Bulgaria: the State of Chaos*

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ABSTRACT:

The argument of this article is that the post-communist transition in Bulgaria is in fact an institutionalization of the practices of disorder. As a result, there develops a distinct differentiation between the political elite and its electorate. The divergence is one of values. The bottom line is the different normative base for evaluating the processes enfolding in Bulgaria: (a) the EU and NATO accession-priorities and macro-economic stability for the elites; and (b) the rising insecurity and decline in economic wellbeing for the majority of citizens. This article makes the point that the situation is further compounded by the current government’s (i) public attitude of disregarding the laws of the state, “because they are bound to change” and (ii) its abstract reference to the notion of “professionalism” when explaining its decision-making, thus, hinting at a belief of its own infallibility. As a result, more often than not, the current political class is ruling by enforcement of its policies, rather than consent. Said otherwise, the Euro-Atlantic values of accession are brought into question because Bulgarians perceive them not as their own, but as represented and upheld by corrupt politicians.

Introduction

The change of the Zhivkov regime in 1989, which set Bulgaria on its "post-communist" transition, stopped short of bringing about new political and economic relations to the country, and instead ushered their simulation under the watchful eye of the Communist Party. The November 10, 1989 transformation was in effect an internal party coup supported by the Gorbachov-led Moscow

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government and not the result of a popular movement for reform. Thus, within the context of the literature on democratic transitions, the ancien regime remained largely consolidated through the breakdown phase and emerged very much unscathed and structurally intact.¹ These developments set up the background for a rather unpredictable transformation process, one, which was initiated from “above” and did not reflect a significant social anxiety with the status-quo.

Henceforth, it is the argument of this article, chaos has been the underlying feature of the Bulgarian transition. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, it represents a “behavior so unpredictable as to appear random”. Thus, this study does not attempt to prove the existence of chaos in the country (since it has been the "order" of Bulgarian transition), but rather evaluates how far into randomness the transition process has traveled. Within such context, the Bulgarian chaos points to the practices of ruling elites to bend the rules of state in favor of particular policies and interests. Therefore, the post-communist institutional development in Bulgaria can be said to reflect tactical decision-making aimed at maximizing the gains of power and not a strategic vision/direction of state-building. It is this development that introduced the logic of chaos in the country, which increasingly emphasized itself as shorthand for the widening cleavage between, on the one hand, politico-economic and administrative elites and the society at large, on the other. The premise of this article is that the practices of governance in Bulgaria can be generalized (for the purposes of clarity) in three periods: (1) 1990-1997: simulation of reform; (2) 1997-2001: attempts at reform; and (3) 2001-present: reign of chaos. Since, the first two periods have been discussed in democratization and transition literature, it is the third one that is at the center of this study.

The suggestion is that the post-communist transition is in fact an institutionalization of the practices of disorder. As a result, there develops a distinct differentiation between the political elite and its electorate. The divergence is not so much one of lifestyle and material well-being (though it also plays an important part in the equation), but one of values. The bottom line is the different normative base for evaluating the processes enfoldling in Bulgaria: (a) the EU and NATO accession-priorities and macro-economic stability for the *elites*; and (b) the rising insecurity and decline in economic well-being for the *populace*. The implication is that such divergence of perception could affect significantly the country’s attempts at closer integration with Euro-Atlantic structures. It is not the purpose of this article to argue that such division is a recent phenomenon. On the contrary, the above-mentioned periodisation of Bulgarian governmentality makes it explicit that it has been preconditioned by the lack of challenge to the pre-1989 value-orientations of Bulgarians. This article is focused on the third period and makes the point that the situation is further compounded by the current government’s (i) public attitude of disregarding the laws of the state, “because they are bound to change” and (ii) its abstract reference to notions such as “professionalism” and “morality” when explaining its decision-making, thus, hinting at a belief of its own infallibility.
Moreover, the implications of the current political regime are deeper since it governs virtually unopposed by a major center of resistance – a situation which is completely new to the post-1989 Bulgarian politics. The rule of Prime Minister Saxcoburggotsky is most conspicuous for the absence of any plausible rivals. The lack of discernible alternatives and any significant political competition in the country has institutionalized a distinct form of apathy in society: (i) one in which representatives from all spectrums of the political elite are perceived as “the same” – i.e. corrupt; and (ii) it is also characterized by a lack of reciprocity between the government and the people – the government is accountable to the people only in a notional and very abstract (if not populist) sense, while the people do not feel responsible for the governments’ actions (i.e. there is a clear distinction between “us” and “them”). As a result, more often than not, the current political class is ruling by enforcement of its policies, something that has further exacerbated the normative realities of the Bulgarian ruling elites and “the people”. In this context, the Euro-Atlantic values of accession are more likely to be brought into question because Bulgarians perceive them not as their own, but as represented and upheld by corrupt politicians.2

Theorizing the State:

"No," said one of the gentlemen, "what we want to know is whether you love the King of the Bulgars or not."
"Not in the least,' he said, 'for I have never met him.'
"What! He is the most charming of kings and we must drink to his health."
"Oh, very willingly gentlemen," and he drank.
"That will do nicely," he was told. "That makes you a supporter, a defender, a champion, nay a hero of the Bulgars. Your fortune is made and your glory assured."
His feet were promptly clapped in irons and he was taken off to the regiment.

