Morality, Unity, Honour (MECH) are characterized by soft Euroscepticism. They are neither advocating for Bulgaria to leave the EU, nor are they calling for a referendum to decide on this issue.

The main research method we use in the article is qualitative content analysis. Through it, we analyze the Vazrazhdane anti-European narrative discourse from the supply side. According to Capano, Galanti and Barbato (2023, p. 238) ‘political narratives are “grand” stories that political leaders tell directly to the public and the electorate. Through these narratives, political leaders shape the preferences of public opinion by telling a story in which they propose a political vision, relevant political goals and how they will perform better than others in leading policies towards reaching the proposed political ends’. Following this concept, we consider narrative analysis in two senses: 1) as a methodological approach that helps explain various aspects of political processes by deriving different understandings and interpretations of political messages and practices (Groth, 2019, p. 11), and 2) as a strategy by which political actors ‘intentionally or intuitively to further relatively specific goals’ (Groth, 2019, p. 8).

Holding the European Parliament elections together with the snap parliamentary elections imposes a preliminary factual limitation of the study, due to the shift of the pre-election debate to predominantly domestic political topics. To compensate for this shortcoming, we focus mainly on the analysis of the positions of the party candidates for members of the European Parliament, expressed in their interviews, statements or publications on social media during the official election campaign period in Bulgaria from June 9 to June 7, 2024. Vazrazhdane did not present a special election program for the European Parliament elections. Therefore, we analyze the two programs available on the party’s website – Vazrazh-

dane's Governance Platform - 2021, entitled 'Who are we and what do we want?' (Vazrazhdane, 2021) and Vazrazhdane's Election Program for the Parliamentary Elections (Vazrazhdane, 2024). The pre-election debates for the European Parliament elections on the three national television channels BNT, BTV and NOVA are also a source of analysis (BNT, 2024a; BTV, 2024b; NOVA, 2024b).

Following the discussion of the theoretical part of the article, we examine hard Euroscepticism from the perspectives of political positions as a principled opposition to the EU and European integration according to 3 main variables, operationalized and presented in Table 1.

Table 1:
Operationalization of the hard Euroscepticism

Indicators	Party positions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desire to leave the EU; Principled opposition to the EU and European integration; • Strengthening cooperation with countries like Russia that view the EU and its member states as enemy countries; • Strengthening cooperation with countries, unions and organizations that are competitors of the EU. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calls to leave the EU; calls for a referendum to leave the Union; • Appeals to lift sanctions against the Kremlin; calls to end military, economic and humanitarian aid to Ukraine; positions to strengthen economic cooperation with the Kremlin; positions that consider the West and Kiev to be guilty of the war in Ukraine; • Strengthening cooperation with China and the BRICS countries.

Source: The author.

As noted in the theoretical framework of the article, party polarization can be measured by examining the distances between parties through spatial models. For this purpose, we analyze data from the CHES expert study on the war in Ukraine (Hooghe, Marks, Bakker, Jolly, Polk, Rovny, Steenbergen, & Vachudova, 2023). The dataset is relevant and, above all, up to date, including the new Bulgarian parties established after 2021. We examine the positioning of political parties in a multi-dimensional spatial model the economic left-right and GAL/TAN scales. Through them, we determine whether there are large distances between the parties. We also analyze the positions of the political parties, whether they support or oppose European integration, and whether they support or oppose strengthening ties with the Kremlin.

4. Domestic political context in the eve of EP elections

4.1. Party system polarization in Bulgaria

Following these theoretical assumptions, the article examines the parliamentary crises in Bulgaria in the period 2021-2024 as a specific case of polarization of the party system. During this period, Bulgaria held 7 parliamentary elections due to the inability of the parties to find a sustainable coalition formula for governance. This is the clearest evidence of party system polarization in the country. The nearly 10-year rule of GERB led to the creation of a model of illiberal democracy, characterized by a high degree of corruption, lack of rule of law, and placing the judiciary, the prosecutor's office, and the media market in political and/or oligarchic dependence, leading to the state capture and repressive actions against political opponents and business competitors of the ruling party (Kanev, 2021, p. 61; Stoyanov & Lyubenov, 2024). Thus, in the summer of 2020, a wave of anti-corruption protests broke out, which lasted several months and paved the way for a change in the party system after the parliamentary elections next year. The fight against corruption and the need for reforms in the judiciary emerged as the main dividing line between new parties such as We Continue the Change (PP), Democratic Bulgaria (DB), There is Such a People (ITN) on the one hand, and GERB-SDS and Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS) on the other. The attempt to build an anti-GERB and DPS coalition in late 2021 proved short-lived. The government of Kiril Petkov, which united the PP, DB, ITN and the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) in a ruling coalition, lasted only 8 months and was overthrown by a vote of no confidence after ITN withdrew from the government. Thus, after two more consecutive early parliamentary elections, a compromise was reached between PP-DB and GERB-SDS to form a government, which collapsed after 9 months due to disputes over appointments to the Anti-Corruption Commission and the adoption of an amendment to the Judiciary Act to complete the reform of the prosecutor's office (Lyubenov & Stoyanov, 2025).

