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# **CHANGING IMAGES OF THE LEFT IN BULGARIA**

The Challenge of Post-Communism  
in the Early 21st Century

*ibidem*-Verlag  
Stuttgart

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## Abbreviations of political parties and organizations

Abbreviation	Full name of the organization in the original language	Full name of the organization in English	Country of origin
BCP	Balgarska komunisticheska partija	Bulgarian Communist Party	Bulgaria
BSP	Balgarska socialisticheska partija	Bulgarian Socialist Party	Bulgaria
BZNS	Balgarski zemedelski naroden sajuz	Bulgarian Agrarian National Union	Bulgaria
DPS	Dvijenie za prava i svobodi	Movement for Rights and Freedoms	Bulgaria
FSN	Frontul Salvării Naționale	National Salvation Front	Romania
GERB	Grajdani za evropsko razvitie na Balgarija	Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria	Bulgaria
KSČ	Komunistická strana Československa	Communist Party of Czechoslovakia	Czechoslovakia
KSČM	Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy	Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia	Czech Republic
KSS	Komunistická strana Slovenska	Communist Party of Slovakia	Slovakia
MSzMP	Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt	Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party	Hungary
MSzP	Magyar Szocialista Párt	Hungarian Socialist Party	Hungary
OSD	Obedinenie za socialna demokracija	Union for Social Democracy	Bulgaria

PCR	Partidul Comunist Român	Romanian Com- munist Party	Romania
PD	Partidul Democrat	Democratic Party	Romania
PDS	Partei des demokra- tischen Sozialismus	Party of Democratic Socialism	German Democrat- ic Republic
PES	---	Party of the Euro- pean Socialists	European Union
PRM	Partidul România Mare	Greater Romania Party	Romania
PSD	Partidul Social De- mocrat	Social Democratic Party	Romania
PZPR	Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotniczej	Polish United Workers' Party	Poland
SDL'	Strana demokrati- ckej ľavice	Party of the Demo- cratic Left	Slovakia
SdRP	Socjaldemocracja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej	Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland	Poland
SDS	Sajuz na demokra- tichnite sili	Union of the Demo- cratic Forces	Bulgaria
SED	Sozialistische Ein- heitspartei Deutsch- lands	Socialist Unity Party of Germany	German De- mocratic Republic
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands	German Social Democratic Party	Germany
SPS	Socjalistička partija Srbije	Socialist Party of Serbia	Serbia
SSRNJ	Socjalistički savez radnog naroda Ju- goslavije	Socialist Alliance of Working People of Yugoslavia	Yugoslavia

## Other important abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full name
CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
Comecon	Council for Mutual Economic Assistance
CSP	Communist Successor Party
GDR	German Democratic Republic (East Germany)

## Preface

It is now 11 years since Bulgaria became a full NATO member, and 8 years since the country acceded to the European Union. Yet Bulgaria is still receiving relatively weak coverage in the annals of the European and global social sciences—a situation evident both from the limited number of special editions devoted to the country, and from the gaps in the literature to which scholars often explicitly refer. There are diverse reasons for this state of affairs. The socialist period of Bulgaria's history is not to be remembered for an impressive resistance against the regime or for strong expressions of discontent against the Soviet domination. Later, in the processes of transition to democracy in Central and Eastern Europe, Bulgaria did not come to present a success story or model for emulation. On the other hand, there was no dramatic failure, such as, say, a triumph of authoritarian trends, to be observed in the country, either. In the context of the Balkans, Bulgaria happily avoided the fate of neighbouring Yugoslavia and did not get tangled in the quagmire of civil wars. Markedly positive or resolutely negative cases usually tend to attract greater attention. Bulgaria's case did not fall in either of those categories. Nevertheless, unique historical experience could be found here. It is an experience which relates to the peculiarly intertwined roles of Europe and Russia in the national development as well as to the anti-fascist resistance and the social struggles of the contemporary world.

Those introductory remarks are needed as initial steps to motivate interest in one of the important manifestations of the Bulgarian political process for many decades: the functioning of the Bulgarian left. This interest can be positioned in a twofold context. The first aspect of this context is the background of the transition to post-socialist democracy and the specific role of the principal organizational agent of the Bulgarian left, the former Communist Party. In contrast with its counterparts in the other former Eastern Bloc countries, the party maintained its unity and influence in a pluralist political model from the very start of transitions, and remained the only one among them to maintain emotional closeness to Russia. The second aspect of the context is the perspective of the current situation, in which the Bulgarian left can become the object of interest given the serious crisis it is

now experiencing—an organizational, moral, political, and ideological crisis that has significantly affected its image.

The issue of the adaptation and transformation of the communist successor parties in CEE has received a significant place in the scholarly debate. A cursory glance on the amassed literature—which is impressive even in its sheer volume—already shows that what we have at hand is a number of different strategies and trajectories of development. We cannot construct some general scheme claiming to be valid for all former socialist countries, and then apply it to Bulgaria to fill it with the required factual content.

That is why two central questions are facing us here. First, which are the factors that can help explain the transformation of the Bulgarian Communist Party in the new democratic situation—factors which, in addition, have contributed to its success, at least in comparison with all other former Eastern Bloc counterparts? Second, which factors in the course of that transformation led to the crisis trends that found their most distinct expression in the early 2010s?

The context of the Eastern Bloc system, marked by its belonging to the Soviet sphere of influence, constitutes a starting point and basis of comparison. This is the necessary background against which the differences in the roads walked by leftist parties in different countries can be put into clear relief. From here the need follows to look for those differences not only in the general system features of the Bloc but also in the different historical legacies of each country. This, broadly put, is the subject of the first chapter of this study.

When tracing the place of the Bulgarian Socialist Party in the modern Bulgarian politics, I am interested above all in the connection between its messages and actions, on the one hand, and the expectations of certain parts of the Bulgarian society, on the other. In this way, the problem of the different images of the Bulgarian left comes to the foreground. It is on those images that I place the focus of my discussion, leaving a secondary role for issues such as organizational development, policies, leadership, and institutions. A look back into history reveals a string of metamorphoses and different political agents that can be viewed as comprising parts of the dynamics of the leftist spectrum in Bulgaria. Within those processes, there is a specific organized political actor of indubitable leading importance because already at its creation some 125 years ago it ambitiously defined the

potential and specific nature of the left in Bulgaria and delineated the space in which a political left must find its place. In the second chapter, I offer an attempt to briefly present the programme and ideological role of that party which for a long period of time ruled the country as a communist party.

In the public and political debate regarding the direction of democratic change after 1989, the Bulgarian left was naturally featured as a post-communist left, and it was this fact, with all of its advantages and disadvantages, that marked its search for a place in the newly forming political life of the country. Together with its post-communist status and its references to the past, the Socialist Party had to also delineate a forward-looking horizon for the left in that new situation. In the end of the day, the Bulgarian left accepted the interpretation that the transition has an essentially rightist liberal character, thus failing to find an adequate leftist image for its own actions and in many respects starting to drift away from the attitudes and expectations of its supporters. I present this divergence between leaders and electorate in the third chapter.

In the fourth chapter, which leads us into the present-day situation, I analyze the consequences of this evolution which have found an expression in a crisis of image and of identity, in new opportunities for alternative left-wing actors, including grassroots movements, and in the crossroad on which the traditional Bulgarian left is now finding itself. The widest and most obvious road is leading down. But are there really no other roads for the leading Bulgarian leftist party? And is this a road down not only for that party but also for the Bulgarian left as a whole? I am aware that I am not able to give categorical answers to those future-oriented questions. I have taken the risk of analyzing events that are literally happening as we speak. But I am convinced that without making sense of the past we can hardly orient ourselves in current processes and make a relatively accurate assessment of the options in this crossroad.

In this sense, this book is not a study of the history of one party but rather an interpretation of the historical processes connected with that party. In other words, my goal is to offer an interpretation of the leftist trend in the modern Bulgarian politics and its changing political and ideological coordinates. Today's situation is the result of the interaction of diverse historical factors. There is a constant change of variables stemming from the specifics of changing situations. Due to that fact, I am employing a number of

methods in this study. A large part of the processes that I am going to delineate can hardly receive an adequate quantification. That is why qualitative methods have pride of place in the discussion. At different points in the course of the study, I am employing historical reconstruction, analysis of documents, ideological critique, and secondary analysis of empirical data. I hope that this diversity does not sound confusing, and that it is presented in apt combinations. The goal I am setting for myself is not to prove but rather to show.

Several other preliminary points are in order. I am working with concepts such as 'communist successor parties', 'Eastern Bloc', and 'Central and Eastern Europe' for which I have endeavoured to specify the meanings I am employing. A somewhat graver issue is posed by concepts such as 'socialist' and 'communist' which are often used interchangeably in the literature. Insofar as societies built under the Soviet control in that part of the world called themselves 'socialist', and insofar as the dominant Marxist-Leninist doctrine viewed socialism as the first stage of the future, not yet achieved communist society, I believe that the concept of communism should not be used to denote the social and political situation in Bulgaria and its 'fraternal' countries in the period between the 1940s and 1980s. Due to this, I am talking about a socialist period and a socialist state but also about a communist regime, meaning a regime of the Communist Party. Analogously, after 1989, in my reading, CEE countries underwent a post-socialist transformation, while the transformation of the ruling parties was 'post-communist'.

As far as sources are concerned, I have attempted to use as far as possible international studies and English language research literature, in order to facilitate the reader in their possible search for references and additional information and analyses. Of course, where I have found it that studies in Bulgarian are of crucial significance for the interpretation of processes, I have made use of them, too. Guided by the same motives, I have limited as much as possible my use of mass media sources.

Finally, it is my pleasant obligation to extend by sincere gratitude as an author to a number of people who have significantly contributed to my work. Even one-man studies are born in an environment of discussion and exchange of opinions. I am indebted to all my colleagues in the Political Science Department at the St. Kliment Ohridski Sofia University for the creative working atmosphere I have been privileged to enjoy among them. I

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Of course, there are probably some errors in this book. There might be some unjustified digressions, arguments showing some degree of partiality, or imprecise formulations. The liability for them remains entirely mine.