Voltaire,  
*Candide* (1759)

The above quote from Voltaire is a very useful introduction to the arbitrariness of Bulgarian post-communist developments and especially their more recent dimensions. If *Candide* is taken as a metaphor for the Bulgarian electorate at the last parliamentary elections (June 17, 2001), voters were literally asked whether they love their exiled by the communists child-king, whom they "have never met" before. Because they did not know him, he was presented to them in three ways: (i) his family history was revived - mainly the memory of his popular father, Tsar Boris III; (ii), his exiled pauper-made-rich-man fairy-tale life; and (iii) the image that he promoted of himself on the several appearances in
Bulgarian media since 1996 – as an erudite person. In a way, mesmerized by this image "of a supra-political figure who integrates both European and Bulgarian identities in his personality," the Bulgarians found themselves voting overwhelmingly for this dark horse on the Bulgarian political horizon. However, soon after the election results, very much like Candide, their hopes were clapped and shackled to a paternalistic regime, whose leadership and objectives are at best dubious if not patchy. Simeon Saxcoburggotsky came up with no concrete political agenda, but with general promises to combat corruption and increase the welfare of the poor in 800 days; he also promised foreign investment and – implicitly, owing to his royal connections in Europe – stronger recognition of Bulgaria internationally. Some interpret the landslide victory of Saxcoburggotsky's National Movement for Simeon II (NDSV) as a radical change in the political scene as well as in the civic culture; for others it is just the opposite – a reactionary backlash against everything that the difficult transition has managed (or failed) to achieve ever since its inception at the end of 1989.

Nonetheless, both positions overlook the failure of the transition period so far, to (i) socialize the everyday reality of Bulgarians to the importance of the Euro-Atlantic values aspired by the elites; and, thence (ii) legitimize the country’s accession by enabling the people to take responsibility for this process through voting. Instead, the electorate chose an "external, quick-fix solution" grounding their decision on the "irrationality generated by the years of pseudo-legitimate reforms and blatantly criminal attempts for social reform of the totalitarian system." Said otherwise, Saxcoburggotsky’s election victory indicates the gulf between the political elite and the electorate and their different perceptions of Bulgaria’s transition. It made conspicuous the inability of the post-communist developments to establish a consistent identity both for the Bulgarian state and its citizens, coherent with the Euro-Atlantic objectives of democratization.

The paradox of Bulgarian transition is that on the one hand it succeeded to introduce a relatively stable (especially by Southeast European standards) political process, which, on the other, was not matched by commitment to economic reform. In other words, Bulgaria established “robust” democratic institutions, but its economy remained weak. Thus, from the very beginning of the post-1989 developments, the political process was mainly the domain of ruling groups, whose decisions shaped the direction of domestic and foreign policy. This, however, should not be understood as an imposition of rule. The frequent change of governments (as illustrated by Table 1) hints at the impossibility of such suggestion (but, on the other hand, indicates a constant shift in decision-making rationale).
Table 1: List of Bulgarian Prime Ministers since November 10, 1989.8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Georgi Atanasov</td>
<td>1989-90</td>
<td>BSP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Andrei Lukanov</td>
<td>1990-91</td>
<td>BSP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Dimitar Popov</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Filip Dimitrov</td>
<td>1991-92</td>
<td>UDF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Lyuben Berov</td>
<td>1992-94</td>
<td>BSP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Reneta Indzhova</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Zhan Videnov</td>
<td>1994-97</td>
<td>BSP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Stefan Sofianski</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Ivan Kostov</td>
<td>1997-2001</td>
<td>UDF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Simeon Saxcoburggotsky</td>
<td>2001-present</td>
<td>NDSV</td>
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The pattern of power up to 1997 was marked by governments that came, tried their policies and were ousted by the corrective of popular unrest or change-of-allegiance of coalition partners. The former has been misinterpreted as the emergence of a strong civil society-sector. In effect, the explosion of non-governmental organizations in the early 1990s was a form of “continuation of politics by other means.” A number of NGOs were (and still are) run and staffed by an “important number of pragmatic, well-educated, liberal politicians.” The outcome from all these developments is that from 1990 to 1997 there is virtually no attempt to initiate a comprehensive reform in Bulgaria that would involve restructuring the redundant economy of the country; hence, the deteriorating economic situation culminating with the 1000% inflation in January of 1997. Paradoxically, though the economic decline did not translate into political repression or a limitation of civil liberties.

Because of the delayed start of the reform process in Bulgaria and the country’s belated orientation towards the Euro-Atlantic structures (both of which can be said to begin with the 1997 government of the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF)) the “socialist way of life” for the majority of Bulgarians remained unchanged and unchallenged and they were satisfied to receive their small but guaranteed salaries. Thus, when the government of Prime Minister Kostov initiated its economic restructuring and privatization program, the values of reform came in sharp contrast with the socialist way of life of the Bulgarian electorate. Therefore, the first genuine attempts to alter the economic environment in the country were reflected by the overwhelmingly no-vote of the electorate. In the current, 39th National Assembly, UDF has a mere 51 seats, the previously non-existent NDSV – 120, the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF) – 21 (and two ministers in the cabinet), and the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) – 48 (initially two and currently only one minister in cabinet). Thus, UDF despite having “saved Bulgaria from economic disaster,” fell victim to its own inability to tackle the mentality of the socialist way of life (even in its own ranks). The blow was made even bitterer when the UDF-backed, incumbent president Stoyanov, lost the November 2001 election to the BSP candidate,
However, such overwhelming rejection of the direction adopted by Kostov's government can be somewhat construed by the lack of internalization of the values of the Euro-Atlantic-driven reform. Rather the values of socialist society are still rather strong and virtually unchallenged. For instance, only 19% of Bulgarians are satisfied with their incomes, but 55% are contented with their jobs, indicating that people are happy to have a job as an indicator of some security, not as a source of material benefits.

The irrationality that such erratic voting patterns indicate, underlines the failure of the transition process to produce an expected consistency in its direction. This came as a result of the lack of socialization transference of the Euro-Atlantic values beyond the coteries of politicians. That is how these values still remain abstract concepts rather than tangible points of reference for Bulgarian citizens. Therefore, as Albena Azmanova (2002) mentions when analyzing the Regular Report of the European Commission, Bulgaria is a country “with stable democratic institutions, a market economy (in the offing) and a legal framework increasingly in line with EU law – but which do not perform in practice.” The inefficiency of the system of governance refers to the inability of the post-communist developments to promote a framework of order that would entail a radical re-evaluation and reform of the pre-1989 legacy. Instead, they institutionalized the separation between political elites and citizens, establishing the electoral ballot-box as their only point of contact, but also departure.