Frequent early parliamentary elections led to a large decline in voter turnout - from 50.6% in the first elections in 2021 (Kanev, 2021) to 34.4% in the ones held on June 9, 2024 (CIK, 2024). The lower voter turnout increased the chance of smaller protest formations to overcome the 4% electoral threshold. Thus, about 100 thousand votes became sufficient to enter parliament. In 2023, the winner of the elections, GERB-SDS, received 660,000 votes. A year later, GERB-SDS won again, but shrank to a record low of 550,000 votes for the right-wing coalition (CIK, 2024). The decline in turnout because of frequent elections is due to voters' disappointment with the inability of political elites to form a stable majority. This encapsulates parties around the narrowest cores of supporters. The loss of the electoral periphery, including neutral and more moderate voters, led to the

radicalization of political discourse. Parties simply began to speak primarily to the hard and most radical cores of activists. And this further polarized the party system. One explanation for this process can be found in studies on affective polarization (Iyengar & Westwood, 2015; Iyengar et al., 2019). Evidence for strong affective polarization in Bulgaria shows the research of Zahariev and Stoychev (2025). Analyzing data from public opinion surveys, the authors present why it is so difficult to find an appropriate coalition formula and form a stable government. They argue that ‘the dividing lines that make majorities impossible are rooted deep enough in the political preferences and expectations of voters themselves’ (Zahariev & Stoychev, 2025, p. 7). Zahariev and Stoychev argue that ‘voters of both PP-DB and Vazrazhdane perceive each other as very distant from each other but perceive GERB-SDS as even more distant’ (Zahariev & Stoychev, 2025, p. 9). Thus, the political crisis opened space for new radical formations such as Vazrazhdane. As Cunningham et al. (2024) noted ‘this level of instability has contributed to the rapid acceleration of the anti-system vote, which the far-right and pro-Russia party, Revival, has greatly benefitted’.

[Vazrazhdane] was established in 2014. The founder of the party and its current leader is Kostadin Kostadinov, a former VMRO-BND’s deputy chairperson. He played a major role in the development and electoral breakthrough of Vazrazhdane. In the 2017 parliamentary elections, the party passed 1% of the vote. Vazrazhdane gained greater visibility during the anti-corruption protests in the summer of 2020, when it joined the opposition’s calls for the resignation of the Boyko Borisov-led government coalition between GERB-SDS and the United Patriots (Bankov, 2022). Vazrazhdane took advantage of the collapse in the United Patriots, composed of three far-right parties - VMRO-BND, Ataka and the National Front for Salvation of Bulgaria (NFSB), which after its joint government with GERB (2017-2021) did not enter parliament in the April 2021 general elections. This opened space for a newcomer like Vazrazhdane. Thus, in the snap parliamentary elections in November 2021, Vazrazhdane entered the Bulgarian National Assembly for the first time, collecting 4.8% of the vote (CIK, 2021). The party’s success is the result of two main factors. First, the inability to form a government led to three parliamentary elections in 2021, which increased the chances of an anti-establishment contender like Vazrazhdane making a breakthrough. On the other hand, Vazrazhdane focused on an anti-vaccine campaign, and restrictions imposed because of the Covid-19 pandemic (Toneva, 2021). Thus, the party exploited the resentment of many citizens who reacted hostilely to the restrictions on movement in public places.

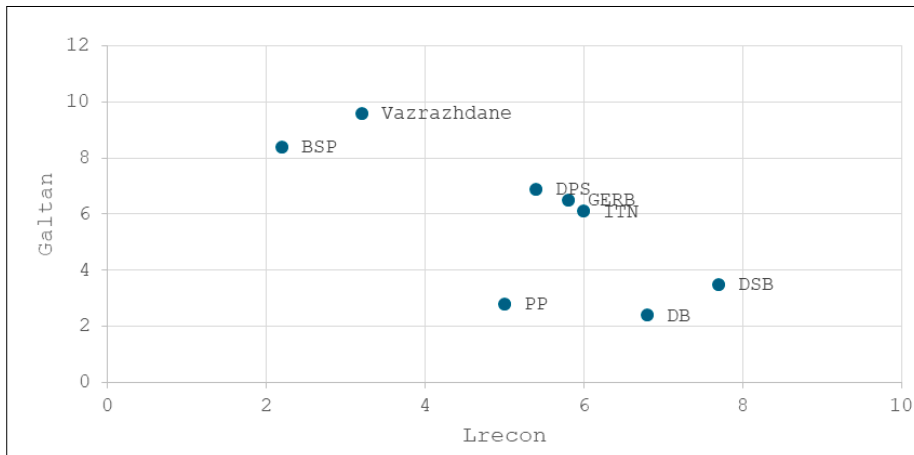
After entering parliament, Vazrazhdane took on an extremely destructive role, turning into an anti-system opposition that refuses any cooperation with the other parliamentary parties (Stoyanov & Lyubenov, 2024). In each subsequent election, the party increased its electoral support, reaching 14% of the vote or over 358,000 voters in the snap elections on April 2, 2023 (CIK, 2023). Thus, the party became the third largest parliamentary group for the first time.

4.2. Party positions and distances in the political space

As we noted in the theoretical framework of the article, distances between parties in the political space are one of the most appropriate measures of polarization. To show the current political distances between Bulgarian parties, we refer to the expert study of CHES (Hooghe et al., 2023). It reflects the dynamics of the positions of parties in Europe after the Kremlin's invasion in Ukraine, which makes it appropriate and relevant for the purposes of the article.

The data in Figure 1 show significant distances between several groups of parties – BSP and Vazrazhdane are located close to each other in the authoritarian-nationalist and far-left economic spectrums. On the opposite spectrum are the two parties united in the Democratic Bulgaria coalition – ‘Yes, Bulgaria’ (DB) and DSB. PP is close to the DB party and DSB on the GAL/TAN scale, but distances itself from them on the economic left and right, positioning itself as centrist party. DPS, GERB and ITN stand in a relatively right-centrist position and at approximately equal distance between the other two groups of parties.

