

Greek-Bulgarian Relations: Present State and Future Challenges

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ABOUT THE SOUTH-EAST EUROPE PROGRAMME

The South-East Europe Programme of the Hellenic Foundation for European & Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP) was set up in October 2011. Research and policy analysis on Balkan affairs has a long tradition in ELIAMEP going back to its founding in 1988. The Programme intends to follow that legacy of high quality scholarly and policy work.

More specifically, the Programme aspires to:

- Provide structure to ELIAMEP's diverse work on South-East Europe and to systematise its approach.
- Enrich ELIAMEP's work on regional international relations with a thorough investigation of the domestic context of Southeast European states.
- Combine policy analysis skills with theoretical knowledge and rigorous methodology to achieve research excellence.
- Promulgate policy recommendations for the promotion of security, democracy and economic development in South-East Europe.
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Last but not least, the South-East Europe Programme is associated with the scholarly journal Southeast European and Black Sea Studies, which is published by Taylor & Francis publishers in partnership with ELIAMEP.

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PREFACE

ELIAMEP's South-East Europe Programme has for several years been researching Greece's difficult and complex relations with Balkan neighbouring countries. Over the years, innovative projects have been implemented, bringing to light original and fascinating data, as for example the attitudes of the Greek and neighbouring states' public opinions, the formation and reproduction of negative stereotypes through media representations or the perceptions that opinion makers and media of the region hold about key developments in Greece. A certain 'bias' in all these studies has been the preoccupation with the 'difficult' issues, i.e. relations that are tainted by serious bilateral disputes and/or heavy doses of public and elite stereotyping and prejudice.

In the present report we aim a different approach by focusing on a positive, 'success story' of the region. Relations between Bulgaria and Greece had also historically been turbulent, and at times quite hostile. But for several decades now, and despite the war and instability present in the wider Balkan region, the two countries have managed first to achieve and then to preserve an admirable level of political and economic relations. Our report, thus, aims at investigating exactly that unique case of excellent bilateral relations. We do not so much focus on the historical dimension of these relations or how these came about before even the end of the Cold War. Rather, the aim is to examine the various parameters of multiple relations between the two countries, to draw some conclusions about the persistence of the positive atmosphere and to shed light to recent developments that may put strain on this success story.

Despite its length, this report is not exhaustive. We merely 'touch upon' or introduce some key data about various aspects of the bilateral relations. Our aim is to offer a useful, first overview of relations and to open up the debate for current state and future challenges of these relations. We will consider this report successful if it manages to generate reflection and open dialogue, not only about the merits of Greek-Bulgarian relations, but also about existing stains and future problems and challenges.

Finally, we would like here to thank all our interlocutors and interviewees, some of who will naturally remain anonymous. We would also like to thank Dr. Anastasis Valvis and prof. Theodore Tsakiris for reviewing parts of our analysis. We did our best to discuss our work with as many experts as possible, but unfortunately, given time restrictions, we could in the end only manage to speak to a limited number of them. Future research, by us or other colleagues, ought to extend the discussion with many more excellent experts and officials, who we were not able to reach on this occasion. Last but not least, our special thanks go to the company **Xanthakis SA** for making this report possible through a generous funding to ELIAMEP's South-East Europe Programme.

INTRODUCTION: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Traditional enmity and the gradual rapprochement

No historian could possibly disagree with the assessment that from the last quarter of the 19th century until well after the end of the Second World War Greek-Bulgarian relations would be defined mainly as “hostile” and “confrontational”. The so-called Macedonian Question divided the two countries, leading essentially to a war by proxies until 1912. Later, a deeply dissatisfied with the territorial arrangement Sofia, would follow a revisionist foreign policy, challenging Greece’s territorial integrity. During both World Wars, Bulgaria and Greece would be on the “opposite sides”, while the Bulgarian occupation of large parts of northern Greece during the Second World War was particularly harsh, leaving bitter memories to the local Greek population.¹ Support to the left-wing forces by Bulgaria and other Balkan People’s Republics during the Greek Civil War as well as the post-Cold War division in Europe, strengthened the security perception of the “threat from the north” in Greece, while it intensified negative stereotypes on both sides of the border.