The question of order is a central concern to theories and practices of statehood. Order can be broadly defined as a framework of predictability. Predictability (in the sense of self-sustaining continuity) is rationalized as a mechanism for maintaining a structure of power; and power stands for the exchange between different forms and sources of authority. In this way, a political order gives meaning to and makes sense of the relations and interactions in a society. Thus, it indicates the “norms, rules and laws” of a state and the institutions that make, interpret, and enforce them. The stability of order suggests its ability “to contain and overcome disturbances to order.” This is where the importance of the normative culture among domestic actors, becomes so significant: because it constitutes a base that buttresses individual confidence in the potentiality of the mutual control over the system's checks and balances. Thus, the legitimacy of domestic order derives from the ability of government to demonstrate and effect acceptable to the majority of citizens moral, economic and political principles. In other words, it can be interpreted as (i) the level of committed acquiescence by the ruling elite to the responsibility and maintenance of the “flourishing” of the community of citizens and (ii) rule them through consent rather than enforcement of official policies (i.e. practicing the sovereign authority of governance). Therefore, responsibility for policy-actions (in terms of accountability of governance) spans beyond mere rhetorical practice.

The inter- and intra-institutional relations in Bulgaria have never been “just what the doctor ordered.” However, they have predominantly stayed within the framework of legality and differentiation of powers prescribed by the existing laws of the country. According to Sabrina Ramet (2002: 377-8) the basis of
legitimate government is not merely the holding of elections or measuring the economic performance, but “that the government should follow its own laws, which in turn must be published and available for inspection by members of the public.” In other words, the praxis of order involves a process of conscious coordination among the participants and the advocacy of legitimate means for the regulation between their interests. Both, however, have been in very short supply in the current government of Bulgaria. Therefore, departing from different contexts – Euro-Atlantic recognition (for the ruling elite) and individual insecurity and dissatisfaction (for the citizens) – "the government" and "the people" seem to have arrived at contrasting interpretation and understanding of their environment.

Said otherwise, the current stalling or malfunctioning of the Bulgarian democratization process is due to the illegitimate practices of current political and administrative elites, which aggravated the dearth of reforms in Bulgaria. Hence, the order of disorder, which began to establish itself after 1989, is currently entrenched as the uncertainty and indeterminacy of the political process characterizing the chaotic nature of the Bulgarian transition.

The State of the State:

A recent study by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press (PRCPP) reveals a dismal picture of Bulgarian society. According to the poll What the World Thinks in 2002, 53% of Bulgarians are dissatisfied with the way things are currently going on in their country (PRCPP 2002: 39). More strikingly, when asked about their conditions today, 91% respond that their situation is bad and 72% expect their situation to get even worse in the future rather than improve (PRCPP 2002: 29-30). Although this pessimism is characteristic of other transition countries it is in stark contrast with the up-beat statements of the Prime Minister, who announced after his return from the Copenhagen European Council: "I hope that the people can see how we are succeeding to accomplish our aims one after the other."21 It is noteworthy that only 4% of Bulgarians declare that they are satisfied with the current state of affairs (putting the country on the same level as respondents in Argentina and Turkey). In fact, Bulgaria’s is the lowest satisfaction level registered from all Central and East European countries included in the poll (PRCPP 2002: 27). The situation is further compounded by the 46% of Bulgarians, who answered that they were unable to afford enough food during the year, about the 50% unable to pay for health care and about 68% who have foregone buying clothes (PRCPP 2002: 25-6). The fact of these high-deprivation levels indicates the deep division between the realities of the Bulgarian political elite and the overwhelming majority of Bulgarian citizens. The latter seem no longer to be concerned with the lofty (Euro-Atlantic) ideals, but focus on the essentials of their survival. Thus, it is not surprising that 55% of Bulgarians indicate that their lives have gotten worse in the last five years, putting into question all the “achievements” of the transition process (PRCPP 2002: 21). Moreover, out of the 44 countries included in the research,
Bulgarians give their quality of life the lowest percentage: 45% put their lives on a scale of 0 to 3 out of 10 (PRCPP 2002: 10).

Such high dissatisfaction figures contradict the very motto of the government’s ruling platform “The People are the Real Wealth of Bulgaria” according to which a key priority is the ”generation of conditions for rapid economic growth leading to job creation and higher income levels”. It seems that (i) the people do not feel wealthier after nearly 800 days of rule by the current government and (ii) the conditions – i.e. confidence in the direction of governance – are lacking. In this context the words of the Prime Minister during his Christmas address to the nation indicate the contrasting points of view:

It is beyond doubt [that 2002] would remain in our history as the year of the highest international recognition – Bulgaria received an invitation for NATO membership and date for its accession into the EU… There is no room left for pessimism. We need more realism. The difficulties we experience are inevitable but short-term. Unlike ever before we have a clear perspective.

Apparently, such visible divergence of opinion between “the government” and “the people” suggests a marked separation of the ruling elite from the electorate. The Prime Minister (implicitly) indicated this on a recent visit to Italy, when he mentioned that he was feeling lonely in the country; in which some analysts saw an ironical sign that Saxcoburggotsky like the majority of his citizens feels dissatisfied with his life in Bulgaria. The striking thing about the current government is that indecisiveness and uncertainty have become the trademarks of its policy-making, which has found its way into public opinion. Asked at the end of 2001, whether the year 2002 would be better or worse for them 71% of Bulgarians responded that they do not know (European Commission 2002: 22), while in July of the same year 65% replied that the new government is going to ensure their economic prosperity (Koinova 2001: 139).

The State of Chaos:

The Rule of Silence

Ever since his election campaign began in early 2001 Simeon Saxcoburggotsky has relied on last-minute decisions to declare his position and, thence keep everybody in check and waiting for his move. Many will remember the brilliantly orchestrated and hyped-up media campaign whether the king is going to take part in the elections or not; the last minute registration of his “movement,” after its registration papers were declared incomplete by the election board (as it would appear later, done on purpose, so that Saxcoburggotsky could benefit from the empathy of ”the people”); his belated support for the outgoing president Petar Stoyanov (two days before the first election round), thus effectively turning the presidential campaign into a debate whether Saxcoburggotsky is (i) going to support any of the candidates, (ii) offer
his own, or (iii) stand himself for a president (which was followed by his bizarre announcement, at least in a democratic polity as the one that Bulgaria aspires to be, that he could not afford to cast his ballot in the second round). All these moves were underlined by Saxcoburggotsky’s remark on the eve of his Movement’s victory that “a man is a master of his silence and a slave of his words”, which entrenched a culture of hearsay and half-truths since there was a dearth of official statements. Recently, he explained further his dislike of public statements by declaring that “I am well informed, because I keep quiet!”