Figure 1:
Positions of Bulgarian political parties in political space GAL/TAN – economic Left/Right¹



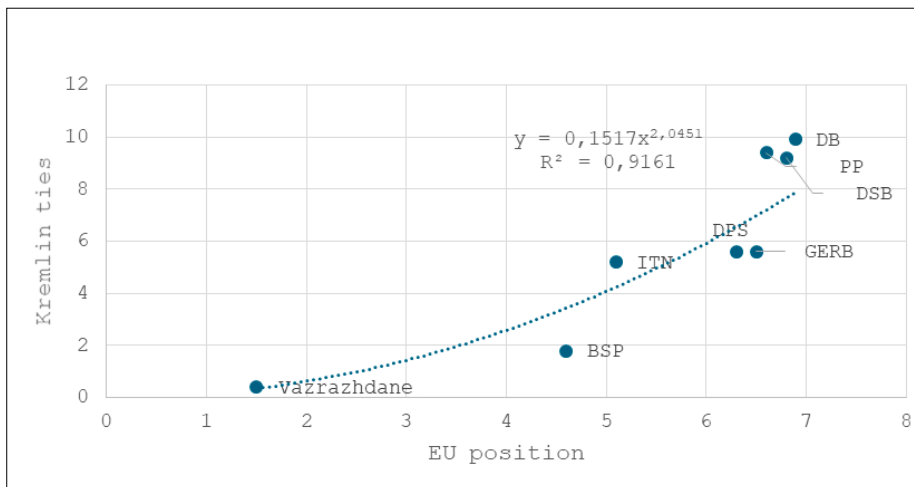
Source: Hooghe et al. (2023). CHES dataset

The largest distances in terms of economic left-right are between the successor to the former communist party BSP and Democrats for strong Bulgaria (DSB). The liberal and pro-European parties PP, DB and DSB stand furthest from Vazrazhdane on the value axis between liberal-oriented progressive parties and the authoritarian-nationalist forces.

The distances between Vazrazhdane and the pro-European parties PP, DB and DSB become even greater when it comes to support or opposition to Euro-

pean integration policies and the attitude towards the regime in the Kremlin. Evidence of this is the data presented in Figure 2. The power regression model shows that the increase by one unit of the variable on the horizontal axis leads to a proportional increase in the variable on the vertical axis - in this case, the attitude towards the Kremlin. Although the cases in this model are few in number, the dependence is substantial ($R^2 = 0.8345$). What is more interesting in this case is the great distance in the positioning of Vazrazhdane from the other parties, standing alone in the lower left quadrant of the figure.

Figure 2:
Positions of Bulgarian political parties regarding the attitude towards the Kremlin and European integration²



Source: Hooghe et al. (2023). CHES dataset.

The data in Figure 1 and Figure 2 show that the presence of Vazrazhdane on the political scene in Bulgaria strengthens party's polarization with its hard-Euro-sceptic positions, combined with a desire for closer ties with the Kremlin.

5. The Vazrazhdane's EP election campaign: hard Euroscepticism and issue salience

According to Zankina (2024, p. 81), 'Vazrazhdane ran an aggressive anti-EU campaign with the slogan "Out of the EU and NATO"'. The party appeals that European integration has gone too far. The EU must be reformed by returning to the idea of a 'Europe of nations' and thus each nation-state should preserve its sovereignty. The party views the current European political elites and the Europe-

an Commission as harmful to the European peoples. The party's leader, Kostadin Kostadinov declared that 'sovereign states must determine the policy of Europe, not the anonymous European Commission. We believe that the EU must reform and become what it was intended to be - an economic and cultural community, because now it is clearly failing Europe' (Zhivkova, 2024). Kostadin Kostadinov argues that the European Union should not become a political superstate and a United States of Europe (Btv Media group, 2024).

Vazrazhdane believes that Bulgaria has suffered several economic damages since its membership in the EU. For example, according to party the closure of two of the nuclear reactors of the Kozloduy NPP between 2002 and 2006, a step that the Bulgarian government made during the negotiations for EU membership, has caused economic losses, and Bulgarians have paid a high social price, depriving themselves of a cheap energy resource. Therefore, the party now categorically opposes the Green Deal and the closure of coal-fired power plants in the country. The MEPs candidate Stanislav Stoyanov defines the Green Deal as 'a conceptually ill-conceived project, a problem for the European economy. Bulgaria must request a derogation and allow Bulgarian coal-fired power plants to continue operating' (NOVA, 2024a).

Kostadin Kostadinov considers that 'with its entry into the EU, Bulgaria became a raw appendage of the Western European countries, which drained our demographic resources and colonized our economy. That is why it is necessary to renegotiate our membership in the EU, because in this form it is literally suffocating and killing the Bulgarian state and economy' (Kostadinov, 2024). Although such renegotiation is practically impossible in a legal sense, this idea is used purely for propaganda purposes. On the other hand, Vazrazhdane is insisting on renegotiating certain quotas in agricultural production, which would allow the country to return to a traditionally strong economic sector in the field of vegetable production and livestock farming. Although these topics have been present in the party's program since 2021, they are articulated even more strongly in 2024 for purely strategic reasons. The increase in prices in recent years has made inflation a key issue, not only in Bulgaria, but also in the EU.

