

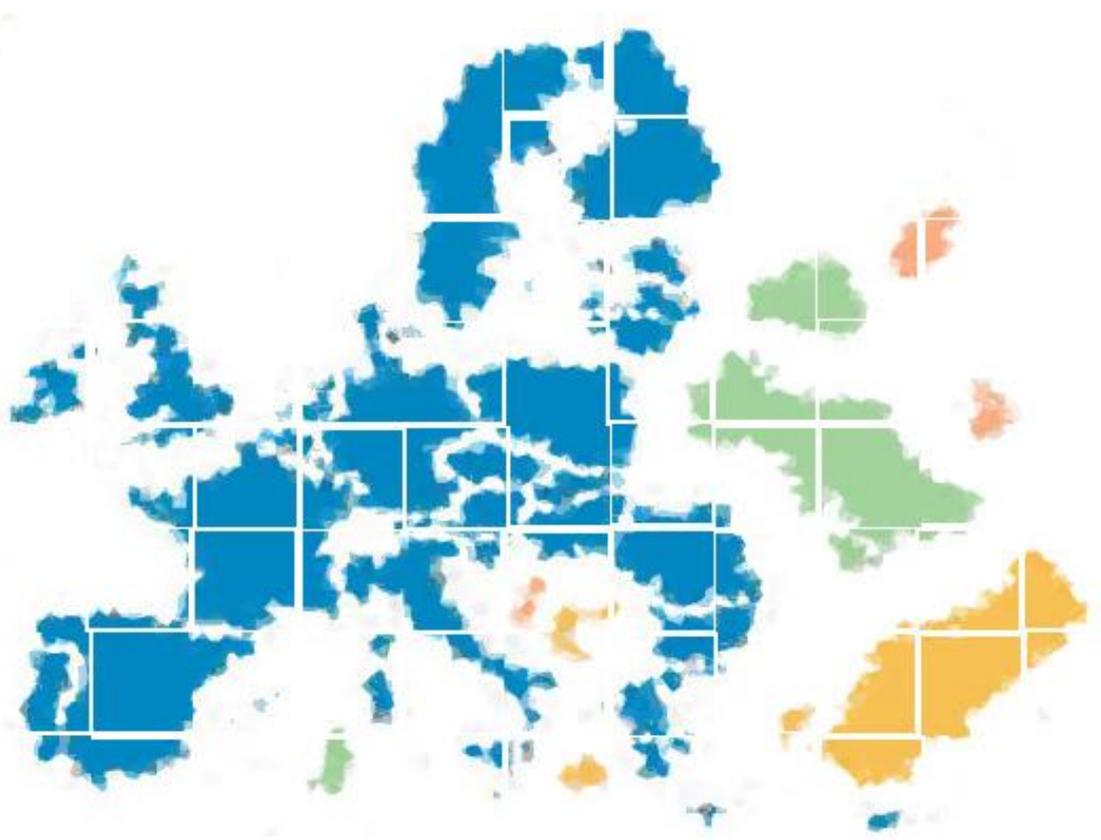
# EU Frontiers

Student Paper Series

## Managing the Middle: Maneuvering Bulgaria's Development through EU and Russian influences

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## Iris Belensky

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Iris Belensky is a 2 year MA student in the department of International Relations at the Central European University, graduating class of 2018. Her interests revolve around South Eastern Europe, specifically Bulgaria, and the ways in which the countries of this region contend with their multi-cultural legacies in the context of their development. More specifically, she is interested in the ways in which this region interacts with Europe and Russia on a political, economic, and cultural level. Both her policy paper for CENS and her MA thesis address these issues within the Bulgarian context.

## Executive summary

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This policy paper analyzes Bulgaria's political and economic development in the context of its simultaneous relationship with the EU and Russia. Having been the Soviet Union's closest ally, Bulgaria presents an interesting case as an EU member with uniquely close structural and cultural ties to Russia. Thus, the paper first provides an overview of Bulgaria's development since 1989, the challenges it continues to face, and the ways in which its relationship with the EU and Russia influence these processes. Then, through an analysis of the 2016-2017 parliamentary and presidential elections, the paper explores some of the ways in which dominant understandings of EU-Russian relations allow for misrepresentations of the political dynamics within Bulgaria. Rather than seeing Bulgarian domestic politics as a battleground for EU vs. Russian influence, the paper argues that these processes need to be understood within the complex context of Bulgarian development. Finally, the paper provides suggestions for EU policies addressing Bulgaria's development.

## Managing the Middle: Maneuvering Bulgaria's Development through EU and Russian influences

### Introduction: Bulgaria as a unique combination of influences

Of all the new member states of the EU, Bulgaria has historically had the closest relationship with Russia; this relationship has been perpetuated in the form of strong economic and political relations even while Bulgaria has been in the EU. As such, a great part of Bulgarian foreign relations has been driven by a balancing act between EU and Russian influences. Bulgaria saw both presidential and parliamentary elections within the span of 5 months – from November 2016 to March 2017. The presidential elections were won by Rumen Radev from the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), a party portrayed as pro-Russian particularly in Western media. The parliamentary elections led to a majority by Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB), the majority party since 2009 and an ally of the EU. BSP also saw a significant increase in its representation in parliament. In many reports, these elections are being read as a sign of a divided society, deciding between the benefits of Russian and EU paths of development, or perhaps the sign of a country surrounded by instability and on the verge of pivotal political transformation.

The purpose of this paper will be to both delineate some of the major challenges that Bulgaria faces in its development and to assess the ways in which and to what extent these challenges influence Bulgaria's relationship with the EU and Russia. In the context of the EU's identity crisis in face of the Brexit, the mounting tensions between the EU and Russia, and Bulgaria's upcoming first term in the EU's rotating six-month presidency in January 2018, the stance that Bulgaria might take on various political and economic issues takes on greater significance. Not only does Bulgaria represent a country of diplomatic importance, being situated on the border of the EU and Russia, it also represents a manifestation of some of the major complications of EU-Russian relations, including the issue of energy security, questions of nationalism and sovereignty, and the dilemmas of post-Soviet economic and political transitions.

## II. Bulgaria maneuvering between EU and Russian influences up until 2016

### *Historic ties to Russia & simultaneous desire for EU membership and participation*

Bulgaria shares deep cultural and linguistic ties with Russia stemming from their common Slavic language roots, use of the Cyrillic alphabet, and religious affiliation with the Eastern Orthodox Church. These cultural connections continue to bear significant meaning for contemporary Bulgarians. Furthermore, historical ties to Russia play a role in the common Bulgarian memory where Russia is seen as Bulgaria's primary ally in its liberation from the Ottoman Empire. In addition, Russia was a major provider of assistance to Bulgaria after its liberation during its national

revival and formation. This alliance held during the course of the two World Wars; although Bulgaria sided with Germany each time, she did so without declaring war on Russia. After the war, this alliance was of course reaffirmed when Bulgaria became a part of the Eastern Bloc, and one of Russia's closest allies.

The sentiment fostered by these ties has had a tendency to proffer Russia as a political and economic alternative to Europe ever since Bulgaria's initial independence. During the interwar period, Bulgarian politics were at times divided over whether the country ought to choose a 'Western' or 'Eastern' path of development, and in parallel, Russophile parties questioning the prevalence of European influence over the Bulgarian way of life have had a consistent presence. Nevertheless, Bulgaria has a history of alignment towards Europe, both following its liberation from the Ottomans, and the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

Post-independence Bulgaria consciously sought to model its political and governmental structures after those of the European powers and oriented its economic development towards Europe as well. Currently the EU is Bulgaria's most significant trading partner, making up 65% of Bulgaria's exports and 64% of imports in the year of 2015; Germany represents the foremost partner amongst the member states with 13% of total exports and imports for the same year. Bulgaria's aspirations for political and economic realignment saw a renaissance at the end of the Cold War, when Bulgaria rallied around the call to 'return to Europe' and made accession to the EU a priority of the country's foreign policy. Bulgaria first signaled its desire to participate in the European integration project in 1990, and by 1995 Bulgaria had submitted its application for membership to the EU. During the entirety of Bulgaria's accession process, popular support for accession was always above 50%, reaching an apex of 85% during the autumn of 2006 just before gaining membership in January of 2007. All the post-1989 Bulgarian governments supported accession to the EU, whether they were headed by the reformed communist party, now the Bulgarian Socialist Party, or by its initial opposition, Union of Democratic Forces, and the opposition parties that emerged afterwards. In fact, the application for EU accession was submitted while Zhan Videnov, of the Socialist Party, was serving as Prime Minister; Bulgaria also acceded the EU under Sergei Stanishev, yet another Socialist Prime Minister.

### *Political transition, Democratization, and its failures*

Bulgaria's political transition was defined by an internal split of the Bulgarian Communist Party, where second-tier members of the party's elites overthrew the established dictator, Todor Zhivkov. Once Zhivkov had resigned and his government had been dismantled, Bulgaria's transition was managed by the post-communists and anticommunists through a series of roundtables in which communist structures were dissolved and a new constitution was written. The Bulgarian Communist party was no longer the singular party of the state, but remained a principle actor after being renamed the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP).

Thus the beginning of Bulgaria's democratization was characterized not by mounting pressure for change from below, but rather a grab for power by established elites. Consequently, there was a low turnover in political actors, and many communist politicians managed to remain in power whether it was in the reformed socialist party or in the new opposition parties. Furthermore the reforms conducted by these politicians dealt primarily with the structures of upper-tier governance, meaning the structuring and power distribution of the legislative and executive branches. Little attention was given to the functioning of state machinery, including public administration, or the judiciary branch. Yet, these were both sectors that had been subjected to direct control by the state during communist times, suffering from nepotism, clientelism, and a lack of independence. The reforms that were done in these sectors during the early stages of transition were marked by a lack of state capacity, creating a wide margin of opportunity for state capture and corruption that was taken full advantage of.

These deficiencies in quality of governance and rule of law were duly noted by the EU and their improvement constituted the main benchmarks linked to Bulgaria's accession, and development in general. It was in these areas that the EU hoped conditionality through the Copenhagen criteria would motivate Bulgarian reform. In Bulgaria, accession to the EU became a goal that in the minds of many served as a substitute to true political transition and economic modernization. An idealistic desire on the behalf of the Bulgarian population to 'normalize' the country and raise the standard of living led to a Europeanization that took place mostly through hopeful initiatives presented on paper but never put to action. Arguably there was limited mobilization directed towards depoliticizing the appointment of civil servants, improving the accountability of the judiciary branch, and increasing transparency in the executive branch which allowed for Bulgaria to be deemed qualified for EU membership. Nevertheless these efforts resulted in halfway measures and partial reforms that led to superficial changes to a deeply embedded network of clientelism and corruption prevailing throughout the entire political system. Post-accession, Bulgaria continues to lag behind Central Eastern EU member states in its measures of corruption and judicial quality despite the EU's development of a new monitoring mechanism, the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism, and the prevalence of anti-corruption rhetoric in the party platforms. In 2016 Bulgaria was ranked 75 on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index while Freedom House reports insufficiencies in rule of law. These areas continue to be primary concerns for Bulgaria both nationally and as a member of the EU.

### *Economic Development: Issues of State Capture and Energy Security*

The economic reform that took place during Bulgaria's transition resembled its political reform in that partial measures were implemented in order to facilitate the enrichment of economic and political elites and further embed networks of corruption. The fast pace of privatization paired with the lack of penetrative political reform provided both incentives and

opportunities for state capture. State capture refers to a deeply embedded network of corruption involving "the virtual privatization...of certain state functions." This occurs when business entities, institutions of the state, political parties, or a combination of the three, secure privileges by exploiting the power of the government for private interests. The institutional networks that underlie state capture in Bulgaria have been able to resist the transformation required by EU reforms through the adoption of rules without sufficient implementation, allowing networks of corruption to accommodate themselves to changing circumstances. Post-accession this has resulted in a low absorption of EU funds, where most of them are lost to corruption-rents.

The problem of state capture permeates into a multitude of sectors, where one of particular importance for Bulgarian security is the energy sector. While Bulgaria's economy displays significant dependence on Russian exports overall (Russia is Bulgaria's second largest source of exports), Bulgaria's energy sector is almost entirely dominated by Russian providers. The Russian state-owned natural gas company, Gazprom, accounts for 97 percent of Bulgaria's natural gas and represents the country's sole provider. Bulgaria's nuclear energy sector, which provides 20 percent of the country's total final primary energy consumption and 34 percent of total electricity consumption, is also Russia dependent. The Kozloduy Power Plant, sole generator of nuclear power in Bulgaria, was built during the Soviet era and continues to necessitate imported Russian fuel reactor.

The diversification of Bulgarian energy sources and the ensuring of sector independence are both goals of domestic and EU economic reform. Initially, due to Bulgaria's historical economic proximity to Russia, energy diversification was not considered an issue of primary concern. It was only after a two week interruption of natural gas supplies during the Russian-Ukrainian gas crisis of 2009 that Bulgaria decided diversification was necessary to its energy security and economic development. Consequently, reform has been difficult and slowly progressing due to issues of state capture discussed above: Russian and Bulgarian energy actors have permeated the higher levels of Bulgaria's governing apparatus, allowing private interests to dictate policy choices in an opaque institutional environment.

Nevertheless, in the last decade, Bulgaria has made significant choices steering the country away from further Russian energy dependence, arguably to its own economic detriment. In 2011, Bulgaria withdrew from the Burgas-Alexandroupolis oil pipeline, and in 2012, from the Belene nuclear power plant proposal, both Russian backed projects. Despite resistance, Bulgaria also twice halted participation in Gazprom's plan for a Southern Stream due to the EU commission's concerns as to the plan's compliance to European competition laws. In December of 2014, Putin formally announced the closure of the project, claiming that Russia's energy projects would be taking a pivot towards Asia, but without failing to express regret over the EU commission's obstruction of Bulgaria's participation. Currently, Bulgaria continues to play its part in upholding Crimea related EU sanctions against Russia.

### III. Bulgaria's Current Political Situation in the Context of 2016-2017 Elections

#### *Government Structure and Political Climate*

Bulgaria is a representative democracy functioning under the framework of a Parliamentary republic. The Prime Minister acts as the head of government after being elected by the majority party, or coalition, of the National Assembly – a unicameral representative body consisting of 240 members and constituting the legislative branch. In addition to the Prime Minister who has a four year term, the executive body consists of the President as Head of State with a five year term, and a Council of Ministers that he appoints in consultation with the National Assembly and the candidate for Prime Minister.

Bulgaria has a multi-party system in which a party must gain a minimum 4% of the vote in order to be represented in the National Assembly. The Bulgarian Socialist party (BSP) continues to be one of the two major parties in the Bulgarian system, while its counterpart has consisted of different parties and coalitions over time. BSP is a social democratic party and is generally considered to be Russia-friendly, ultimately supporting cooperative economic and political relations with Russia. Currently, headed by Kornelia Ninova, BSP is perceived to have intensified its pro-Russian stance in the last Presidential and Parliamentary elections, supporting both the end of sanctions and a renewal of the Belene power plant project.

The ethnic Turkish party, Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS) is a liberal centrist party primarily representing the interests of the Turkish and Muslim minority. DPS has also aligned itself in support of policies for cooperation with Russia. The greatest political ally of Russia in Bulgaria's party spectrum is Ataka, headed by party leader Volen Siderov and known for its far-right, nationalist, and xenophobic stance. Siderov and the party's other representatives invoke the narrative of Bulgaria's historic alliance with Russia, reminding the population of Russia's role as a liberator from the Ottoman Empire and its instrumental part in saving Europe from Nazi Germany. Ataka also plays on the rhetoric of national sovereignty and maintains an anti-EU position. In 2009 Ataka was the fourth most represented party in parliament, but its popularity has decreased and it is now one of three parties in the United Patriots coalition.

The Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB), led by Boiko Borisov and representing BSP's leading opposition, has been the primary pro-European party represented in the Bulgarian Government. Coming to power for the first time in 2009, GERB presented a strong anti-corruption and pro-EU platform in addition to the strongly personalistic elements of Borisov's candidacy for Prime Minister. He was elected Prime Minister once again in 2013 with a GERB majority in parliament. GERB takes a pragmatic approach to relations with Russia and is careful to avoid alienating pro-Russian voters.

*Presidential elections 2016*

The Presidential election in November 2016 represented a contest between BSP-backed ex-general Rumen Radev and GERB-backed Tsetska Tsacheva. Radev won with 59 percent of the vote, while Tsacheva took just over 35 percent. Following the first round of the presidential election, in which Radev came out with a foretelling lead, Prime Minister Boiko Borisov pledged to resign if his party's candidate, Tsacheva, lost. With Radev winning the run-offs, Borisov was forced to keep his promise, while early parliamentary elections were scheduled to be held the following year.

Radev may have ended up representing BSP in the elections, but he began as an independent candidate. This fact acts as a symbolic entry point to understanding his presidency not as a pivot towards Russia, but rather the desire for a new approach. Many media sources, primarily Western but a few Bulgarian as well, portray the recent presidential election as another contest between European and Russian influences. Yet the election gains greater significance when perceived from a domestic perspective. While BSP is known for being connected with Russian politicians and business men, as an independent candidate, Radev did not represent the BSP ideology, but rather his own 'put Bulgaria first' approach. As such, Radev's stance on Russia and the EU will not differ much from that of Borisov: although he may seek greater cooperation with Russia, he will likely maintain western alliances to NATO and the EU. His calls for Russia friendly policies are rather indicative of two realities: firstly, that in Bulgarian politics it is advantageous to provide appeal to the Russophile constituency. And second, due to Bulgaria's proximity to Russia, geographically, culturally, and historically, being pro-European or pro-Russian has never been a mutually exclusive choice. Managing the middle ground has been a political and economic necessity. Consequently, viewing the progression of Bulgarian politics through the lens of a West vs. Russia narrative can lead to misinterpretations that set roadblocks both for Bulgarian development and the resolution of EU-Russia tensions.

From the perspective of the voting constituency, a vote for Radev was hardly a vote for Russia, but was rather a vote for a new face. After having Boiko Borisov as the main figure in national politics for almost a decade and no perceptible changes in the levels of corruption or economic development, Bulgarians chose the opposition.

*Parliamentary elections 2017*

The Parliamentary elections were scheduled for March 26, 2017 and brought on the return of GERB as the majority party and Boiko Borisov as Prime Minister for a third term. GERB came out with 95 seats out of 240 in the National Assembly - 11 more than the last term. BSP increased their representation significantly, gaining 49 seats for a total of 80. The United Patriots, the coalition including Ataka and two other nationalist parties, came in third; DPS came in fourth. Finally, the party Volya gained its first ever seats in parliament, making for a total of five parties represented

opposed to the usual 8. Coalition building represented, as usual, a difficult balancing act. Ultimately GERB formed a coalition with the United Patriots, despite their rather radically opposed ideologies, with Volya in a supporting position. BSP and DPS came together to form the opposition.

Once again, many interpretations of the parliamentary elections resorted to presenting the results within a narrative of contesting Western and Russian influences. The re-election of GERB was portrayed as a reaffirmation of Bulgaria's alliance to Europe, while some Bulgarian media sources questioned whether BSP had gone 'too far' with their pro-Russian stance. Once again, this interpretation overemphasizes the importance of foreign policy in the election, and does so through what seems an anachronistically Cold War mindset. Instead the result of both the elections and the coalitions reveal the resilience of the political status quo. GERB retains its political monopoly as it has for the past decade. The coalition between the pro-European GERB and the Eurosceptic United Patriots goes towards affirming the suspicion that the Nationalists are not in parliament so much to change the system, as to get a firmer grip on power. Consequently, many political analysts claim that the presumption that ideology has any significant effect on voting at all is naïve, and that instead elections are determined by parties' networks of patronage.

Nevertheless, the instability that is created in the National Assembly by the great increase of BSP seats should be given appropriate significance as well. Changes are taking place in Bulgarian politics, as demonstrated in the contest for power between GERB and BSP and the divided parliament. Although both GERB and BSP both come from a background still tainted by corruption and patronage from the days of the Communist party, they represent the closest to diversity in political choice with the potential to influence policy making that the country has. Thus, there is potential that the interactions and frictions undergone by this new parliament may lead to significant changes in Bulgarian politics. Yet these changes, at their foundation, are not primarily motivated by ideological inclinations towards East or West, but rather, at worst, a desire to attain or maintain power, and at best a desire for development and change.

#### **IV. Future Prospects and Policy Recommendations**

##### *Summarizing the Current State of European and Russian Influences on Bulgarian Development*

Analysis of the recent presidential and parliamentary elections that took place in Bulgaria and their significance for the future of the country ought to place a heavy emphasis on the narrative of Bulgarian development in which the influence of Europe and Russia play significant, but not primary roles. It is the fact that both Europe and Russia will necessarily both be involved with Bulgaria's economic development, and thus be interacting indirectly with one another, that makes this case an indicator of sorts for the state of Euro-Russian relations. As such the portrayal of Bulgarian elections as being a political gain for either Russia or Europe is telling in itself. Yet in the context

of development, where both Europe and Russia will be needed as Bulgaria's partners, this approach will be non-productive and even detrimental. Such an approach effectively gives Bulgaria a secondary role in its own development by making it an object embedded within the relationship of two more powerful actors, consequently simplifying the specific problems that plague the country's democracy, economy, and society.

A key point that is not emphasized in all of the accounts which note Bulgaria's cultural, historical, economic and political proximity to Russia is the difficulty, and even impossibility, of extracting the country from those ties. The culture and history that Bulgaria shares with Russia touches many Bulgarians who will still be able to vote for years to come, on a personal level. The issue figures prominently for parties covering the entire political spectrum: it incites Russophile parties to use the sentiment to play to their advantage, and it prevents pro-European parties from advocating overtly anti-Russian policies. In this aspect Bulgaria represents a unique case in the EU – a form of heterogeneity that may need to be specifically addressed.

A similar scenario presents itself on the level of economics and, as noted, specifically in the energy sector. Putting aside historical ties, geographical proximity makes Russia not only a logical source of energy but, in the absence of other European options, a necessary one. In this aspect Bulgaria is not alone, because while countries in the western parts of the EU, like Spain or France, can be independent from Russian energy, Central Eastern European countries necessarily are not. Once again the heterogeneity of EU members can be remarked upon, highlighting some of the areas in which it may become increasingly difficult to find a European consensus. This question is complicated by the fact that many of these economic ties are deeply corrupted, making it easy to conclude that they ought to be broken off. Acknowledging that this corruption is a product of institutional legacies propagating themselves through the transition period and EU accession highlights the issue of corruption as one tied to development, rather than purely negative Russian influences.

As history has shown and the present continues to reaffirm, Bulgaria has always aligned its model for development with that of the West when given the choice. After the end of the Cold War, Bulgaria sought to align itself politically and economically with Europe and take on the processes of democratization and marketization. This Bulgaria has done both out of a desire to integrate itself with the European standard of life and out of recognition that Europe is equipped with better resources to provide Bulgaria the support it needs for development. Recently the choice to align with Europe has become more apparent in Bulgaria's choices in economics and energy security. Bulgaria has upheld EU sanctions against Russia in full. In the realm of energy security, Bulgaria has committed itself to diversification and has rejected several Russian-backed energy projects which would have brought not only easy access to energy, but jobs and revenue to the country. These measures do offer long term advantages for Bulgarian development as they may disrupt the networks of state capture which it will be vital to break down. Yet the depth of Bulgaria's economic entanglement with Russia means that these measures have exacted a significant strain on Bulgaria's economic

development and political environment. If these concessions are to be sustainable, Bulgaria will need significant economic support and realistic alternatives, or a focus on an improvement of EU-Russian relations that would once again make economic cooperation a viable political option.

### *Avoiding Worst Case Scenarios*

The need for improvement in the rate of Bulgaria's development may be the crucial factor determining the country's political stances in the future. While this paper bases itself on the foundation that Bulgaria's relationship with both Europe and Russia is deeply dependent on its narrative of development, there are situations in which this dependence would lead to an exacerbation of divisions and even an overtly pro-Russian stance. On the level of economic and political elites this potential is founded in the reality that their allegiances will lie where it is the most profitable for them to be. Forces that are pro-European now, including political parties and business elites, can easily be converted if significant advantages are offered to them elsewhere. On the level of the electorate it is possible that increasing disappointment with the country's state of affairs and increasing disillusionment with the levels of corruption in the government could reach a breaking point leading to a backlash against both the government and pro-EU policies. In such a case, nationalist parties would seize upon the opportunity to take power and direct Bulgaria definitively towards the East. It is this alternative that current analysts fear the recent elections are foreshadowing – reading the current contest between GERB and BSP as a sign of a society already divided between east and west rather than a population in search for a viable path of development overshadowed by an institutional network in search of extracting rents. Devoting resources towards sustainable development in Bulgaria and time towards cultivating EU's internal and external policies such that they would address the particularities of the Bulgarian context could prevent current concerns from becoming self-fulfilling prophecies.

### *Identifying Directions for Future EU policies*

For the EU to be able to maintain internal cohesion for the development of future policies it will be increasingly important to address the heterogeneity of member states' political and economic realities. This issue of course touches upon the future development of the EU and the five options presented by the EU commission's white paper in March 2017. Although the question of the future of the EU lies far outside the scope of this paper, the concept of heterogeneity holds significant weight for small Eastern European countries like Bulgaria who would like to avoid being backtracked on the trajectory of EU integration. As discussed above at length, cultural and economic ties to Russia present a category in which EU members vary distinctly. For internal cohesion to be maintained until a settlement can be found with Russia as regards the conflict in Ukraine and the annexation of

Crimea, Bulgaria (and other Central eastern European as well) will need the support of Europe in the form of economic and energy substitutes.

Furthermore, Bulgarian development will need continued support in the fight against corruption, particularly with regards to judiciary independence and corruption within public administration. These questions have consistently been difficult to grapple with as they lie outside the competencies of the EU. Yet, continued and reinforced use of monitoring devices such as the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism can be instrumental to ensuring progress in these areas. Traditional instruments, like that of conditionality, particularly in regards to participation in the Schengen agreement, may also be effective in inciting reform at the government level. Yet, the ineffectiveness of conditionality in inciting sustainable change in the Bulgarian case ought to be noted for future policies. Conditionality ought to stem increasingly towards concrete goals and demands that can be measured quantitatively rather than being politicized by either side.

Specific attention ought to be given to the monitoring and improvement of the absorption of EU funds, as well as their allocation. EU funds represent a key benefit of EU membership. While blame for problems with the judicial system and public administration can be imparted directly onto the Bulgarian government, the misallocation of EU funds has the potential to negatively affect public opinion of EU membership through a conflation of domestic corruption with European neglect.

While the development of economic and energy alternatives for Bulgaria and other Central Eastern European member states will require collaboration on the part of all members of the EU, the fight against corruption would benefit from an increase in domestic civil participation. The disillusionment and cynicism about the state of affairs in Bulgaria often leads to a general domestic apathy and an absence of sufficient pressure from below to mobilize effective reform. Consequently the most important allocation of funds may be that which is provided directly towards academic and research institutions that are involved in monitoring and analyzing the major blocks in the way of Bulgaria's development and sharing this information with the public. Ensuring that these institutions and other civil society organizations participate in the allocation of EU funds may present an opportunity to involve the Bulgarian population with the country's development while bypassing some of the networks of corruption that permeate the central government and its institutions.

## V. Conclusion

Contextualizing the elections of 2016/2017 within the history of Bulgaria's relations with Russia and Europe and the process of its transition since 1989 has illuminated nuances to some of the key issues that the EU will need to face, as well as issues that Bulgaria will need to grapple with domestically. Taking Bulgaria as a specific case within the EU facilitates a re-conceptualization of EU-Russian relations within the domestic framework of a country concerned with its economic and political development. Through

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this lens Europe and Russia present themselves not as two powers vying for stronger influence in their neighborhood, but rather two economic and political partners that will be necessary for successful development. And while Bulgaria may represent an extreme example of this case as a result of its unique historical and cultural relations with Russia, this scenario is one that applies to varying extents to other countries in Central Eastern Europe.

What Bulgaria's relationship to the EU and Russia reveals is that there exists heterogeneity amongst EU members in relation to their economic and political entanglement with Russia. This heterogeneity will need to be addressed in order to develop both an internally cohesive approach to foreign policy with Russia, and European options for economic and energy diversity for states that are more dependent on Russia economically. What the recent Bulgarian elections demonstrate in the context of Bulgaria's development is that consistent problems with corruption and state capture are obstructing development and that this is inciting voters to search for alternatives within the admittedly shallow diversity of political options presented to them. Rather than being representative of growing Russian influence over the Bulgarian population, the division that currently exists in Bulgarian politics, is indicative of a society grasping for a realistic path to development. Aiding Bulgaria in the fight against corruption will be the most effective way to combat the current instability of the country. Furthermore, amongst the various tools that are available to the EU to motivate reform, perhaps the most desirable would be to insure that the funds it provides are utilized in such a way that the public is both inspired and given the agency to demand the change it wants to see.

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