The improvement of Greek-Bulgarian relations would be a slow process. In 1953, there was a first agreement on their delineation of their border, while the following year diplomatic relations were re-established. A next important step would be the signing of twelve agreements that regulated a series on important issues for bilateral relations in 1964.² It was, however, after 1974, that Athens and Sofia would embark in what could be described as a “historical reconciliation”, reminiscent of the French-German reconciliation. It was a process of bilateral rapprochement that began by Konstantinos Karamanlis (Κωνσταντίνος Καραμανλής) and Todor Zhivkov (Тодор Живков) in the 1970s and continued by Andreas Papandreu (Ανδρέας Παπανδρέου) and the Bulgarian leader in the 1980s. Regional concerns in both Athens and Sofia generated in particular by Belgrade’s and Ankara’s assertive foreign policies on minorities and other issues, led the two countries to put aside the legacy of confrontation and any ideological differences they had, and to build friendly bilateral relations.³ In fact, bilateral agreement on issues of regional and international politics, in combination with the deterioration of Greek-Turkish and Bulgarian-Turkish relations, during the second half of the 1980s, would generate the impression of a “Greek-Bulgarian axis” in the Balkans.⁴

¹ See Ξανθίππη Κοτζαγεώργη-Ζυμάρη (επ.), Η Βουλγαρική Κατοχή στην Ανατολική Μακεδονία και τη Θράκη 1941-1944 (Θεσ/νίκη, 2002).

² Γεώργιος Χρηστίδης, Τα Κομμουνιστικά Βαλκάνια. Εισαγωγή στην εσωτερική και εξωτερική πολιτική στην Αλβανία, Βουλγαρία, Γιουγκοσλαβία και Ρουμανία την περίοδο 1945-1989 (Θεσ/νίκη: Βάνιας 2003), σ. 171-73.

³ For the post-1974 development of Greek-Bulgarian relations see Κωνσταντίνος Σβολόπουλος, *Η Ελληνική Πολιτική στα Βαλκάνια 1974-1981* (Αθήνα, 1987), σ. 50-60· Γιάννης Βαληνάκης, *Εισαγωγή στην Ελληνική Εξωτερική Πολιτική, 1949-1988*, (Θεσ/νίκη: Παρατηρητής 1989), σ. 344-345· Χαράλαμπος Τσαρδανίδης, Στέλιος Αλειφαντής, «Η Ελλάδα και οι Βαλκανικές Χώρες, 1974-1987», σε Δ. Κώνστας, Χ. Τσαρδανίδης, *Σύγχρονη Ελληνική Εξωτερική Πολιτική*, Τόμος Α’ (Αθήνα: Σάκκουλας 1989) σ. 318-321· Κυριάκος Κεντρωτής, «Βουλγαρία», σε Θ. Βερέμης, *Βαλκάνια. Από το διπολισμό στη νέα εποχή* (Αθήνα, 1995), σ. 397-399· Евгения Калинова, Искра Баева. "Българските преходи 1939-2005", София, 2006· Евгения Калинова. "Балканската политика на България - предизвикателства от запад и от юг (1944-1989 г.)", В: Изследвания по история на социализма в България 1944-1989, т. 2, София, 2010, с. 712-813· Румяна Маринова-Христиди. „България на Живков и Гърция на Караманлис: началото на едно приятелство (1974-1981)”, М и н а л о, 2008, 4, с. 63-74.

⁴ Emil Tsenkov, “The Geopolitical Dilemmas of a Former Satellite”, *Bulgarian Quarterly*, Winter 1991, Vol.1, No.3, p.58. A similar perception could also be found in Greece, although there were those that disagreed, for example Στέλιος Αλειφαντής, *Βουλγαρία: τα διλήμματα μιας νέας εποχής*, (Αθήνα: Ειρήνη Ιούνιος 1993), σ.45.

Greek foreign policy after the end of the Cold War

It is not an exaggeration to say that for Greece the post-Cold War era has been a great missed opportunity.⁵ Despite some domestic political and economic problems, Greece found itself at the start of the post-Communist era in a unique diplomatic, political, economic and social position, compared at least to its Balkan neighbours undergoing difficult, or even bloody, transitions. As a result, from the start of this period, political elites and intellectuals in Greece excelled in rhetorically advocating for a special role in the region. But rhetoric was far from reality. For a number of reasons - from the dispute with FYROM to fearful and nationalistic public reactions to Balkan developments and to support to Milosevic's Serbia during a good part of the 1990s - Greece failed to realize its potential in the region and make use of its advantages for the good of the entire Balkan region.