5.1. Vazrazhdane and Bulgarian referendum

During the election campaign, Vazrazhdane's leader Kostadin Kostadinov stated that the party would initiate a referendum on Bulgaria's exit from the EU if the terms of membership were not renegotiated. He believes that 'at the current moment, Bulgaria's membership in the EU harms Bulgarian national interests in every sector, without exception. If we are not allowed to do this (i.e. renegotiation), then we will organize a referendum on leaving the European Union' (Info-mreja, 2024). Among the negative consequences of EU membership, Kostadinov

also lists the demographic crisis. He pointed that after the country joined the EU in 2007 and the opening of the European labor market, an unprecedented emigration of 1.2 million Bulgarians left the country to look for work in Western Europe (Kostadinov, 2024). According to him, in the long term this could leave the country without a workforce and lead to economic collapse (Kostadinov, 2024). These fears are also typical of other countries in Eastern Europe. This ‘demographic panic’, as Ivan Krastev defines it, is ‘one of the least discussed factors shaping eastern Europeans’ reaction toward refugees’ (Krastev, 2017, p. 50). According to Krastev, however, this problem is significant and can explain the reasons for the growing Euroscepticism in Eastern Europe. That is why Vazrazhdane categorically opposes the Migration Pact. The leader of Vazrazhdane Kostadin Kostadinov hyperbolizes this problem, trying to influence the fears of Bulgarians. For example, in his speech in the Bulgarian National Assembly, he claims that ‘planes with migrants arrive every week. Almost all of them are convicted recidivists and criminals with multiple criminal acts’ (BTA, 2024).

Vazrazhdane declared that they will work to reform the EU, which will remain only an economic union, but not develop as a political union in the direction of federalization. If this does not happen, then they will insist on holding a referendum on leaving the European Union. Such a position was presented by the leader of the party’s list in the EP elections Stanislav Stoyanov. According to him, the goal of Vazrazhdane ‘is not to take Bulgaria out of the EU, but to solve the problems. If the EU does not change, the hypothesis remains, to ask the people whether they want to remain a member of the EU’ (NOVA, 2024a). During the campaign, Vazrazhdane once again declared itself against Bulgaria’s membership in the eurozone. The collected signatures for a referendum to postpone Bulgaria’s entry into the eurozone were blocked by the Constitutional Court, since the adoption of the euro is a commitment that Bulgaria made with the signed EU accession treaty. The argument is that the acceptance of the euro would lead to an increase in prices and the country would lose its monetary sovereignty. Vazrazhdane rejects any positive arguments that will bring benefits to the country from the adoption of the Euro. The party argued that accepting the euro could push Bulgaria down the path of the Greek debt crisis (Vazrazhdane, 2024).

5.2. Through pro-Russian propaganda against the EU

The war in Ukraine was one of the most articulated topics during the campaign. One of the reasons for this was the criticism of Vazrazhdane by its political rivals. Opponents of Vazrazhdane viewed its pro-Russian orientation as a national security problem and therefore attacked it mainly on this basis (Raikova, 2024). This turned the attitude towards Russia and the war in Ukraine into the

dominant political discourse during the election campaign. Vazrazhdane has always denied accusations of being a pro-Russian party. They define themselves as a 'nationally responsible party,' and the qualifications given to them as a pro-Putin or pro-Kremlin party come from the liberal establishment. (BNT, 2024a)

A key role in the Vazrazhdane campaign was played by the journalist and radio host Petar Volgin, who has been nominated as a candidate for the European Parliament. In recent years, he has gained scandalous popularity for his one-sided coverage of the war in Ukraine, approaching the Russian propaganda position and using anti-European and anti-liberal theses and statements (Angelov, 2022). In the election debate on Nova TV, Volgin argued that the roots of the war in Ukraine can be traced back to the 1920s. Like Kremlin propaganda, he defined the Ukrainian nation as artificially created. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, „the West gradually began to transform Ukraine, purposefully fueling anti-Russian sentiments (NOVA, 2024b). Volgin pointed out that the West is primarily to blame for the war in Ukraine with NATO's expansion to the East. He described the Maidan protests in 2014 as a coup by the West, which overthrew the legally elected president and government, and Russia's response was to protect the Russian-speaking population in Donbas. (NOVA, 2024b).

The pro-Russian theses of Vazrazhdane are also expressed in the anti-NATO and anti-American attitudes that were clearly expressed during the campaign. The party again develops its usual theses for holding a referendum on Bulgaria's exit from NATO. The party has considered NATO more as a problem for global security than as a guarantee for the national security of the Alliance countries, including Bulgaria (NOVA, 2024b). Strong anti-American sentiments are salient issues of Vazrazhdane which was presented as a distinctive discourse during the election campaign. In the pre-election television debates, Petar Volgin described the EU as an 'American puppet on strings' (BTV, 2024b), and the European Commission as a 'dependent institution, subordinate to the will of the USA' (Karbovski, 2024).

5.3. Other integration projects

The Vazrazhdane election program focused on 'conducting a balanced foreign policy and building partnerships, both in the East and in the West' (Vazrazhdane, 2024). The party believed that the country should also seek other opportunities for economic cooperation. For example, in the summer of 2024, Vazrazhdane participated in a delegation at the BRICS forum in Moscow. The leader of Vazrazhdane, Kostadin Kostadinov, sees BRICS as 'the future of the world'. Therefore, Bulgaria should develop economic ties with the East and countries of the global South, countries that represent enormous potential for development for purely demographic reasons (Kostadinov, 2024).

6. Results of the 2024 EP elections in Bulgaria

The European Parliament elections in Bulgaria recorded a low turnout of 33.78%. Lower than this was the turnout in 2007 at the first partial elections in the year of accession - 28% and in 2019 - 32%. Six parties and coalitions passed the 5.88% electoral threshold. The European People's Party (EPP) has the most representatives in the European Parliament from Bulgaria, with a total of 6 (5 representatives from GERB-SDS and 1 from Democratic Bulgaria (DB). 5 MEPs join the Renew Europe group - 3 from the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS) and 2 from We Continue the Change (PP). The Bulgarian Socialist Party for Bulgaria adds 2 MEPs to the Socialists and Democrats group. There is such a people (ITN) announced during the election campaign that it would join the European Conservatives and Reformists group. Vazrazhdane with its 3 MPs also became co-founders of a new parliamentary Europe of Sovereign Nations (ESN) group, in which the Alternative for Germany will play a leading role. The remaining members of the group are far-right parties, primarily from Eastern Europe.

Table 2:
European Parliament election results in Bulgaria

Party/Coalition	Number of voters	% of the vote	MEPs	Affiliation with EP groups
GERB-SDS	474 059	23.55	5	EPP
DPS	295 092	14.66	3	Renew
PP-DB	290 865	14.45	3	Renew/EPP
Vazrazhdane	281 434	13.98	3	ESN
BSP for Bulgaria	141 178	7.01	2	S&D
ITN	121 572	6.04	1	ECR
Velichie	81 955	4.07	-	NI
MECH	51 076	2.54	-	NI
VMRO-BND	42 022	2.09	-	ECR

Source: CIK.

These results confirm the dominance of pro-European parties in the country. Ataka last found a place in the EP in 2009 as a representative of hard Euroscepticism from Bulgaria. The low voter turnout gives a greater relative weight to Vazrazhdane. The party's results are comparable to those of Ataka in the 2007 and 2009 EP elections (Georgieva, 2007; CIK, 2009). This leads to the conclusion that a result of around 300,000 votes seems to be the maximum for the anti-European national populist right in the country. The rise of the new populist and anti-establishment parties such as MECH and Velichie, who showed electoral potential in the 2024 elections, means that the competition for the protest vote against the political status quo is great, especially in a weakly institutionalized party system like the Bulgarian one.

7. Conclusion

Vazrazhdane's election campaign was marked by several narratives. First, the party is trying to recreate a narrative based on the feeling of a deep sociopolitical crisis - the main reason for this is the lost sovereignty due to membership in the EU and NATO. Second, the narrative that Bulgaria is losing from its EU membership in socio-economic terms. Third, the need for reforms in the EU and renegotiation of the country's membership conditions. If this does not happen, the party will initiate a referendum on leaving the EU. Fourth, the West is to blame for the war in Ukraine, Russia is a friend, and Bulgaria should seek ties and economic cooperation with the BRICS countries.

This type of discourse is not unique. Vazrazhdane largely repeats the theses of its predecessor, the Ataka party. And these narratives were also observed during the campaign for the European Parliament elections in other Central and Eastern European countries (Ivaldi & Zankina, 2024). However, the Bulgarian case is interesting and unique in something else - this is the unprecedented political crisis in its duration, which led to 7 parliamentary elections in the period 2021-2024 and the party system polarization because of this process. The European Parliament elections in Bulgaria are being held with traditionally low voter turnout. The combination of the European Parliament elections with another consecutive snap parliamentary election further polarized the political discourse during the election campaign. Low voter turnout stimulates parties to speak primarily to their narrowest party core of supporters, to mobilize them to the maximum extent. This leads to radicalization in the political discourse, which in the case of anti-European parties such as Vazrazhdane is expressed in strengthening hard Euroscepticism.

The elections showed that Vazrazhdane reached its electoral ceiling. Whatever the political future of Vazrazhdane, anti-European attitudes as an electoral potential in Bulgaria remain relatively weak, but stable. This raises the question of whether the party should change its strategies in the future. In general, there are three paths before the party. The continuation of radical anti-European rhetoric, combined with the promotion of pro-Kremlin positions, would put the Vazrazhdane party in permanent political isolation and this could lead to its gradual marginalization. Another path for Vazrazhdane is the one taken by some national-populist parties in Europe. By softening their radical rhetoric, they increased their electoral support and became more acceptable partners for part of the political mainstream. The third path for Vazrazhdane is the chameleon's behavior, expressed in the pursuit of opportunistic benefits and the alternation of soft and hard Eurosceptic positions depending on the political situation.

Calls for a referendum on EU membership are not something to be taken lightly. For now, this seems more like an opportunistic call by niche parties like Vazrazhdane for additional electoral support. However, such rhetoric could lead to further political polarization, which can be dangerous for democracy in times of multiple crises, public fears and uncertainty.

References:

- Abedi, A. (2004). *Anti-political establishment parties. A comparative analysis*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Albertazzi, D. & Van Kessel, S. (2024). Why Do Party Elites Incentivize Activism? The case of Populist Radical Right. *Party Politics*, 30(5), 770–780.
- Angelov, G. (2022, April 11). Volgin, BNR i desinformatsiyata: tova triyabva da spre nezabavno. *DW Bulgaria*. Retrieved from: <https://www.dw.com/bg/волгин-бнр-и-дезинформацията-защото-ва-трябва-да-спре-веднага/a-61436094/>
- Bankov, P. (2022). Parliamentary elections in Bulgaria, 2 October 2022. *BLUE Electoral Bulletin of the European Union*, 3, 118–122.
- BNT (2024a, May 10). Panorama: Balgaria i badeshteto na Evropa- predisboren debat. *BNT*. Retrieved from: <https://bnt.bg/news/panorama-10052024-328772news.html?page=8>
- BTA. (2024). Kostadin Kostadinov: Ubivat Balgaria – ne ni vrashtat prosto migranti, a iznasilvachi, ubijctsi I narkoplasiori. *BTA*. Retrieved from: <https://www.bta.bg/bg/news/bulgaria/oficial-messages/626860-kostadin-kostadinov-ubivat-balgariya-ne-ni-vrashtat-prosto-migranti-a-iznasilvachi>
- BTV (2024b, June 2). Evropeiskiyat izbor na Balgaria: zaklyuchitelen eurodebat po bTV. *BTV*. Retrieved from: <https://btvnovinite.bg/predavania/120-minuti/evropejskiyat-izbor-na-balgarija-zaklyuchitelen-evrodebat-v-efira-na-btv.html>
- Btv Media group (2024, April 16). *Kostadinov: V tozi si vid ES zaplashva evropejskata tsivilizatsiya*. [Video]. YouTube. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AAuGdo2MEIU>
- Capano, G., Galanti, M. & Barbato, G. (2023). When the political leader is the narrator: the political and policy dimensions of narratives. *Policy Science*, 56: 233–265.
- Casal Bértoa, F. & Rama, J. (2021). Polarization: What Do We Know and What Can We Do About it? *Frontiers in Political Science*, 3: 687695.
- CIK (2009, June 7). Izbori za chlenove na Evropeyskiya parliament. *CIK*. Retrieved from: <https://ep2009.cik.bg/results/index.html>
- CIK (2019) Izbori za chlenove na Evropeyskiya parliament. *CIK*. Retrieved from: <https://results.cik.bg/ep2019/mandati/index.html>
- CIK (2021). Izbori za president i viceprezident i narodni predstaviteli, 14 noemvri 2021. *CIK*. Retrieved from: <https://results.cik.bg/pvrns2021/turl/rezultati/index.html>
- CIK (2024, June 9). Izbori za chlenove na Evropeyskiya parliament. *CIK*. Retrieved from: <https://results.cik.bg/europe2024/rezultati/index.html>
- CIK, (2023). Izbori za narodni predstaviteli, 2 april 2023. *CIK*. Retrieved from <https://results.cik.bg/ns2023/rezultati/index.html>
- Cunningham, K., Hix, S., Dennison, S. & Learmonth, I. (2024, January 23). A sharp right turn: A forecast for the 2024 European Parliament elections. *European Council of Foreign Relations*. Retrieved from: <https://ecfr.eu/publication/a-sharp-right-turn-a-forecast-for-the-2024-european-parliament-elections/>
- Dalton, R., Farrell, D. & McAllister, I. (2011). *Political Parties & Democratic Linkage. How parties Organize Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- De Vries, C. E. & Hobolt, S. (2020). *Political Entrepreneurs: The Rise of Challenger Parties in Europe*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- De Vries, C., Hobolt, S., Proksch, S. & Slapin, J. (2021). *Foundation of European Politics. A Comparative approach*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Downs, A. (1957). *An economy theory of democracy*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Eatwell, R. & Goodwin, M. (2018). *National Populism. The Revolt against Liberal Democracy*. UK: Penguin books.
- Ellger, F. (2024). The Mobilizing Effect of Party System Polarization. Evidence from Europe. *Comparative Political Study*, 57(8), 1310–1338.
- Emanuele, V. & Marino, B. (2024). Party System Ideological Polarization in Western Europe: data, trends, drivers, and links with other key party system properties (1945–2021). *Political Research Exchange*, 6(1), 1–15.

- Enyedi, Z. (2016). Populist Polarization and Party System Institutionalization. *Problems of Post-communism*, 63(4), 210–220.
- Eurobarometer (2024). *EP Spring 2024 Survey: Use your vote - Countdown to the European elections*. Retrieved from: <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3272>
- Flood, C. (2002). Euroscepticism: A problematic concept. *UACES 32nd Annual Conference and 7th Research Conference, Queen's University Belfast* [Conference presentation], 2–4.
- Georgieva, P. (2007). Parvite izbori za chlenove na Evropeyskiya parlament v Balgaraia. *Politicheski izsledvaniya*, (2).
- Groth, S. (2019). Political narratives / narrations of the political: an introduction. *Narrative Culture*, 6(1), 1–18.
- Havlík, V., & Hloušek, V. (2025). Where Have All the 'Exiters' Gone? Contextualizing the Concept of Hard Euroscepticism. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 63(2), 351–368. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13602>
- Heinisch, R., McDonnell, D., & Werner, A. (2021). Equivocal Euroscepticism: How populist radical right parties can have their EU cake and eat it. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 59(2), 189–205.
- Hooghe, L., Marks, G., Bakker, R., Jolly, S., Polk, J., Rovny, J., Steenbergen, & Vachudova, M. (2023). *The Russian Threat and the Consolidation of the West*, Working paper.
- Infomreja. (2024, May 15). Kostadin Kostadinov ot Kyustendil: Tselta ni e da se prevarnem v parva politicheska sila. *Infomreja*. Retrieved from: <https://infomreja.bg/kostadin-kostadinov-ot-kiustendil-celta-ni-e-da-se-prevyrnem-v-pyrva-politicheska-sila-154014.html>
- Ivaldi, G. & Zankina, E. (2023). *The Impacts of the Russian Invasion of Ukraine on Right-Wing Populism in Europe*. Brussels: European Center for Populism Studies (ECPS).
- Ivaldi, G. & Zankina, E. (2024). *2024 EP Elections Under the Shadow of Rising Populism*. ECPS: European Center for Populism Studies.
- Iyengar, S. & Westwood, S.J. (2015). Fear and loathing across party lines: new evidence on group polarization. *American Journal of Political Science*, 59(3), pp. 690–707.
- Iyengar, S., Lelkes, Y., Levendusky, M., Malhotra, N. & Westwood, S.J. (2019). The Origin and Consequences of Affective Polarization in the United States. *Annual Review of Political Science*, (22), 129–146.
- Kanev, D. (2021). Parliamentary Elections in Bulgaria, 4 Arpil 2021. *BLUE Electoral Bulletin of the European Union*, (1), 61–66. Retrieved from: https://geopolitique.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/BLUE_1_en-1.pdf
- Karbovski, M. (2024, April 27). *Na zhivo pred Karbovski: Petar Volgin mezdru zurnalistikata i politikata*. [Video]. YouTube. Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EfU_phaMN7U
- Kopecký, P., & Mudde, C. (2002). The two sides of Euroscepticism: Party positions on European integration in East Central Europe. *European Union Politics*, 3(3), 297–326.
- Kostadinov, K. (2024, May 20). *Ravnosmetka ot chlenstvoto na Balgaria v ES. Kostadin Kostadinov blog*. Retrieved from <https://kostadin.eu/ravnosmetkata-ot-clenstvoto-v-es/>
- Kostadinov, K. (2024, May 23). *Obshtite zagubi ot chlenstvoto na Balgaria v ES za 17 godini bazliza grubo na 181 billion leva*. [Facebook status update]. Retrieved from: https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=987515752937442&set=a.452502546438768&type=3&ref=embed_post/
- Kostadinov, K. (2024, September 24). *BRICS*. [Video]. YouTube. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ki3lMwE3L7E>
- Krastev, I. (2017). *After Europe*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Krastev, I. (2024). The European Elections will be a rough ride the political mainstream. *Financial Times*. Retrieved from: <https://www.ft.com/content/1cda0451-b992-4aa2-be9c-b2174cf8ba64>
- Lipset, S. M., & Rokkan, S. (1967). Cleavage Structures, Party Systems and Voter Alignments: An Introduction. In Lipset, S.M. & S. Rokkan (Eds.). *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives* (pp. 1–64). New York: Free Press.
- Lyubenov, M. (2011). *Balgaskata Partiyina Sistema: Grupirane i Strukturirane na partiynite predpochitaninya (1990-2009)*. Sofia: St. Kliment Ohridski University Press.
- Lyubenov, M. & Stoyanov, D. (2025). Parliamentary elections in Bulgaria, 9 June and 27 October 2024. *BLUE Electoral Bulletin of the European Union*, 5(4). Groupe d'Etudes Géopolitiques. (forthcoming).
- Mudde, C. (2007). *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Mudde, C. (2019). *The Far Right Today*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Mudde, C. & Rovira Kaltwasser, C. (2017). *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Muñoz, M. & Meguid, B. (2021). Does party polarization mobilize or de-mobilize voters? The answer depends on where voters stand. *Electoral Studies*, (70), 102279.
- Musiał-Karg, M. & Casal Bértoa, F. (2025). The Ball That Failed to Curve: The 2023 “Populist Polarizing” Referendum in Poland. *Politics and Governance*, 13, 1–20.
- Norris, P & Inglehart, R. (2019). *Cultural Backlash. Trump, Brexit, and authoritarian populism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- NOVA. (2024, May 19). Volgin: Ako spechelim izborite shte iniciitame referendum za chlenstvoto ni v NATO. NOVA. Retrieved from <https://nova.bg/news/view/2024/05/19/456288/волгин-ако-спечелим-изборите-ще-инициираме-референдум-за-членството-ни-в-нато/>
- NOVA. (2024a, May 21). Stanislav Stoyanov: Za nas e vazhno da poluchim seriozno predstavitelstvo v EP. NOVA. Retrieved from <https://nova.bg/news/view/2024/05/21/456515/станислав-стойанов-за-нас-е-важно-да-получим-сериозно-представителство-в-еп/>
- NOVA. (2024b, May 21). Izborite v Bgaria - novoto upralenie: Ot Sofia do Bryuksel: Debat mezhdu kandidatite za Evropeyski parlament po NOVA. NOVA. Retrieved from: <https://nova.bg/news/view/2024/05/21/456448/изборът-на-българия-новата-власт-от-софия-до-брюксел-дебат-между-кандидатите-за-евродепутати-в-сфيرا-на-nova/>
- Otova, I. (2024). Bulgarian populist euroscepticism: the unavoidable Russian dimension. *Political Studies Review*, 1–7. Sage.
- Poguntke, T. & Hofmeister, W. (2024). *Political parties & the crisis of democracy. Organization, Resilience, & Reform*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Raikova, E. (2024, January 19). Vazrazhdane izvednazh se okaza zaplaha za natsionalnata sigurnost. Sega. Retrieved from: <https://www.segabg.com/hot/category-bulgaria/vuzrazhdane-izvednuzh-se-okaza-zaplaha-za-nacionalnata-sigurnost>
- Reif, K. & Schmidt, H. (1980). Nine second-order national elections: A conceptual framework for the analysis of European election results. *European Journal of Political Research*, 8, 3–44.
- Rossteutscher, S. & Stövsand, L. (2022). Party-System Polarization and Individual Perceptions of Party Differences: Two Divergent Effects on Turnout. *Government and Opposition*, 59, 911–931.
- Rovira Kaltwasser, C., Taggart, P., Ochoa Espejo, P. & Ostiguy, P. (2017). *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sani, G. & Sartori, G. (1983). Polarization, Fragmentation and Competition in Western Democracies”. In Daalder, H. and P. Mair (Eds.). *Western European Party Systems*, (pp. 307–340). London: Sage.
- Sartori, G. (1976). *Party and party Systems. A Framework for analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Stoyanov, D. (2019). Bulgarian Strategic Culture between Europe and Russia. In Miklóssy, K. & Smith, H. (Eds.) *Strategic Culture in Russia’s Neighborhood: Change and Continuity in an In-Between Space* (pp. 124–141). Lexington Books.
- Stoyanov, D. & Lyubenov, M. (2024). Melting Democracy: the October 2024 National Elections in Bulgaria. *The Loop-ECPR’s Political Science Blog*. Retrieved from: <https://theloop.ecpr.eu/melting-democracy-the-october-2024-national-elections-in-bulgaria/>
- Szczerbiak, A. & Taggart, P. (2008). Theorizing party-based Euroscepticism: problems of definition, measurement and causality’. In Szczerbiak, A. & Taggart, P. (Eds.). *Opposing Europe? The Comparative Party Politics of Euroscepticism: Volume 2: Comparative and Theoretical Perspectives* (pp. 238–262). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Szczerbiak, A. & Taggart, P. (2024). Euroscepticism and Anti-Establishment Parties in Europe. *Journal of European Integration*, 46 (8), 1171–1191.
- Taggart, P. (1998). A touchstone of dissent: Euroscepticism in contemporary Western European party systems. *European Journal of Political Research*, 33(3), 363–388.
- Taggart, P., & Szczerbiak, A. (2002). The party politics of Euroscepticism in EU member and candidate states.
- Taggart, P. & Szczerbiak, A. (2003). Europeanisation, Euroscepticism and Party Systems: Party-based Euroscepticism in the Candidate States of Central and Eastern Europe. *Pan-European Perspectives on Party Politics*, 207–225. Brill.
- Todorov, A. (2007). Vanshna politika i politicheska kultura: edno izmerenie na klividzhite v Bgaria. *Politicheski izsledvaniya*, 3, 3–26

- Toneva, A. (2021). Kovid krizata prez prizmata na radikalno desnite partii v Balgaria i Germaniya (Yanuari 2020 - Noemvri 2021). *Doktorantski cheteniya 2021*. Sofia: St. Uliment Ohridski University Press.
- van Kessel, S., Chelotti, N., Drake, H., Roch, J., & Rodi, P. (2020). Eager to leave? Populist radical right parties' responses to the UK's Brexit vote. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 22(1), 65–84.
- Vazrazhdane. (2021). Koi sme nie i kakvo iskame? Platforma za upravlenie na Vazrazhdane-2021. *Vazrazhdane*. Retrieved from: <https://vazrazhdane.bg/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Програма-Възраждане.коригирана.pdf>
- Vazrazhdane. (2024). Vansna politika. *Vazrazhdane official website*. Retrieved from: <https://vazrazhdane.bg/икономика-и-работа/>
- Wagner, S. (2022). Euroscepticism as a Radical Left Party Strategy for Success. *Party Politics*, 28(6), 1069–1080.
- Zahariev, B. & Stoychev, G. (2025). Balrarskoto partiyno-politicheskoprostranstvo spored predstavite i simpatiite na izbiratelite. Sofia: Institut Otvoreno osbshestvo, 1–13. Retrieved from: <https://osis.bg/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Political-parties-BZandGS.pdf>
- Zankina, E. (2023). Pro-Russia or Anti-Russia: Political Dilemmas and Dynamics of Bulgaria in the Context the War in Ukraine. In Ivaldi, G. & Zankina, E. (Eds.) *The Impacts of the Russian Invasion of Ukraine on Right-Wing Populism in Europe* (pp. 48–63). Brussels: European Center for Populism Studies (ECPS).
- Zankina, E. (2024). Populism and Polycrisis in Bulgaria on the Eve of the 2024 European Parliament Elections. In Ivaldi, G. & Zankina, E. (Eds.) *2024 EP Elections Under the Shadow of Rising Populism* (pp. 70–83). ECPS: European Center for Populism Studies.
- Zhivkova, P. (2024, January 31). Kostadin Kostadinov, predsedatel na partiya Vazrazhdane pred Trud news: ESse prevrashta vsrvah darzhava, rakovodena ot anonimni hora. *Trudnews*. Retrieved from: <https://trud.bg/костадин-костадинов-председател-на-партия-възраждане-пред-труд-news-ес-се-превръща-в-свърх/>

Endnotes:

- 1 Lrecon: 0 = Extreme left; 10 = Extreme right Galton: 0= libertarian/postmaterialist; 10 = traditional/authoritarian.
- 2 EU position: How would you describe the general position on European integration that the party leadership took over the past three months? 1 = strongly opposed; 7 = strongly in favor
Kremlin ties: How would you characterize the party's position towards the government of Russia? 0= Strongly seek ties with Kremlin; 10= Strongly opposes ties with the Kremlin.