Signs of European Union influence in Sofia and Skopje: An ethnographic note

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Abstract

How does the European Union, in the process of its eastward enlargement, influence social and political behavior of entire nations in the new member states and in the candidate countries? Are these societies automatically following Brussels' political conditionality or do they just pretend to do it? The traditional literature that asks this type of questions mainly focuses on two alternative explanatory paradigms, institutional and strategic. In the first case the weaker side gradually accepts the norms of the stronger party; in the second case, the weaker side accommodates its interests within the new political environment.

This paper starts from different ontological premises based on hermeneutics, and proceeds through an alternative methodological protocol inspired by political ethnography. Instead of mainly looking at politicians' behavior and the legislative acts, it traces signs of European Union influence by observing the everyday life of the ordinary people in two purposefully chosen post-communist capital cities, Sofia and Skopje. The peoples in these two cities show remarkable differences in the way they interpret and adopt into their lives the presence of the new supranational authority, the European Union.

Key words: European Union, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Politics, Culture

999

Introduction

How does European Union (EU) integration affect the new post-communist EU member states and the candidate countries? Since this question was asked for the first time some twenty years ago, the mainstream literature in political science had not found a consensual answer. On the one hand, there are Euro-optimists who see the EU as benevolent pro-democratic and civilizing force (Vachudova 2005; Kubicek 2005; Pridham 2001, 2005; Spirova and Budd 2008; Coricelli 2007; Schimmelfennig 2007; Epstein and Sedelmeier 2008; Mansfield and Pevehouse 2006). On the other hand are the Euro-skeptics who see the EU as a technocratic and an anti-democratic force (Raik 2004; Bickerton 2009; Bideleux 2001; Gallagher 2005a, 2005b; Grosse 2010; Kutter and Trappmann 2010). Finally, there is an intermediary group of authors who see the EU sometimes as a pro-democratic force and sometimes as a rather neutral factor in post-communist development (Kolarska-Bobinska 2003; Grzymala-Busse and Innes 2003; Dimitrova 2002).

Despite their opposing views on the same research question, all authors accept the objective asymmetrical power relations between EU and post-communist candidate countries; the role of subordinated party here is attributed to those who have to make more efforts to adapt to the changes within the system of relations. A frequently heard statement "off the record" in Brussels maintains that it is the candidate country that wants to join the Union and not the other way around. It summarizes the spirit of this power asymmetry. The level of asymmetry, however, is not the same for the different authors. Those who use the institutional or learning model attribute less autonomy to the domestic actors who have no other option but to adapt to the requirements set up by the dominant party. Those who use the strategic or instrumental model start from the point that candidate countries have sufficient space for maneuvering, e.g. in terms of whether to join the Union; such political choice that the domestic political elite has is enough to make the Union less strict on some points and more ready to bargain. Epistemologically, most authors work within the realm of positivism; methodologically, in what Schatz and Schatz (2003) call methodological excess, they use either quantitative data or non-interpretative qualitative methods. Among them none looks at EU integration as a process of cultural interaction.

This paper will answer the research question by providing an inductive and descriptive demonstration. Instead of measuring EU influence by what should have been achieved, it will describe what has already been achieved. Instead of interpreting the findings from the position of

foreign observers, such as the EU itself or *Freedom house*, sources that claim objectivity and impartiality, this research will use inter-subjective interpretations that the local society creates in order to grasp with the new reality, EU integration.

Methodology

Regarding the choice of cases, when it comes to choose among post-communist countries, the current literature (Vachudova 2005; Levitsky and Way 2005; Bideleux 2001) shows a certain trend to use predominantly illustrations from Central Europe (Poland, Hungary, the Czech republic, Slovakia). These illustrations, with the exception of Slovakia, were mainly of countries that were considered without major political problems before even the start of European integration; therefore it would be much more difficult to discern the exact role of EU among the other factors that influenced their political and cultural development. This is a reason why I will be focusing on the Balkan region, a region in which EU influence is more difficult and full of contradictions.

Bulgaria is an interesting case as a principal field study; this country has gone through the entire process of European integration; it has entered the EU as a member in January 2007. In addition, this country defies the simplistic logic of institutional transfer from West to East. Even after its formal EU membership, Bulgaria continues to pose serious questions regarding its democratic quality. Macedonia, which is a candidate for EU membership, is still in the "waiting room" pending the official start of accession negotiations; for diachronic analytical purposes this latter country is therefore a good candidate for a secondary field study.

The following sections present and discusses the findings that emerged from two field trips to Bulgaria in June-July 2009 and in June-August 2010, and one field trip to Macedonia in June-July 2010. The author checked the gathered information against previous observations made in both countries; these previous observations took place before 2002, in the case of Bulgaria, and before 1998, in the case of Macedonia. The study presents findings gathered through non-participative observation for each country, followed by a comparative analysis for both countries.

The proposed paper is ethnographic. It starts from the holistic premise that any society represents an interrelated system, including both material and symbolic elements, and that the

symptoms of existence of different influences, as far as they really exist, can be retraced in different sub-systems, from the relations between the ordinary citizens to the official statements of the head of state. As far as political science is concerned (e.g. Bayard de Volo et al. 2004; Lauren et al. 2007), ethnography starts from the premise that traces of significant actions can be found anywhere, not just within formal institutions and strategic behavior, such as voting.

As this paper reports personal observations within a specific period of time (2009-2010), it will present and discuss only these observations. Facts of interest, naturally, have been missed and therefore will not be discussed. However, my conference reports and private talks with specialists on the Balkan regions from different disciplines (Ohio 2011) have suggested that these additional observations would not have changed my general impressions and main conclusions. Another limitation refers to the relatively brief moment in history when these observations were made. Another field study in both countries in the future may compare the observations over much longer period of time and present more dynamic picture of the process of EU influence.

Non-participant observation, as part of ethnographic approach, makes the observer invisible for the research objects and therefore they become less afraid of his or her presence and more likely to speak and behave without self-imposed restrictions. An inherent bias of this technique, however, is its focus on the present reality; unlike interview and text analysis, the observer sees the world as it is now, not even a day earlier. To dig deeper back in time and to understand the context of what has been seen, the study used semi-directive interviews for triangulating purposes. For example, the presence of Macedonian flags on high masts on public squares and highways may have varied significance, such as a show of force toward ethnic minorities, neighbor states or the European Union. The triangulation with semi-directive interviews eliminated the first two options and put emphasis on the relations between the EU and Macedonia. Within these bilateral relations, the informants interpreted these flags as a symbol of national sovereignty assertion and as a refusal to accept asymmetrical power relations, a key element in the EU integration process.

The scope of observation was focused but not limited to topics that naturally followed the research question, such as the material and symbolic presence of the EU in the region. Following the logic of ethnographic holism, I included all sorts of observations in my notebook pending additional analysis and selection of those more relevant to one or another element of the research

topic. Therefore, my observations dealt with any potentially interesting human behavior and also with some consequences of human behavior. In order not to appear as an intruder and make people feel observed, the notes that I took were written down afterward, usually when I was alone, usually twice a day, at lunch and in the evening.

Regarding the accumulation of observable information, my best period of seeing "with new eyes", "like a foreigner" in the case of Bulgaria and Macedonia was usually limited to 2-3 weeks after arrival on the field, which roughly corresponded to the time attributed to the each individual field study. Observation, in my case, after this 2-3 week period, reached a point of saturation; the point of saturation was the moment when adding new information through observation did not add any new information or new questions. Instead of puzzles, at that moment as an observer I saw predominantly normality similar to my usual social environment; my natural psychological ability to adapt and adjust had made me a part of the new normality and I therefore stopped asking myself questions like a foreigner, such as "what is the meaning of …?" or "why do they do it this way?"

Making observations in two countries instead of one was certainly of help. Some observable information was more concentrated in one or in the other country. I must acknowledge that without this more accentuated presence some information could have been missed out in either the one or in the other country.

The rest of the paper divides the observed information into two sections, one for each country, followed by a comparative analysis. The observations that are reported are chosen among those that either produce independent, from other sources, information or are sufficiently corroborated by statements made during the semi-directed interviews. Each observation includes raw facts followed by first-hand reflections that explain the reason why it has become problematic within this research as well as some possible interpretations.

Findings in Bulgaria

For this country, I specify whether the observations are made during the first or the second field trip, in 2009 or 2010, and also whether they remain unchanged between the two trips.

1. This observation is made in 2009; the observed artifacts had disappeared in 2010. The

place was the Sofia airport's new terminal 2, the hall of arrivals and departures; a gallery of big posters sponsored by the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, more exactly by the Minister Mrs. Gergana Passi, by the way in electoral campaign at that very time. Each poster, their exact number was 14, was divided into two parts, each representing both European and Bulgarian classical and modern paintings and/or sculptures. The name of the temporary gallery was "European images". All names of the painters and their works were in English. My first reaction to this gallery was that it showed the inferiority complex of the Bulgarian government vis-à-vis the European Union; it used art in order to elevate Bulgaria up to the European level; this explained also the use of English, hardly understood by the majority in Bulgaria, but understood by international travelers. Most interviewees to whom I had shown some of the images of the galley, however, did not agree with my interpretation. They exclusively pointed out the electoral context of the exhibition. In 2010, when the gallery was already closed, another independent interpretation partly confirmed my conjectures; according to it, Bulgaria had always been a European state, the art was proof. These two interpretations were not mutually exclusive. They confirmed a dynamic in which individuals were constructing an imaginary national past where Bulgaria was part of Europe with the practical consequence that Europe had no superior moral authority to ask behavioral changes from Bulgaria. Some Bulgarian politicians and their immediate entourage would also offer this interpretation.

2. This observation was made in 2009; the observed artifacts still remained intact in 2010. Sofia city center; numerous graffiti with racist, anti-minorities, homophobic and anti-province slogans, such as: "Kill Dogan (the leader of the Turkish ethnic minority party) become a hero!"; "All Turks in common tomb"; "Turks out"; "The pederasts under the knife"; "Pederasts under humans" (in Bulgaria designation "pederasts" is generalized to all homosexuals, not just to pedophile homosexuals); "Adolf Hitler" (this latest is written as appears here, not in Cyrillic letters); "Sofia for Sofians". "B.Borisov (the name of the new Prime minister with the Star of David right to his name)". My first reaction to these graffiti was that the society in general was either highly intolerant toward the minorities of all sorts, or very tolerant toward the expression of such radical anti-minority views, or

both. The following interviewees largely confirmed both assumptions. The small number of people, such as those feeling more European than Bulgarian, or people that contemplated common actions with minority representatives, for different reasons would not react against such graffiti; the "Europeans" among the interviewees would consider themselves to be "above" such domestic matters; the "Liberals" or the people with civic understanding of national identity, would consider the matter as representing private opinions, i.e. free to be expressed in a free society.

3. This observation was made in 2009; the observed artifacts still remained intact in 2010. This observations dealt with some office spaces in Sofia that should have been used for "European" purposes, mainly as information help desks (Info-points) where citizens could get information and other materials about the EU, their rights as European citizens, some programs of general interest, e.g. universities and scholarships for students. I observed that some of these spaces were either emptied or turned into alternative use, such as cafes, newspaper kiosks, a cinema that showed largely American movies. My first reaction and interpretation to this was that these spaces were intended to show the EU officials the interest in Bulgaria up to the date of joining the Union; with the growing understanding in Bulgaria that the EU had very limited and diminishing leverage over Bulgaria after the membership in January 2007, these spaces like "Potyomkin's villages" were left without financial support and thus abandoned from their intended principle use. This impression was confirmed by some informants. One of them, a 42 year-old female state civil servant said: "The code word before 2006 was to get into the EU and then we would see". Indirectly, this impression that the EU symbolic power over Bulgaria was diminishing was also supported by the fact that citizens were not really interested in European matters as they were before 2007 and immediately after. To be sure of that, I observed for several hours a European info center in Sofia that still worked for its intended purpose; the center was not visited by anyone, except me; the clerk was not friendly and was incompetent to provide technical assistance; the books and some brochures in the library could not be accessed directly by the public, thus conveying the wrong message that EU intentionally made all information inaccessible just like the Bulgarian government and Bulgarian libraries. Despite the fact that this Info center had in its name "European", the

organization of the service looked very much like a Bulgarian local library, where access to information was also traditionally restricted.

4. This observation was made in 2009; the facts were still present in 2010. The observation dealt with the musical environment in the streets of the capital city of Sofia and in the second largest city of Plovdiv. It contrasted with the environment of the 1990s and the early 2000s on some important points: 1. The volumes were lower; the impression was that people were more inclined to respect the right of the other citizens not to feel attacked by music they do not like; 2. The genre of music had changed from largely local mixture of folklore, gypsy music and popular music, locally known as "chalga", to western pop and rock music. A separate observation that later turned out to be inspired by the same motives, was the disappearance of the pornographic journals that were put on display in Sofia and also of the pornographic pages in many daily newspapers. This disappearance meant the pedestrians and the readers, children included, could not see it and that the local pornographic journals had given up to the large western brand names such as "Playboy". I could trace the understanding of these phenomena, the change in music and the disappearance of pornography from direct display, to the direct references to the European, and more generally western, cultural environment. The Bulgarians had given up on being different with regard to aesthetic values. Additional analysis made me think that it had less to do with "giving up" than with intentionally trying to change appearances. The new business and political elite wanted to be associated with western "high" culture instead of local endogenous popular culture. After many years of neglect, the theaters were again crowded with people. The local media, printed and electronic, followed this change oriented on Western cultural models.

5. This observation was made in 2009 and in 2010. The observation itself dealt with the presence of European symbols such as EU flags or the logo "Euro" associated with different organizations and activities, not necessarily governmental or associated directly with the EU and its presence in the country. Compared to 2009, in 2010 governmental buildings had observably fewer European flags; as a contrast, some private interests, such as banks or even restaurants, had begun or had kept displaying European symbols. The reason why the government was less enthusiastic could be linked to the general

understanding that European influence was decreasing, see observation #3, or perhaps to the understanding that the European symbols did not increase anymore the political legitimacy of the government. As far as private enthusiasm was concerned, the use of "Euro" logos had to convey the idea of security either to Bulgarians or to foreigners living and working in the country. Putting the logo associated with European Union on the banks was the way of convincing the Bulgarians that they could keep their money there without risks; the need of this additional symbolic "security policy" could be explained with the long history of financial crises in the country during the 1990s which were still present in the popular memory, especially for the people aged 35-40 and over. Putting European logos on restaurants targeted mainly foreign clients; in a country notorious for its low food standards this was another way of claiming that the food served there met unspecified higher "European" standards of quality.

6. This observation dealt with acts of respect for law and order. In Bulgaria, traditionally, law and order was a foggy concept and most people looked at it through the prism of their personal interests only, behaving frequently as free riders. However, they were gradually becoming aware (through media, travel, immigration) of the European, and more generally western, norms of behavior that reflected a very different culture of respecting law and order. My observations included numerous cases of smoking in prohibited areas, not wearing seat-belts in cars, drinking alcohol in public and other legally prohibited acts. The interviews largely confirmed that Bulgarians were still not respecting the laws. To reconcile these behaviors with the new European identity, some Bulgarians, as also revealed through interviews, had developed the original concepts of "Southern Europe" vs. "Northern Europe". According to this new symbolic division, Bulgaria had actually been integrated more precisely into "Southern Europe", together with countries such as Greece, Italy, and Portugal, where not respecting the laws – many Bulgarians really believed in this – was not such a big problem as in the northern parts of the continent. The conclusion was that the Bulgarians, at least some of them, had found an easy cultural way of taking a "detour" from the need to apply the rules, including European directives, which did not comply with their personal interests and yet still considered themselves being Europeans. Such a "detour" allowed eliminating the otherwise negative

consequences on the consciousness, like the feelings of guilt or shame.

7. This observation logically followed from the previous; it dealt with behavior that was at the border between legality and illegality. Private security forces protected many residences and office buildings in Bulgaria. Some Bulgarians felt forced to secure their valuables because they did not trust the national police, considered protecting mainly the state and the most economically powerful interests, not the ordinary citizens. The observation showed that the national police could also offer paid security services as if it was a private company. These observations, confirmed in interviews, showed that the ordinary Bulgarians, when in trouble, were more likely to show the tendency to appeal for help to these private enforcers instead of going through legal and even less through political channels.

8. This final observation for the country dealt with some acts of new collective action that transcended the individual atomization, which was still largely dominant in Bulgaria. After the collapse of communism, the government on national and local levels abdicated from its responsibilities on many common projects, such as maintaining roads and parks. The economy was largely privatized. The public domain, however, that technically could not be privatized, like the streets, parks, and zoos, became financially and organizationally abandoned. For many years it was the law of the strongest that was applied to these public areas; e.g. private cars were parked on the sidewalks or in the kids' playgrounds. In recent years, the trend was for the public authorities, both the state and the municipalities, to reclaim their authority. In Bulgaria such reclamation, however, did not directly confront private interests, but tried instead to coordinate private interests for the common purposes. As a result, some parks had already been reclaimed for their original recreational purposes; in exchange, putting their names on display as commercials from their business had promoted the private interests. Some public civil servants among the interviewees openly spoke about their new roles as honest brokers between private interests, thus confirming the increased recurrence of these practices; on the basis of being honest brokers some even fantasized about having become more "public" than "state" servants.

Findings in Macedonia

1. The observation dealt with the presence of huge national flags on very tall masts on display in the capital city of Skopje and in other locations. The Macedonian flag itself showed a stylised version of the ancient Macedonian Vergina Sun. The flags were usually not accompanied by other flags, either European or municipal; they could have been situated near governmental offices, at the border control, or on public squares and alongside main boulevards in the capital city. They usually flied far above the surrounding buildings, at approximately 30 meters. Such display of national symbolic to my memory, later confirmed by archived photos and interviews, was not present during the 1990s. My first impression was that the flags reflected increased nationalist sensitivity and a feeling of insecurity. This could look like a normal display of insecurity given the young age of the modern Macedonian state, which was less than 20 years old. What made this interpretation not quite plausible or at least not sufficient was that the sense of national insecurity appeared actually to be increasing, instead of decreasing, with the passing of the time; as if in 2010 the Macedonian government and the public alike felt the need for more nationalist symbols than in the early 1990s in order to feel more comfortable. Could it be that European integration was a factor in this increased sense of insecurity? Some of the interviewees suggested that the EU might be a factor in this display of national symbolic. Some interviewees even pointed out, in a similar vein, at the new Skopje urban development plan, or Skopje-2014, that reflected the same feeling of uncertainty. A new interpretation was that the display of flags, which began approximately two years earlier under the current government and the project Skopje-2014, was intended, by showing the unity between the Macedonian government and the majority of the population, to influence foreign governments about the right of Macedonia to claim the ancient Macedonian political and cultural heritage, including the name of the republic; another intention was to convince, this time, the public opinion about the capacity of Macedonia to deal on an equal footing with growing European political pressure.

2. This observation was a comparative follow-up on the observation with regard to the music and other aesthetic changes in Bulgaria. Regarding music, in Macedonia, as in a time machine, I had the impression that I was still in Bulgaria of the 1990s; the musical

genres were much more heterogeneous, yet with clear predominance of the locally produced ethnic music; the music itself made much more noise than in Bulgaria nowadays but it was as noisy as in Bulgaria in the 1990s. I could not stop thinking that the political battles over European integration in Macedonia, and its relative advantages and disadvantages, found distant analogy in the musical street environment. The fact that the society still struggled over the hegemonic musical genre, national songs expressed in local language vs. foreign songs that were mainly in English, could explain the higher noise volumes in Macedonia. In Bulgaria, where the battle had already been settled in favor of "international" rhythms and lyrics, the volumes were significantly lower. This interpretation was indirectly confirmed by other observations: TV and radio channels in Macedonia still predominantly broadcast local ethnic music, as were the case in Bulgaria up to the early 2000s.

3. This observation dealt with the public display of "Euro" logos and symbolic, including flags, associated with different governmental, non-governmental and private organizations; European flags were usually relegated to secondary position compared to Macedonian flags. In Bulgaria, on the contrary, the government had appropriated European flags and put them on equal standing with the Bulgarian flags even before the official start of the accession negotiations. As far as I could remember, in Bulgaria it happened as early as 1992 when the country became a Council of Europe member (EU flag and the Council of Europe flag are identical). In Macedonia, the different branches of the government either completely ignored EU flags, this concerned the parliament building and the presidential residency, or put them on much lower standing and in much fewer numbers than the Macedonian flags; e.g. the governmental building in Skopje. Regarding the NGO sector, there was an interesting correlation between the political orientation of some of these organizations and the use of EU flags alongside the Macedonian flags in front of their headquarters. The European symbolic was much more common to organizations whose members expressed sympathy toward the current opposition and former communist party. On the contrary, those who predominantly sympathized with the current nationalist government did not show any EU symbols. As far as private interests were concerned, there was a huge variety in "Euro" logo use, from

some banks and financial corporations to pharmacies and a street shoe polisher. Unlike Bulgaria, the private use of "Euro" logos as a symbol was hardly related to claims of higher standards of quality. According to some interviewees that tilted politically toward the current government, this private utilization of "Euro" logos was in fact the modern version of the old "Yugo" logos linked to the old communist nomenclature. Unlike Bulgaria, where the "Euro" logos had never been used for narrow partisan purposes, in Macedonia they seemed to be an important part of current political struggles.

4. This observation dealt with acts of respect for law and order, and was largely inspired by parallel observations in Bulgaria. The same acts of behavior as in Bulgaria fell under observation: wearing car seat-belts, smoking in prohibited areas, drinking alcohol in public, and some other acts. The contrast between the two countries was very much in view. In Macedonia people generally respected the rules, written as well as unwritten. All interviewees confirmed that the people were also aware of their respect for the rules; the European Union representatives in Skopje also confirmed these flattering observations. Unlike in Bulgaria, in Macedonia the individuals felt proud of being able to contribute to the common good by their individual acts. This pride had nothing to do with foreign authorities; people respected a law because it was a law, not because they wanted to show outside observers how civilized they were.

5. This observation dealt with the use of parallel security forces; it was inspired by some parallel observations in Bulgaria. In Macedonia, on the contrary, there were no signs of private enforcers, such as "This object is protected by…" followed by the name of a private company; there was not even any mention of such suspicious activity in the interviews either. The citizens largely looked to the police and, this was rather specific for Macedonia, to their kin for help in case of trouble; the ethnic minorities were much more likely to turn to kin solidarity; the ethnic majority was fairly equally divided on this issue between kin solidarity and the national police.

6. This observation dealt with displays of graffiti with political connotations. It was inspired by the presence of graffiti with anti-minority and homophobic texts found in Bulgaria. After extensive search for such type of graffiti in Macedonia, I did find but only few (e.g. "Adolf" in Cyrillic). This looked surprising given that in the interviews people often

mentioned ethnic and religious tensions, mainly regarding the biggest ethnic minority, the Albanians. My preliminary conclusion was that the presence of a real ethnic problem in Macedonia, and the fact that in Skopje there are significant Albanian neighborhoods, made people very cautious regarding such open expressions of hatred as graffiti. In Sofia, Bulgaria, which was ethnically homogenous despite ethnic guest workers, and far away from mixed ethnic regions, such hatred could pass unnoticed and without fear of negative social and political consequences. As far as the political graffiti in Skopje were concerned, the type I found dealt mainly with appeals for political action: "Gotce return" (Gotce Delchev is a national hero); "Tito – president"; "Tito – SDSM" (SDSM is the Macedonian abbreviation for the successor organization of the communist party). The respect paid to dead political leaders in Macedonia was something quite unusual for Bulgaria where people stopped idealizing politicians almost immediately after they were elected and took office.

Comparing the countries

The observations showed that feelings about the EU influence vary significantly in these two countries: in Bulgaria the impression was that EU as a key factor was gradually diminishing; in Macedonia, on the contrary, the impression was that EU was increasing its pressure by virtue of increased reaction to it. As far as the national, mainly ethnic, identity was concerned, in Bulgaria there were no feelings about any real and present danger coming from Brussels. "European" and "Bulgarian" were rarely put in opposition, save from those who looked for more arguments to justify their proper denationalization. The sense that Bulgaria belonged to "Southern Europe" might help prevent such opposition in the future. In Macedonia, where Europe was viewed still as a homogenous entity, and nobody spoke of Northern vs. Southern Europe, some parts of society saw it as a threat to national identity. In addition, in Macedonia, unlike in Bulgaria, the European project had profoundly divided the political and intellectual elite into supporters and skeptics.

In Bulgaria, European integration as a result of an asymmetrical power relation was largely seen as being without alternatives from its very beginning; in Macedonia, there were

apparently political alternatives, such as symbolically making these relations more symmetrical. Regarding attitudes toward the ethnic and other minorities, Bulgarian xenophobes found surprisingly in "Europe" an ally instead of a strict disciplinarian. In Bulgaria, being a hardliner toward the Turks and the Roma had never been and was still not considered shameful; on the contrary, it became a part of a new European normality. Surprisingly, the Macedonian nationalists, whom I expected to show similar public hatred against minorities, because of their European skepticism, showed much more restraint in their behavior; they could not refer to Europe as a moral guide in their hatred. In Macedonia, unlike in Bulgaria before EU membership, people realized that an eventual EU membership would require profound changes in behavior. No Macedonian spoke about two Europes, one of which being less strict on respect for the law.

People in Macedonia, in general, were much more law-abiding than in Bulgaria, but this difference was more than simply quantitative. The Macedonians valued such law-abiding behavior; the Bulgarians, on the contrary, valued disrespecting the state and its regulations. This qualitative difference would certainly help Macedonia become more like Europe after it becomes an EU member, but would not help the process itself because of the fears associated with this magnitude of the change. On the contrary, in Bulgaria, the accession period was culturally much easier to pass, with slogans like "First to get into the EU and later we will see!" Regarding the capacity for collective action, the Macedonians, because of their strong kinship bonds and/or respect for the law, differed significantly from the Bulgarians, who remained predominantly individualists who valued more the private law-enforcement.

The image of European integration was different in these countries; in Bulgaria, which was culturally always separated from the West during the Cold War, integration was viewed as a unilateral road westward. In Macedonia the situation was much more complicated given its history, real and imaginary, and the communist period positioning between the West and the East. What in Bulgaria intellectuals and people called "The road to Europe", in Macedonia could easily, akin of the Central European nations, be presented as "Returning to Europe", which would require some intentional movement westward, or even as "Taking back Europe", which would not require any such movement, but rather would require a radical change in EU policy toward Macedonia.

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