This policy of silence on behalf of the Prime Minister was most pronounced during the debate on whether his movement is going to be registered as a party and whether he would become its leader. It seemed that the crucible was going to be solved on the very day the Movement had convened in the biggest conference-hall in Bulgaria to declare itself a party. As the leader of NDSV’s parliamentary group, Plamen Panayotov, had made it clear prior to the congress: "Ours is going to be a party of an electoral type" and the Prime Minister is going to be its chairman. However, the joyous delegates who had arrived from the four corners of the country to witness the foundation of the new party were stunned when Saxcoburggotsky declared that "our aim today is to find the legal mechanisms, which would guarantee the democratic nature of the Movement." In other words, the new party was not to be (at least not in the format that was envisaged at the time) and more surprisingly, regardless of the fact that the party/movement was named after him, Saxcoburggotsky was not going to be its leader. Nevertheless, a month later, in the beginning of April, NDSV became a party and astonishingly the Prime Minister accepted to become its chairman. Asked what made him alter so radically his position from a month earlier, Saxcoburggotsky responded: "I have often said and I am going to repeat it again: I consider myself a pragmatic person. I don't dream, nor attach myself to issues, which are fixed from the start. [I took this decision] Because I think that the wish of this sector as well as the audience should be respected". However, a concern for the "audience" (as he refers to "the people") should be not the fact that Saxcoburggotsky from the leader of a national movement became the chairman of a political formation; nor even his apparent change of heart. There are at least two other reasons for anxiety.

The first one is the reference to the people as "the audience." What this indicates is not the attitude of the Prime Minister, but rather his inability to express himself in the vocabulary of Bulgarian language. Ever since his first appearance on Bulgarian media in mid-1990s, Saxcoburggotsky has been known for his elaborate expressions and archaisms. At the time, was perceived as a striking purity of his language (in sharp contrast with the vulgarity of their reality) which mesmerized Bulgarians. However, since becoming a Prime Minister the magic and lucidity of his expression has been completely lost. Thus, when Saxcoburggotsky refers to Bulgarians as "the audience", he implies the Western notion of "public" (as in "public opinion"). However, when literally used in Bulgarian it means "audience" and that is how "the people" perceive themselves through the discourse of the Prime Minister. In other words,
Saxcoburggotsky is thinking and articulating himself in terms of *Western* concepts, while the Bulgarian public is formulating their perceptions in terms of their daily experiences. Therefore, the subsequent (i) inability of the Prime Minister and his government of "yuppies" (as they are referred to, because a number of them were educated and worked abroad, mostly in the UK) to translate the Euro-Atlantic perspective to the language of Bulgarian reality; as well as (ii) their failure to comprehend the source for the misgivings that Bulgarians seem to have.

The other reason for concern from this second inauguration of NDSV as a party is that in the (s)elected Political Council (since it was Saxcoburggotsky who appointed the members of the ruling body of *his* party) there are seven government ministers (thus, making it reminiscent of the Politburo of the Communist party). This, in effect, suggests the convergence of state and party - something, which had not occurred in such explicit form in the post-1989 Bulgarian politics. According to Saxcoburggotsky, such format of the party leadership "does not create a new political class", but assists NDSV in "convincing and rallying those who are suspicious, those who think that nothing can change for the better, and those who are disillusioned."  

*The Rule of the "New Morality"

The quasi-authoritarian nature of the organization (and its leader) were rumored ever since the emergence of the Movement in 2001; and became quite obvious in early March 2002, when a group of 10 MPs from NDSV wrote an open letter urging some members of the cabinet to be sacked and the adoption of an emergency program of stability measures. The Prime Minister's response was to call the MPs individually to his office and ask them to resign from the National Assembly. Obviously to his surprise, the MPs refused, since although nominally he was their leader, they were not appointed by Saxcoburggotsky to the Assembly, but rather by their constituents. Thus, they left the parliamentary group of NDSV, but remained in parliament as independent MPs.

Such examples of the Prime Minister's attitudes contradict the practices of democratic republican governance, where he and his government are supposed to offer their positions for debate rather than declare their views and enforce their policies regardless of the means. So far, his government has a significant track record of trying to forestall the laws of the Bulgarian state. In a sense, this has brought into question the very existence of the legal structure of the country since it is perceived by the executive as imperfect (because it impedes their policies) and also, because law, itself, becomes an instrument in the hands of the ruling elites.

The first major scandal of the new government came about on March 21, 2002 when one of the main Bulgarian newspapers *Trud*, published the minutes from a closed session of the Council of Ministers of October 25, 2001. According to the published text, the main topic of debate was how to drive through a contract with a British-registered private company regardless of the Law on the
Public Orders. The Finance Minister, Milen Velchev suggested that “Crown Agents” be hired to consult and implement the government strategy for improving Bulgaria’s customs administration. The main argument of Minister Velchev for obviating the Law on Public Orders was that if the government adheres to it, this is going to “delay the process for at least three months.” In other words, the legitimate procedure would “slow down” the government strategy to deal with the corruption, tax evasion and other crimes related with customs administration. That is why it is intent on making a quasi-legal (at best) move to achieve its goals, while in the meantime “we are going to suggest a bill amending the current law.” At the Prime Minister’s suggestion, the contract is put under a “special procedure” dealing with matters of “national interest”. Thus, as the Minister of Labor and Social Policy declared at that meeting, “it is a political decision to connect this [the contract with “Crown Agents”] with the national security.” However, if one looks at the procedure, which the Finance Minister finds cumbersome, it entails the opening of a competition for a public order, appointing a commission (i.e. the Agency of Privatization) to review the offers, select the best applicants and finally assign one of them the contract.

The normal question would be what is the problem with such a procedure (which seems to be the practice in other countries)? Apparently, time is not the issue here, as the Finance Minister would have it. It is the argument of this study that the reason is also not the suggested under-the-table deals for personal enrichment by certain members of the government. As it would become apparent from its subsequent decisions, the current government is not keen on letting other institutions or bodies have control over and monitor its policy-making. Obviously, the procedure envisioned under the Law on the Public Orders divests too many powers away from the government and puts them in the hands of the reviewing commission. As one analysis in the financial newspaper Banker indicates, owing to the contract with “Crown Agents”, Bulgaria was deprived of € 7,000,000 of PHARE assistance money because of duplication of finance. However, a bigger blow to the country was dealt by (i) the apparent disregard for the current Bulgarian laws (because they are subject to change, thence they should not be abided by in their current form); and (ii) the institutional conflict with the judiciary, which this attitude triggered.

The “new morality” which the ruling elite proffered found itself more often than not challenged and “hampered” by the Bulgarian laws. Saxcoburggotsky has long declared his dissatisfaction with the current Constitution of the country. Shortly after its adoption in 1991 he declared:

I have no degree in constitutional law, so I make no pronouncement, but the Turnovo Constitution is more liberal than this first attempt to become a state of law. Constitutions in any democracy may be amended, so this is the line along which legislators should proceed. As far as political parties are concerned, the King in a constitutional monarchy can be of exceptional assistance to guarantee and foster political life as a moderator… Particularly in such a transitional period as this, I feel
that no other democratic system can replace the advantages of monarchy, its alternatives and its elasticity. Theory aside, in my own case I have had Western upbringing… I have the advantage of being related to all the European royal families, and with these connections monarchy in Bulgaria stands an even better chance. National unity, reconciliation, and a new sense of dignity are obvious elements in a constitutional kingdom… I shall not reiterate the advantages of monarchy, which coincide with what I can achieve, provided my people give me a chance.39

Statements like this, made by Saxcoburggotsky in the early 1990s indicate a deep conviction that the current laws of Bulgaria are merely attempts at creating a state of law, i.e. not something to be abided by, because they do not have the elasticity of monarchical rule. Therefore, they should be amended to provide the ruling class with more alternatives to guarantee their rule. In many respects the current actions (or inactions) of the Prime Minister do not differ from his statement of a decade earlier. His discourse has hardly changed, since he is still speaking in terms of the same abstract concepts, and in his stance one can read the attitude of a monarch moderating among different positions, by declaring his own (in the last-minute), which is usually middle-of-the-road and non-committal, or in his own words a no-pronouncement. Moreover, Saxcoburggotsky's perception of his people as passive recipients of his achievements underlies a belief that decision-making is the prerogative of a selected elite (i.e. the King, the politicians and their officials) rather than a common activity, to which citizens should (at least in theory) have access as well.

The Rule of Enforcement

As it very often turns out it is at the implementation stage that the real values of governance become apparent. Asked by a Hungarian journalist how far Saxcoburggotsky is into his 800-day reform program, he answered that "the cabinet has achieved to enforce a new approach and a new style of governance in Bulgaria. This approach is characterized by a social dialogue, tolerance in the interaction between political formations and respect for professionalism."40 However, such values in the abstract are less compelling than the most significant trials for the enforcement of this new approach: the privatization attempts of the emblematic, state-owned tobacco giant “Bulgartabak” and the Bulgarian Telecommunications Company (BTK). As it happened both deals were at the bottom of an institutional war between the government and all the branches of the judiciary. The deals faced challenges by the Supreme Cassation Prosecution Office and the Supreme Administrative Court (plus there were threats to refer them to the Constitutional Court). Again the problem was the procedure under which the respective buyers of both state-owned companies were selected.
However, after some rumination (and seeing that it is not going to get its way) the government decided to introduce changes in the Privatization and Post-Privatization Control Act (PPPCA). The gist of the changes is that the government declares the privatization of fifteen state-owned businesses, among which “Bulgartabak” and BTK, as matters of “national security”. Thus, the Agency for Privatization is going to offer the companies for sale, but the government decides who is going to be the ultimate buyer and the National Assembly (controlled by NDSV and, its coalition partner, MRF) has to approve it. Said otherwise, through this new procedure, the government effectively annuls the control of the judiciary over the legality of the procedure and achieves freedom to enforce its decisions virtually unchecked. Clearly such step is motivated not only by the desire to complete these two deals, but also by the need for liquid money in the budget for 2003. Instead it enshrines the right of ruling elites over the judicial process and, thence, undermining its authority. The further political and economic implications of these amendments are to further muddle the effectiveness of the PPCPA by “making its application somewhat contradictory in practice.” If anything, the years of transition have made apparent that (i) the governmental enforcement of policies cannot make people work, invest or invent; and (ii) the constant amendment of fundamental laws for the reform process instead of creating well-structured incentives, befuddles their objectives and makes impossible their achievements (for instance, the Transformation and Privatization of State-Owned and Municipal Enterprises Act has been altered about 30 times since its adoption a decade ago, which made it virtually inapplicable). The underlying arrogance of the amendments to the PPCPA indicates the use of democratic legitimization (i.e. the results from the elections) to monopolize power; as is suggested by the statement of an MP from the MRF who in response to a question whether he is going to support the amendments, declared: “Well, of course. We are the ruling majority” the implication being that we can do whatever we want.

Such attitude implies in itself the inherent distinction between the political class — ”we”, ”the majority” — and the rest of ”the people” who are referred to as ”the audience” or ”the electorate”. Asked recently, whether Bulgaria is going to commit troops to a possible military campaign in Iraq, Saxcoburggotsky answered: ”Participation - the issues are well-known already. I would say, that they have become tedious to the audience to listen to them”. However, despite the ”audience's” knowledge of the issues there was no knowledge on the government's own position of the role Bulgaria is going to play in different possible scenarios. In an earlier statement, the Prime Minister made the enigmatic statement that ”we are for peace”; while the Foreign Minister, Solomon Passi and the Bulgarian Representative at the UN Security Council, Tafrov (together with Spain) declared their support for a possible US war-effort in Iraq. Asked whether this is true, the Prime Minister responded that he had just been on the phone with Mr. Tafrov and there is ”nothing like this”. In the mean time, the Defense Minister, Nikolay Svinarov declared that Bulgaria is not going to send ”volunteers” to Iraq, which was followed by a statement of the General
Chief of Staff, Kolev that there are 150 personnel training for a possible deployment in Iraq.\textsuperscript{47} The confusion caused by these conflicting statements was finally solved by the government's spokesperson, who announced that the cabinet is going to take a decision on Iraq "only when the issues are ripe enough from a diplomatic point of view\textsuperscript{48} - in other words, wait and see. Apparently, such divergence of opinion on behalf of key government figures speaks not only for a lack of coordination, but also suggests (i) a failure to project a strategic vision on behalf of the government and (ii) unwillingness to consult "the audience" on the issue. Instead, the ruling elite is going to take a decision and declare it, when the time is ripe. It is such approach to policy-making that drives the current "political class" and "the people" away from each other.

\textit{The Rule of Infallibility}

The underlying logic of NDSV's "we-ness" is the outlining of a distinct moral field, within which the values of appropriateness are reserved only for its own members. In other words, within its moral sphere the participants are expected to act towards each other with reference to a common set of shared ideas by which behavior is structured and evaluated. In contrast, behavior outside the moral field can be said to be \textit{amoral} in that it is principally idiosyncratic and as such may be purely instrumental or exploitative without being subject to sanctions. Thus, for the individual those belonging to other moral fields can be said to form part of his or her \textit{amoral} sphere.\textsuperscript{49}

Therefore it is quite agreeable for the ruling elite to adopt a position of being the right ones, while divesting the blame onto their opponents and relieving themselves from the responsibility of the wrongdoing. The most telling recent example was the voting on the amendments of the above-mention Privatization and Post-Privatization Control Act. The result of the vote was 113 votes "for", 97 "against" and 8 "abstentions". However, some MPs from the UDF noted that nine of the deputies, who voted "for" the bill from NDSV, were actually absent during the voting and motioned for a revote. It has long been a common practice in the National Assembly that MPs "cover-up" each other and use their colleagues' cards and vote for them. Thus, sometimes an MP votes with two or more cards, which has been institutionalized in parliamentary jargon as "piano playing" (from MPs having to stretch their arms to neighboring chairs).\textsuperscript{50} However, within the discourse of the "new morality" proffered by NDSV, the Speaker of the National Assembly, Ognian Gerdzhikov, declared that he is going to end the practice or resign. Making a statement after he "caught" one MP voting with more than one card he announced that "such episodical occurrences would remain a thing of the past. I promise this! And if I cannot do this than I am good for nothing!"\textsuperscript{51} In spite of his proclamations and attempts apparently not much has been achieved. Confronted with the request for a revote, Gerdzhikov pointed out that the MPs from UDF are not the ones who can speak for morality, since they regularly vote
with more than one card. Asked whether he is going to resign then, the Speaker responded: "I made Sisyphean efforts to stop this, but I cannot be a police officer and look every MP in their hands."52

Said otherwise, the “new morality” of NDSV is a rule without responsibility: accountability is not to be reflected outside the acts of rhetorical action. Not surprisingly then, the majority of Bulgarians perceive an erosion of the moral values of society. 39% point out moral decline as a top national problem, while 60% say it is the corrupt politicians that are the problem (PRCPP 2002: 32). Such responses indicate the gulf between the ruling and those who in effect perceive themselves as ruled, rather than participants in an open democratic process. The gap between the realities of these two groups was reflected by the Prime Minister during the launching of his initiative “I do not corrupt,” when he stated that “it is not enough for politicians to have an acute sense of morality; but it is equally important that every citizen stops tolerating corruption and rejects it outright.”53 The unease in this instance is caused not by Saxcoburgotsky’s idea, but by two of its premises: (1) that the citizens do not have an acute sense of morality (i.e. that they are amoral); (2) that the citizens are in a position where they have a choice to reject corruption. The latter indicates the profound inability to understand that Bulgarians have either to pay the required under-the-table money for a certain service (like health care, for instance) or they do not receive this service altogether. Already, the PRCPP research quoted above indicates a substantial number of citizens who “reject” the practices of corruption under the force of circumstances (i.e. their own economic inability to procure the required payment). Such initiatives of the government indicate a profound misunderstanding of (i) the mechanics of corruption (hence, strategies for dealing with it); and (ii) the reasons for the discontent and dissatisfaction that Bulgarians feel.

According to the Prime Minister, the reason for such divergence of perceptions can be found in the media: "Alas, our press is always critical and persuades the people that everything is bad", he exclaimed while on a visit to Italy.54 The achievements that Saxcoburgotsky wants emphasized he stated during his opening speech of the current session of the National Assembly: "[During 2002] we stimulated the enterprise and the initiative of Bulgarians and the results are already obvious... The coordinated efforts between the judiciary and the executive branches have led to a marked decrease in criminality and significant achievements in curbing corruption.”55

However, a number of indicators depict a slightly different picture from the one presented by the Prime Minister. For instance, the foreign direct investment for the third quarter of 2002 was only $ 70.000.000, “registering the lowest registered quarterly levels in the last 4 years,” while the overall volume of foreign investments for 2002 is only 63.5% of its 2001 value.56 In effect the state’s revenue from foreign direct investment have been less than that from the money sent back to their relatives by Bulgarian emigrants. The sum sent by emigrants from January to November 2002 has been $449.600.000, while the foreign investment for this period has been $428.700.000.57
Moreover, at the level of human security, the biggest concern for the majority of Bulgarians during 2002 was crime. 72% think that it is a significant problem for the country and 53% point that the government is not taking the necessary measures to curb it (PRCPP 2002: 32-9). Crime has been a dominant theme of the Bulgarian transition. Nevertheless, public displays of violence between different underground groups have significantly decreased since 1997, with the crack down against the so-called “insurance companies.” But throughout (especially the second-half of) 2002 in the capital Sofia (as well as other cities in the country) a series of shootings and bombings brought back to light the reality of criminality to the daily lives of Bulgarians. This culminated in December 29 with the murder of the former Chief Military Prosecutor and current member of the Prosecution Council, Nikolay Kolev outside of his house. One of the many strange twists in this incident is that among the publicized versions for his death, the most prominent is the one that the current Prosecutor-General of Bulgaria ordered the execution. Commenting on the event, the Bulgarian President, Parvanov, mentioned that "we should be alarmed by the murders of high-ranking lawyers, politicians and god-forbid, statesmen. But we should not forget and should be equally disturbed that the common people on the street are completely defenseless." Unwittingly, not even a month later, the issue pointed out by the President was accentuated with the murder of the wrestling-coach Todor Matov. Apparently, as the Ministry of Interior stated, Matov was machine-gunned by mistake, because he was driving in a car of a similar type as an underground drug-dealer, who was the apparent target of the attack and at the time of the incident was in the same area. According to the Chief Secretary of the Ministry of Interior, Boiko Borisov, "the incident, as well as those that happened at the end of the previous year, is part of a struggle for the control over the Bulgarian drug market. Until this is over there would be more shootings. I have warned you about this." However, an insight into the supposed coordination between the judiciary and the police, is given by the Chief Secretary, who on the same occasion put the blame on the courts who let convicted criminals and individuals go: "We get them, they let them go."

The sense of personal security was not boosted much by the revelation that a member of the special anti-terrorist squad was caught transporting drugs to Greece. This news came in the wake of a disclosure in November 2002 that former members of this squad had set up a "murder bureau" (but unlike Jack London’s model this was premised solely on pecuniary consideration) for contract killings. Both incidents led to a restructuring of the service and investigating other members of the specialized squad. Yet again, when commenting on the restructuring of the service the Minister of Interior, Petkanov stated that he wished the Bulgarian court system were as speedy as the one in Greece, which tried and convicted drug-dealers just in three days.

Such examples of institutional confrontation between the executive and the judiciary were further aggravated by a recent war of words between the President Parvanov and the NDSV Chairperson of the Parliamentary Commission on the Media, Milena Milotinova. Criticizing a bill for the...
regulation of the Bulgarian media, the President stated that if it is passed into a law, he is going to use his veto powers, since the bill is an instance of “outright dictate and interference [in the media] and pursues the defense of particular corporate interests of the ruling majority.” In response, Ms. Milotinova declared that the presidential veto has been devalued like the Bulgarian currency during the BSP government of Prime Minister Videnov.64

The implications of such inter-institutional conflicts reflect directly on the Euro-Atlantic priorities of the country (not only in their implications for the acquis communautaire). Since it is the political elite that is the promoter of the values of EU and NATO accession, the current antagonism makes it impossible to maintain a capable policy for bringing into being effective governance as to follow the chosen decisions and, more importantly, to build the political agreements needed to sustain them. Instead the confrontation between different state-institutions has further distanced the political elite from the rest of the Bulgarian citizens.

Conclusion

The argument of this article has been that the order of unpredictability, which has established itself in post-1989 Bulgarian developments has gradually, but inevitably led to the current bifurcation between “the governing” and “the governed”. Apparently, the current political class perceives Bulgarian reality from the context of the international recognition of Bulgaria at the NATO Prague Summit and the Copenhagen European Council. However, the doubtless achievements of Bulgaria's foreign policy are just a step in a process, whose successful completion requires consensual relationship between the government and the citizens. On the other hand, the majority of Bulgarians seem to perceive their environment from the framework of their surrounding circumstances, characterized by insecurity, dissatisfaction with their conditions of existence and hopelessness. Thus, the divergence of views between the ruling class and the people seems like a logical outcome. Its implication, however, is that the evocation of closer ties with the Euro-Atlantic organizations is reflected by a rising perception of dissatisfaction with the state of affairs in Bulgaria. Such relationship could potentially impact negatively the accession dynamic of the country (a possibility indicated by the recent profusion of anti-EU statements on the decision to close the nuclear plant at Kozloduy). In such sporadic signs of distancing public support for measures undertaken to condition the country for potential membership one can decipher the possible negative spillover on the Euro-Atlantic aspirations of the state from the inability of the ruling elites to tackle the ingrained socialist values of Bulgarians.

Thus, the chaotic nature of Bulgarian transition has been further institutionalized by the lack of reforms that significantly impact the pre-1989 normative of the majority of people. Because of the poor economic conditions not many Bulgarians have been able to form an independent opinion of the Euro-Atlantic mirage of security, stability and prosperity that politicians speak about,
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as well as objectively evaluate the situation in their own country. Only 10% of Bulgarians have traveled abroad, 7% have visited an EU country and 5% an EU applicant state (European Commission 2002: 38-9). Moreover, only 2% of Bulgarians stated that they have worked outside of the country. Such figures help rationalize the hopes of many Bulgarians that someone who has "been-to" and "made-it" in "the West" (and as such is offering a different perspective from the well-know political figures of the 1990s) can "help" them get their living standards closer to "normality"; and, at the same time, sparing them from the sacrifices that such transformation entails. However, the NDSV government further aggravated the situation by conspicuously disregarding the current laws of the state, initiating an inter-institutional conflict, as well as their inability to translate their views to the language of the living conditions for the majority of Bulgarians.

As a result, the gap between elites and citizens grows wider and deeper. The "Saxcoburggotsky addition" to it is that his rule brought into question the ability of the young generation to make a difference. As it had been mentioned above, a number of key-state positions were given to young, Western-educated and with Western-work-experience Bulgarians. However, the apparent dissatisfaction with the current lack of advantageous results to the majority of citizens has challenged the expectation from the young generation; hence, the disillusionment that the NDSV rule has brought about.