This negative picture was partly moderated in the latter half of the 1990s and in the subsequent decade when Greece fully promoted the goal of the Europeanisation of the Balkans. During that period, Greece managed to improve its image in the region and to partly make up for the lost years of the early post-Communist era. Several problems remained, more prominently the unresolved dispute with FYROM. But, still, a more comprehensive, both politico-diplomatic and economic, bilateral and multilateral, approach was adopted during this period. It did not make Greece a regional hegemon as many had erroneously hoped. But it largely made Greece into a solid partner of Balkan neighbours to their European and Euro-Atlantic integration processes. In recent years, the tables started to turn again. On the one hand, bilateral disputes, not having been resolved in better times, started to fester, leading to controversial diplomatic stand offs; the issue of FYROM's accession to NATO and the EU is a case in point. On the other hand, the deep economic crisis weakened Greece's image and severely decreased its economic potential in the region.

Bulgarian foreign policy after the end of the Cold War

From 1945 until 1989 Bulgaria had followed with consistency the same foreign policy line of attachment to the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc, gaining the reputation of the most loyal ally/'satellite' of the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe.⁶ The end of the Cold War, that coincided with the removal of Todor Zhivkov from power, in November 1989, ushered in an era of important changes in Bulgarian foreign policy. Faced with the disintegration of the Eastern Bloc (Warsaw Pact, COMECON) and the substantial deterioration of the Bulgarian economy, Sofia did not have many alternatives: while maintaining close ties with the Soviet Union, it made a concerted effort to improve Bulgaria's relations with the West, seeking in particular financial support.⁷ The termination of Bulgaria's close relationship with the Soviet Union in August 1991 left Bulgaria in a "security void"⁸, that would only intensify the realization that relations with the West had to be improved and developed. All Bulgaria's political forces agreed on that; even the

⁵ For comprehensive analyses of Greece's Balkan policies in the post-Cold War era, see: Σωτήρης Βαλντέν, «Η Ελλάδα στα Βαλκάνια και τον κόσμο 1995-2003: ο δύσκολος εκσυγχρονισμός της εξωτερικής πολιτικής», Αθήνα, 2004, Θεμέλιο. Σωτήρης Βαλντέν, «Η Βαλκανική Πολιτική της Ελλάδας. Κριτικός Απολογισμός της Μεταπολεμικής Περιόδου και Προοπτικές», στο Παναγιώτης Τσάκωνας (επιμ.), *Σύγχρονη Ελληνική Εξωτερική Πολιτική, Μια Συνολική Προσέγγιση*, Αθήνα, 2003, Σιδέρης. Μαριλένα Κοππά, «Ελληνική Βαλκανική Πολιτική: Τριάντα χρόνια μετά», στο Κωνσταντίνος Αρβανιτόπουλος και Μαριλένα Κοππά (επιμ.), *Τριάντα Χρόνια Ελληνικής Εξωτερικής Πολιτικής 1974-2004*, Αθήνα, 2005, Λιβάνη. Σωτήρης Σέρμπος, «Ελλάδα και Δυτικά Βαλκάνια», στο Γιάννης Βαληνάκης (επιμ.), *Η Ελληνική Εξωτερική Πολιτική 1990-2010*, Αθήνα, 2010, Σιδέρης.

⁶ On Bulgaria's reputation in the West during the Cold War Era, see for example J.F. Brown, *Nationalism, Democracy and Security in the Balkans* (Dartmouth, 1992), pp.111-126.

⁷ Duncan M. Perry, "A New Era: Looking Westward", *Report on Eastern Europe*, 28 December 1990, Vol. 1, No. 52.

⁸ "Security of Bulgaria: Regional and European Dimensions", Special Report by Nikolay Slatinski, Chairman of the National Security Committee of the Bulgarian Assembly, to the Defense and Security Committee of the North Atlantic Assembly, *Bulgarian Military Review*, Vol.2, No.3-4, Autumn-Winter 1994.

Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), the former communists, who had maintained power after the first democratic elections in 1990, did not disagree.⁹ In March 1993, Bulgaria would sign an Association Agreement, known also as *Europe Agreement*, with the European Union (EU), that would form the legal basis of Bulgaria's relations with the EU from 1993 until 2000, when Bulgaria would begin its negotiations for joining the EU. Bulgaria's integration into the EU and NATO would accelerate following the formation of the Ivan Kostov government, in April 1997, that declared a strong commitment to Euro-Atlantic integration, defining membership into the EU as a "strategic goal".¹⁰ The decision by the Kostov government to provide support to NATO during its military operations against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, in the spring of 1999, was not left unrewarded: in EU Summit in Helsinki of December 1999, Bulgaria was invited to open accession negotiations with the EU; in 2004 Bulgaria joined NATO and in 2005 it signed its Accession Treaty to the EU, while it formally joined the Union on 1 January 2007.

⁹ Perry, op. cit.

¹⁰ See Petar-Emil Mitev, "The European Orientation in Political and State Documents of 1997", in Mitev (edit.) *Bulgarian Youth Facing Europe*, International Centre for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations, Sofia 1999, pp.65-80.

1. POLITICAL AND DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

Diplomatic relations

The end of the bipolar confrontation in Europe undermined the “geopolitical usefulness” of both Greece and Bulgaria, forcing them to look for a new role in the emerging post-Cold War Europe, with Bulgaria being certainly in a much more difficult position, as it was on the side “of those who lost the Cold War”. Given the tense state of Bulgarian-Turkish relations existing at the time, as a result of the so-called “regeneration process” against the ethnic Turkish minority (1984-1989) and the mass exodus of ethnic Turks in the summer of 1989, Sofia would view relations with Athens as part of a trilateral relationship: “already at the onset of the democratic process in the country, the conviction prevailed that relations in the Sofia-Athens-Ankara triangle would be of decisive significance for its regional security, as well as for the pace and reforms of integration in Europe”.¹¹ Two schools of thought concerning policy vis-à-vis Greece and Turkey emerged in Sofia at the time: “the pro-Greek one which regards the consolidation of the old Sofia-Athens axis as the most direct route towards Bulgaria’s integration in Europe, and the pro-Turkish one which, besides arguing the need for close Bulgarian-Turkish cooperation, also holds that this kind of choice would also markedly correspond to the American notion of Bulgaria’s incorporation in international life”.¹² During the 1990s, BSP¹³ and the Armed Forces¹⁴ were widely seen as closer to the (“pro-Greek”) first school, while President Zhelyu Zhelev (Желю Желев) (1990-1997)¹⁵ and the *Movement for Rights and Freedoms* (MRF) of Ahmet Dogan as part of the (“pro-Turkish”) second one.¹⁶ The *Union of Democratic Forces* (UDF) claimed to follow a policy of “equidistance”, a claim that generated a lot of skepticism in Greek quarters in the 1990s, both times UDF held power in Bulgaria - during Filip Dimitrov’s (January – November 1992) and Ivan Kostov’s government (1997-2001).¹⁷

The BSP governments of Andrey Lukanov (Андрей Луканов, January – November 1990), “stepping upon” the good level of political relations that had already been established in the 1970s and 1980s¹⁸, sought to further develop Greek-Bulgarian relations, having two main aims: the provision of security guarantees from Greece and Greek mediation on Bulgaria’s relations with the West and in particular the European Community (EC). Sofia asked, unsuccessfully, for the evolution of the 1986 Declaration in the direction of bilateral military cooperation; Athens, due to NATO objections, was reluctant to agree to such intensification of military cooperation with Sofia.¹⁹ Athens, however, was much more willing to provide its good services in advancing Bulgaria’s relations with the EC. Thus, when Lukanov, during his official visit in Athens on 17 May 1990, asked his counterpart Konstantinos Mitsotakis (Κωνσταντίνος Μητσοτάκης) to assist Sofia’s desire in establishing “as much as possible close relations with the EC”, he received a

¹¹ Emil Tsenkov, “The Geopolitical Dilemmas of a Former Satellite”, *Bulgarian Quarterly*, Winter 1991, Vol.1, No.3, p.61.

¹² *ibid*, p. 61.

¹³ Assessment provided by various interviewees in Sofia and Athens.

¹⁴ Αλειφαντής, *op. cit.*, σ. 39.

¹⁵ *ibid*, σ. 50.

¹⁶ “The arguments of the second school have been openly expressed by Ahmet Dogan, the leader of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms of the ethnic Turks, who declared that for Bulgaria “... the road to Europe passed through the Bosphorus”. Tsenkov, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

¹⁷ Assessment provided by various interviewees in Athens and Sofia.

¹⁸ With the most notable example being the *Declaration of Friendship, Good Neighborhood and Friendship*, signed in September 1986. It was under Art 2 of the Declaration that the Greek Foreign Minister Carolos Papoulias travelled to Sofia for “consultations” with his Bulgarian counterpart, during the crisis of March 1987 that brought Greece and Turkey to the brink of war. Χαράλαμπος Τσαρδανίδης, Στέλιος Αλειφαντής, «Η Ελλάδα και οι Βαλκανικές Χώρες, 1974-1987», in Σύγχρονη Ελληνική Εξωτερική Πολιτική, Τόμος Α’, σς 319-320.

¹⁹ Αλειφαντής, *Βουλγαρία*, σ. 47.

positive response.²⁰ During the European Council of 18-19 October 1990, the Greek Premier asked for the provision of EC assistance to Bulgaria.²¹ The same period, Athens also responded positively to the Bulgarian request for the provision of humanitarian assistance, at particularly testing times for many Bulgarians.²²

In January 1991, Greek Premier Mitsotakis visited Sofia and held talks with the new Bulgarian Prime Minister, Dimitar Popov (Димитър Попов), whereby “both sides underlined... that Greek-Bulgarian relations... are a truly stabilizing factor in the Balkans “.²³ In October 1991, a Treaty of Friendship, Good-neighborliness, Co-operation and Security was signed, a document described as “notable and advanced”²⁴, containing important security guarantees in the context of collective security.²⁵ It was the dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and in particular the declaration of independence of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), that caused the first serious, post-1989, diplomatic differences between the two countries. In September 1991, Sofia refused to participate in a trilateral meeting in Athens, a diplomatic initiative of the Mitsotakis government, stressing that “it did not wish to participate in a meeting concerning Macedonia’s future” without the participation of representatives from FYROM.²⁶ While the decision by the Philip Dimitrov (Филип Димитров) government in January 1992 to recognize FYROM with its constitutional name, caused serious tension in bilateral relations, as the Greek MFA Antonis Samaras (Αντώνης Σαμαράς) had an agreement with the Bulgarian MFA Stoyan Ganev (Стоян Ганев) for a “coordinated action on the independence moves of Greece’s northern neighbor”.²⁷

During roughly the same period political elites in Athens started to view Bulgaria as part of the emerging ‘anti-Greek’ axis that was allegedly being formed at the time in the Balkans, with the inclusion of Turkey, FYROM and Albania. Bulgaria was perceived as being prone to Turkish influence due to the newly elevated political role of Turkish minority and the attempts of the post-communist political elites to break away from the country’s image as a Communist-Soviet stronghold. Such views partly reflected irrational tendencies that started to spread among political elites and in the public opinion due to the Balkan crisis and the independence of FYROM. Nonetheless, the truth of the matter is that for a while political elites in Athens had serious concerns about perceived Turkish revisionist tendencies and Ankara’s attempts to extend its political influence in the broader Balkan region through Muslim populations and friendly governments; this was often spoken of as the “Turkish-Muslim arc”, which extended to Bulgarian, FYROM and Albania, thus ‘encircling’ Greece (Serbos 2010: 94).

The negative political atmosphere, however, did not cause any serious damage nor did it last for long. During Philip Dimitrov’s talks in Athens in May 1992 it was stressed that although the two sides disagreed on the issue of FYROM’s recognition, this “had not affected their friendly relations”; “It is (only) natural for true friends to disagree in specific issues” the two Premiers stated characteristically.²⁸ The fast, post-1992, development of bilateral economic ties²⁹ and Athens steady diplomatic support to Sofia’s efforts to advance its relations with the EU were buttressing bilateral relations. Thus, in March 1993 an agreement was signed for the mutual

²⁰ Κυριάκος Κεντρωτής, «Βουλγαρία», in Θ. Βερέμης, *Βαλκάνια. Από το διπολισμό στη νέα εποχή* (Αθήνα: Γνώση 1995) σ. 400.

²¹ *ibid.*, σ. 401.

²² Apart from the Greek government, humanitarian assistance was sent to Bulgarian by the Greek Red Cross, the Church of Greece and various NGOs. *Ibid.*, σ. 403.

²³ Κεντρωτής, *ό.π.*, σ. 403.

²⁴ Interview with a former senior Greek diplomat, 10/2/2017.

²⁵ Αλειφαντής, *op. cit.*, σς. 47-48.

²⁶ Tsenkov, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-65.

²⁷ Interview with a former senior Greek diplomat, 10/02/2017. For the same issue see below.

²⁸ “Bulgarian Prime Minister Dimitrov on Visit to Greece”, *BTA*, 21 May 1992, *BBC SWB*, EE/1392 A1/1, 28 May 1992.

²⁹ By 1993 bilateral trade was around \$400 εκ., making Greece Bulgaria’s third most important trade partner, after the Russian Federation and Germany. Νίκος Χίος, «Σε ύψος ρεκόρ το εμπόριο με τη Βουλγαρία», *Η Καθημερινή*, 13 Μαρτίου 1994.

promotion and protection of investments³⁰, while in October 1993, the Bulgarian Foreign Minister Stanislav Daskalov, in an interview to a Greek newspaper, expressed his country's gratitude for "the support and assistance of the Greek side" to Bulgaria's efforts to "gradually integrate into European structures".³¹ Following the formation of the BSP government under Zhan Videnov (Жан Виденов), in January 1995, there was a substantial development of bilateral relations, certainly helped by the ideological proximity of the two parties in power in Athens and Sofia, and a good personal chemistry existing between Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou and his much younger Bulgarian colleague.³² The exchange of official visits intensified, while a number of important agreements were signed: like the agreements concerning the opening of three new border crossings and the agreement on the waters of river Nestos/Mesta, both signed during the visit of the Greek Foreign Minister Karolos Papoulias (Κάρολος Παπούλιας) in Sofia, in December 1995³³. While in June 1995, during a meeting in Moscow there was a first agreement on the construction of the oil pipeline Burgas-Alexandroupolis.³⁴ The Greek President Kostas Stefanopoulos (Κωστής Στεφανόπουλος) also visited Bulgaria in November 1995. According to a senior Greek diplomat of the time, the speech that President Stefanopoulos gave to the Bulgarian Parliament was of particular importance because it clarified that Greece was willing to support Bulgaria's entry to Western institutions, and especially the EU, without expecting benefits from Bulgaria in return; it was rather the support to a friendly neighboring country in its time of need.³⁵ Overall, the statements of the Greek President reflected the cordial atmosphere of the visit:

"From now on the only thing we have to do is to open new objects of cooperation which will strengthen the two countries' relations. I would like to stress that there are no obstacles, but just the opposite, all the conditions are right for promoting our relations. This statement, of which I was assured, was confirmed at today's talks".³⁶

Following the formation of the new UDF' government, in April 1997, under Ivan Kostov (Иван Костов), there is a noticeable absence of high-level contacts between the two sides, for the next two years, generating the impression of a cooling off of bilateral relations, as Sofia was seeking to upgrade its relations with Ankara.³⁷ It was only after Kostov's visit to Athens, in July 1999, that the climate would change, as Sofia sought again Athens diplomatic support in its efforts to advance its relations with the EU. The time was not coincidental: following NATO's intervention in Kosovo, and the support that Sofia had provided, Bulgaria's image in Brussels had improved considerably and so its chances to get an agreement for the start of accession talks with the EU.³⁸ The Bulgarian Premier declared that Greece was Bulgaria's "most important political partner in the Balkans".³⁹ The new confidence built in the bilateral relations was such that during FYROM's

³⁰ See «Συμφωνία Μεταξύ της Κυβερνήσεως της Ελληνικής Δημοκρατίας και της Κυβερνήσεως της Δημοκρατίας της Βουλγαρίας για την Προώθηση και Αμοιβαία Προστασία των Επενδύσεων», *Επετηρίδα Αμυντικής & Εξωτερικής Πολιτικής 1995*, Ελληνικό Ίδρυμα Ευρωπαϊκής και Εξωτερικής Πολιτικής, Αθήνα 1995, σς. 275-282.

³¹ Νίκος Χίος, «Μέσω της Ελλάδος αφομοιώνει η Σόφια τις ευρωπαϊκές δομές», *Η Καθημερινή*, 31 Οκτωβρίου 1993.

³² