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Petar Cholakov

**ETHNIC ENTREPRENEURS  
UNMASKED**

Political Institutions and Ethnic Conflicts  
in Contemporary Bulgaria

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Top centre—remembering the victims of the conflict in Katunitsa during a procession in 2013, the slogan reads: "We are not going to forgive, we are not going to forget" (© Petar Cholakov);

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Bellow, the "cliché of multiculturalism" at the centre of Sofia (see section 1.1 of the book): centre left—the Orthodox Church "St. Nedelya" (© Petar Cholakov);

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bottom right—the Sofia Synagogue (© Petar Cholakov).

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Printed in the EU

To my daughter Elena



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# Abbreviations

## Abbreviations of political parties and organizations

Abbreviation in English	Full name of the organization in English	Abbreviation in Bulgarian	Full name of the organization in Bulgarian
ABR	Alternative for Bulgarian Revival	АБВ	Алтернатива за българско възрождане
ASP	Alternative Socialist Party	АСП	Алтернативна социалистическа партия
BAPU	Bulgarian Agrarian People's Union	БЗНС	Български земеделски народен съюз
BAPU "Nikola Petkov"	Bulgarian Agrarian People's Union "Nikola Petkov"	БЗНС "Никола Петков"	Български земеделски народен съюз "Никола Петков"
BAPU "United"	Bulgarian Agrarian People's Union "United"	БЗНС "Обединен"	Български земеделски народен съюз "Обединен"
BDF	Bulgarian Democratic Forum	БДФ	Български демократичен форум
BEL	Bulgarian European Left	БЕЛ	Българска евролевица
BNRP	Bulgarian National Radical Party	БНРП	Българска национално-радикална партия
BNU	Bulgarian National Union	БНС	Български народен съюз
BSDP	Bulgarian Social Democratic Party	БСДП	Българска социалдемократическа партия
BSP	Bulgarian Socialist Party	БСП	Българска социалистическа партия

DLP	Democratic Labor Party	ДПП	Демократична партия на труда
DOST	Democrats for Responsibility Solidarity and Tolerance	ДОСТ	Демократи за отговорност свобода и толерантност
DROM	Movement for an Equal Public Model	ДРОМ	Движение за равноправен обществен модел
FF	Fatherland Front	ОФ	Отечествен фронт
IMRO-BNM	IMRO-Bulgarian National Movement	ВМРО-БНД	ВМРО-Българско Национално Движение
MBC	Movement "Bulgaria of the Citizens"	ДБГ	Движение "България на гражданите"
MRF	Movement for Rights and Freedoms	ДПС	Движение за права и свободи
NCPPI	National Committee for Protection of Peoples' Interests	ОКЗНИ	Общонароден комитет за защита на националните интереси
NFSB	National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria	НФСБ	Национален фронт за спасение на България
NMSP	National Movement for Stability and Progress	НДСВ	Национално движение за стабилност и възход
ODS	United Democratic Forces	ОДС	Обединени демократични сили
OLJ	Order, Legality, and Justice	РЗС	Ред, законност и справедливост
PPFD	Peoples' Party "Freedom and Dignity"	НПСД	Народна партия "свобода и достойнство"
PROUD	People for Real, Open and United Democracy	ГОРД	Гражданско обединение за реална демокрация

PU	People's Union	НС	Народен Съюз
TNLMB	Turkish National Liberation Movement in Bulgaria	ТНОДБ	Турско национално-освободително движение в България
UBNL	Union of Bulgarian National Legions	СБНЛ	Съюз на българските национални легиони
UDF	United Democratic Forces	СДС	Съюз на демократичните сили
UDF Center	Union of the Democratic Forces "Center"	СДС "Център"	Съюз на демократичните сили "Център"
UFD	Union of Free Democrats	ССД	Съюз на свободните демократи
UNPP	United National Progressive Party	ОНПП	Обединена национално прогресивна партия
UNS	Union for National Salvation	ОНС	Обединение за национално спасение
UYNL	Union of Youth National Legions	СМНЛ	Съюз на младежките национални легиони

## Other important abbreviations

Abbreviation in English	Full name in English	Abbreviation in Bulgarian	Full name in Bulgarian
BHC	Bulgarian Helsinki Committee	БХК	Български хелзинкски комитет
BNA	Bulgarian National Assembly	НС	Народно събрание на Република България
CEC	Central Electoral Commission	ЦИК	Централна избирателна комисия
CPAD	Commission for Protection against Discrimination	КЗД	Комисия за защита от дискриминация
ECHR	European Convention on Human Rights	ECHR	Европейска конвенция по правата на човека
ECtHR	European Court of Human Rights	ЕСПЧ	Европейски съд по правата на човека
FYROM	Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	-	-
GSI	Global Slavery Index	-	-
NAP-DRI	National Action Plan for the pan-European Initiative "Decade of Roma Inclusion"	НПД-ДРВ	Национален план за действие по инициативата "Десетилетие на ромското включване"
NCCEDI	National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Demographic Issues	НССЕДВ	Национален съвет за сътрудничество по етническите и демографските въпроси

NCCEI	National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues	НССЕИВ	Национален съвет за сътрудничество по етническите и интеграционните въпроси
NCEDI	National Council on Ethnic and Demographic Issues	НСЕДВ	Национален съвет по етническите и демографските въпроси
PADA	Protection against Discrimination Act	ЗЗД	Закон за защита от дискриминация
PRR	Populist Radical Right	-	-
SAC	Supreme Administrative Court	ВАС	Върховен административен съд
SANS	State Agency National Security	ДАНС	Държавна агенция национална сигурност
SFRY	Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia	-	-
WGI	Worldwide Governance Indicators (World Bank)	-	-



# Introduction

The relative ethnic peace which Bulgaria has enjoyed in the recent decades is among the few remaining bastions of national self-confidence. Amid bitter antagonism, bloodshed, and financial crises, which devastated many countries after the collapse of the Communist bloc, the sanctity of interethnic accord has, in general, been revered in Bulgaria. Its preservation is possible because the political system, despite its multiple drawbacks, is still able to tame the flashing sparks. Not only the limited comprehensive research on the topic but also the current affairs testify to the relevance of this book, dedicated to the role of political institutions in ethnic conflicts in Bulgaria after 1989. As I am writing these lines, Lyutvi Mestan, the leader of the newly formed ethnic party Democrats for Responsibility Solidarity and Tolerance (DOST),<sup>1</sup> states that the amendment of the Election Code,<sup>2</sup> which the majority in the Bulgarian National Assembly (BNA) approved on April 28, 2016, “is a continuation of the Revival Process.”<sup>3</sup> The events in Katunitsa, Orlandovtsi, Garmen, and Radnevo indicate that the clashes and physical violence between Bulgarians and Romani, who remain subjected to social exclusion and marginalization, are on the raise. In addition, there are numerous other less visible and often ignored outbursts of hostility on ethnic grounds which happen on a daily basis. The issues discussed in the pages that follow are even more pertinent when we consider the international context. The principles and values on which the European Union (EU) is built are challenged by the constant migrant flow from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and other

- 
- 1 In Bulgarian—ДОСТ. Mestan was formerly the chair of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF, ДПЦ).
  - 2 The amendments effectively reduced the number of polling stations in which the Bulgarian emigrants can vote abroad. The purpose of the legislative changes, which were initiated by the National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria (NFSB), a populist radical right (PRR) party, was to reduce the weight of the ethnic vote, coming mainly from Turkey.
  - 3 See “Mestan: the Election Code is a Continuation of the Revival Process” (2016).

failing states. At the same time, the increasingly menacing shadow of terrorism revealed its poisonous tentacles in the attacks in Madrid (2004), London (2005), Burgas (2012), Paris (2015), Brussels, Istanbul, Nice, Würzburg, Ansbach, Munich, and Berlin (2016).

*The subject* of this study is the way the political institutions manipulate the ethnic conflicts during the past 27 years. Political institutions are relatively durable and sustainable social groupings or structures operating under statutory or common rules and regulatory systems that are responsible for the political process (March and Olsen 2008: 3).<sup>4</sup> In a *narrow sense*, to them pertain the institutions forming the backbone of the state which are at the core of the political process and are empowered, whenever appropriate, to apply coercion – the parliament, the government, the judiciary bodies, the public administration, etc. In a *broad sense* to them must be added the political institutions-intermediaries<sup>5</sup> as well as the institutions that postulate the norms of social behavior such as the constitution and electoral law. In order to achieve optimal heuristic value *the analysis will be limited to the political parties, the parliament, the government, the judiciary, and the relevant legislative framework*. I will not dwell on the role of the presidential institution or the media. The impact of the tidal wave of migrants from failed states and the threats to national security posed by terrorism are also not going to be examined. Furthermore, I have purposefully not included a full-blown geopolitical analysis. This does not mean that, for example, the neo-Ottoman doctrine of the Turkish President Recep Erdogan and the hybrid propaganda, employed by the Kremlin and the traditionalist values defended by the Russian diplomacy, in the

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4 “An institution is a relatively enduring collection of rules and organized practices, embedded in structures of meaning and resources that are relatively invariant in the face of turnover of individuals and relatively resilient to the idiosyncratic preferences and expectations of individuals and changing external circumstances. They are constitutive rules and practices prescribing appropriate behavior for specific actors in specific situations” (March and Olsen 2008: 3). A comprehensive guide to the study of political institutions is *The Oxford Handbook of Political Institutions*, see Rhodes et al. (2008).

5 They provide a link between the citizens and the state. To them belong political parties, professional and other organizations, interest groups, the media, etc. See Karasimeonov (1997: 16).

concept of “Conservative Revolution” which seeks natural allies in the populist radical right (PRR) and left parties in the EU,<sup>6</sup> are not relevant to this study (Koritarov 2016, Minchev 2016, Vasilev 2016). However, in order to make my task more realistic and manageable, I decided not to incorporate at length these issues in the project.<sup>7</sup>

I have also resisted the temptation to draw parallels between the Bulgarian case and the ethnic issues on the Balkan Peninsula as a whole or, even still, between the ethnic conflicts in this country and those in polities across Europe. At first glance, the reasons for such comparisons are compelling. For example, not unlike the ethnic formations in Bulgaria, the ethnic parties in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM)<sup>8</sup> play a significant role in its political system.<sup>9</sup> To go even further, at present, journalists persistently bring forward the question of the rights of the “Bulgarian minority” in Albania; others, who discuss the dramatic events surrounding the Catalan independence referendum which took place on October 1, 2017, juxtapose the Revival Process in Bulgaria with the policies of “el Caudillo de la Última Cruzada y de la Hispanidad”<sup>10</sup> Francisco Franco (1892–1975) toward the Basques.<sup>11</sup> Although I am familiar with the ethnic relations in other Balkan countries, as well as the ethnopolitical issues in EU in general, I have to admit that I am by no means a pundit in all of them. The real danger

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- 6 As openly stated by the former director of the Russian Institute of Strategic Studies, Vladimir Reshetnikov, for example. The pillars of this doctrine are the conservative values of the Christian Orthodoxy, anti-globalism, and nationalism. This “traditionalist ideology” maintains a strong opposition to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and EU; see Vasilev (2016).
- 7 Naturally, whenever it was absolutely necessary, I provided and explored specific examples of the influence of Turkey, Russia, the EU, etc., on the ethnic relations and conflicts in Bulgaria.
- 8 The formations of ethnic Albanians, such as the Albanian Democratic Union for Integration, the Democratic Party of Albanians, the Besa Movement – Lëvizja Besa, etc.
- 9 According to the population census from 2002, approximately 64% are Macedonians, 25% Albanians, 3.8% Turks, 2.66% Romani, etc.
- 10 “The Leader of the Last Crusade and of the Hispanic heritage,” one of the many titles of Franco.
- 11 For this comparison, see Indzhov (2017). For a general introduction to the politics of ethnic identity in the Balkans see, e.g., Limenopoulou (2004).

here is that, at the end, I could inadvertently open a can of worms. It could be detrimental to the project if I embark on the perilous journey of drawing such parallels throughout the book. For these reasons, the only in-depth comparison that I explore in detail is between the Bulgarian ethnic models and the former Yugoslav federation.<sup>12</sup>

I do not believe that conflicts are necessarily something “evil,” or that they should be avoided at all costs. As it was famously pointed out by Ralf Dahrendorf, they may be beneficial to society (Dahrendorf 1959, 2007). The latter could not survive without both consensus and conflict.<sup>13</sup> In my view, however, conflicts become particularly dangerous and volatile whenever *they stem from politicized ethnic identity*<sup>14</sup> coupled with unsuccessful attempts at their institutionalization. My scientific curiosity has been provoked by such problematic cases and the consequences that they have for the Bulgarian political system and society. It is equally important to clarify (my take on) some other terms used in this study. Ethnic identity is the sense of belonging to a named human population with myths of common ancestry, shared historical memories, one or more elements of common culture, a link with a homeland, and a sense of solidarity (Hutchinson and Smith 1996: 4–6, Limenopoulou 2004: 2). A minority ethnic group is any ethnic group in a given society that forms an appreciable subsystem with limited access to roles and activities central to the economic and political institutions of the society (Shermerhorn 1996: 18). By “ethnic party,” I understand a political party, the majority of whose constituents belong to one or more ethnic minorities. An “ethnic entrepreneur” is a person (typically a politician) who voices and uses the interests, everyday challenges, and fears of a particular ethnic group (or groups) in order to mobilize political support for a certain cause.

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12 The other country to which I make a brief reference is the Republic of South Africa.

13 According to Dahrendorf, without conflict, there can be no consensus, and although consensus leads to conflict, conflict also leads to consensus. Of course, we should not forget that Dahrendorf’s main unit of analysis was the class, and not the ethnic group. See Dahrendorf (1959).

14 See Section 1.1.

*The structure* of the project corresponds to the facets of the subject. *The first part* necessarily begins with an adjustment of “the optics” through which the analysis will be performed. In a dynamic and interdisciplinary field, such as the study of ethnic conflicts, there is a lot of controversy regarding the notions and methods of investigation. There are, as well, disagreements on the use and content of the conceptual apparatus. The advantages of an institutional approach to conflicts, which I use in this work, are illustrated mainly through the means of the exploration of the tragic demise of the Yugoslav federation. The study of ethnic relations in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), the mistakes of the political elites in particular, is an invaluable lesson stimulating the better understanding of our own country. Using this study as a starting point of the analysis of the Bulgarian case, I then pinpoint the specifics of contemporary challenges in front of ethnic relations in Bulgaria. *The second part* examines the role of political parties both outside and inside the parliament. I trace the developments of the ethnic model in its interconnection with the first and the second party systems. I highlight the particularities in ideology, political support, and mobilization of the main ethno-political formation – the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF), as well as of the representatives of the PRR. Last but not least, I discuss various case studies on Roma, crime and politics. *The third part* of the book is devoted to the integration policies of Bulgarian governments after 1989, especially those that are targeted toward Roma. I assess the role of the judicial system and the antidiscrimination legislation.

There is a plethora of explanatory concepts about the nature and causes of ethnic conflicts. The “classic” schools of thought are the primordialist (Geertz 1973), the instrumentalist (A. Smith 1986), and the constructivist (Anderson 2006). Scholars of ethnic conflict and civil wars have introduced theories that draw insights from all of these schools. Significant approaches, some of which are influenced or related to the three fundamental paradigms, are the insti-

tutionalist (Lijphart 1968, 1977, McGarry and O’Leary 1993, Crawford and Lipschutz 1998, Hechter 2000, Osipov 2013),<sup>15</sup> the environmental (or economic, which can be derived from, for example, Marxism), the ethnocultural (MG Smith 1969), and the theory of modernization (Horowitz 1985, Altermatt 1998).<sup>16</sup> An “army” of scholars has examined ethnic relations in Bulgaria: political scientists, sociologists, social psychologists, historians, ethnographers, economists, philosophers, and others. Nonetheless, there is a relative lack of comprehensive studies dedicated *entirely to the role of political institutions* for deterrence and/or incitement of ethnic conflicts during the last 27 years. Instead, these issues are discussed in chapters or sections of monographs and compendiums (e.g., Kertikov et al. 1990, Makariev 1999, 2017, Hopken 2000, Dimitrov 2001, Dronzina 2004, Mizov 2008, Engström 2009, Karasimeonov 2010, Zlatanova 2013) and, above all articles that highlight specific aspects of the problem, for example, the link between political parties and ethnic conflicts (Smilov 2006, 2007, 2008, Kabakchieva 2008, Todorov 2012), the Bulgarian ethnic models (Arsenova and Kertikov 2002, 2003, Mitev 2005, Bosakov 2006, Pamporov 2008, Geiselmann and Karamelska 2010), the integration policies targeting minorities (Grekova 2008, Gulubov 2008, Ivanov 2008, Rechel 2008), etc. For example, although the important recent book by Plamen Makariev – *The Public Legitimacy of Minority Claims* – explores the Bulgarian case as well, its scope is much more ambitious and broader<sup>17</sup> than the purpose of mine. Makariev’s work is a study of public policies concerning the national minorities in Central and Eastern Europe. Furthermore, it analyses these policies through the means of political philosophy, in particular through the prism of “the Habermasian version of the theory of public deliberation and the model of deliberative democracy” (Makariev 2017: 9).

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15 Some of the key “branches” of the institutional approach are the consociationalism, federalism, and non-territorial autonomy.

16 As I mentioned above, this work is guided by an institutionalist understanding of conflicts. A detailed account of this approach is made in Chapter 1.

17 See Makariev (2017).