Thus, Bulgaria's zigzagging through the chaos of transition appears to be reaching its expected endstate: the differentiation of society not so much into two classes, but two value-oriented groups. The political implications can be manifold. The unfortunate realization is that so far the post-1989 developments in the country have not managed to make a significant dent on the values of the socialist way of life of Bulgarians; which, by implication makes the presence of chaos virtually unchallengable. However, in a state of arbitrariness no one can ever be sure.

Endnotes

2 An inference indicated by the recent debate on the closure of the nuclear plant at Kozloduy in the context of EU conditionality.
3 Coşkun and Özkan (2001: 12).
5 Hereafter, it would be referred to by this study either as "the Movement" or "NDSV".
8 The Bulgarian transition formally began on November 10, 1989 through a peaceful internal political coup in the Bulgarian Communist Party. As the table shows, the post-1989 political spectrum of Bulgaria (until the June 2001 parliamentary elections) was divided between: the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP - the reformed Communist
The State of Chaos

Party) and the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF - the mainly neoliberal formation); the third main political formation is the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF - the so-called "king-maker" formation of the Bulgarian Turkish minority, since they were always tipping the balance in favor of any of the other two parties).

9 The term used in Bulgaria to refer to the heads of the care-taking governments, appointed by the President of the Republic.

10 This statement should not be interpreted as a negation of the achievements of a number of them, especially in the sphere of education and minority rights.


14 Indicated by the corruption accusations to some of its high-ranking members.

15 This article concentrates predominantly on NDSV (and by implication MRF) and sidelines BSP and UDF. The reason is that the other two organizations have been unable so far to make a significant impact on the decision-taking process (perhaps with the exception of BSP, which used to have two and now only minister in the current government and as such cannot be defined as an opposition party, although most of its statement indicate that this is its own identity; as well as, the current President used to be its former leader). However, BSP rather quickly after the June 2001 elections managed to “reform” its image and make itself more appealing (hence, its success in the presidential elections), while UDF is still unable to recover from the crisis of 2001, and seems unable to identify a consistent strategy for winning back the hearts and minds of voters. Such focus on NDSV is hoped to aid the development of the main argument and mostly identify the unusual (for the Bulgarian transition period, at least) concentration of power in one political formation. As recent developments have indicated NDSV cannot be taken as a monolithic organization standing firmly behind its leader. It is obvious that there are a number of power-centers that are trying to emerge and establish themselves as the strategists of the party and state policy-making. However, it is still Saxcoburggotsky who ultimately calls the shots in NDSV and the party still holds comfortably the overwhelming majority that it has in the National Assembly, together with the help of MRF.


19 Ikenberry (2001: 45).


21 http://www.government.bg/PrimeMinister/Statements/2002-12-14/4164.html [Accessed on 8 February 2003].


24 "Zhivotut e prekrasen." Dnevnik, 3 December 2002.
This article was sent for publication before the occurrence of two events, which could have and still could disturb the current status quo in Bulgaria. However, the lack of any immediate implications confirms that what is expected in the country usually happens in unexpected ways.

The first event were the findings of a special parliamentary committee that the Minister of Interior, Petkanov had ordered an unlawful use of tapping and surveillance devices against representatives of the opposition as well as leading Bulgarian journalists. The “normal” expectation would be that he would be removed from his position; but this has not been the case. In his defense, Minister Petkanov said: “It is the judge’s responsibility and not mine. It is the judge who allows the use of these devices. What is the significance of a Minister’s signature – what is its legal value?” (“ODS iska ostavka na minister Petkanov.” at http://www.focus-news.net/scandal/scandal.php?scan=1 [Accessed on 15 February 2003]. Emphasis added). Apparently, this explanation has been satisfactory to the Prime Minister.

The second incident was the murder with a single shot in the heart of Iliya Pavlov, the President of the “MG Corporation”, the 8th richest person in Eastern Europe, a former operative of the Bulgarian secret service, a key witness to the trial on the murder of former Prime Minister Andrei Lukyanov, and one of the godfathers of Bulgarian mafia (“Ubiha Ilia Pavlov.” at http://www.focus-news.net/scandal/scandal.php?scan=1 [Accessed on 8 March 2003]). The execution of such an emblematic figure in front of his office in the center of Bulgaria’s capital, Sofia further indicates the consolidation of the criminal world in the country.

However, both incidents have remained largely unnoticed by Bulgarian society and have failed to make it reconsider its relationship towards the ruling elite and the consolidation or erosion of democracy in the state.

Ibid. Emphasis added.
Rabotia za zhivota na bulgarite." Trud, 8 April 2002.
Deputatski ostavki ili durveno zheliazo." Dnevnik, 8 March 2002.
Which in this case is only technically true, because the whole election campaign of NDSV was built around the personality of its leader, and the majority of the electorate learned who their MPs were only after the elections.
Ibid.
Ibid.
"Otkazvame se ot sedem miliona evro za mitnicite." Banker, 21 March 2002.
The Turnovo Constitution adopted by the First Grand National Assembly of Bulgaria in 1879, was proclaimed to be one of the most liberal constitutions of its time in Europe, although it was provided by the then Russian Imperial government. Part of the reason for this is that the original draft had been written in 1876 by the American Plenipotentiary in Istanbul and close friend of the Russian Representative, Count Ignatieff.

It is noteworthy that the list of fifteen companies is not final and could be enlarged, as the government deems appropriate. Originally only to businesses were included in this list.


Ibid.: 31.

This has been attempted by previous governments as well. However, never before in the post-1989 period in Bulgaria has a political party commanded such an overwhelming majority in Parliament; let alone has it been so faithfully supported by the MRF.


I am grateful to Viktor Bojkov for this suggestion.


"Premierut e ogorchen, che presata ne zabeliazva podobrenie na zhivota." Dnevnik, 3 December 2002.


"Emigrantskite pari nadhvurlia chuzhdite investicii." Kapital, 2 March 2003.

24 Chasa, 6 January 2003.


65 The most visited countries being Greece, Turkey and Germany (European Commission 2002: B-25)

66 The majority in Greece.

References:


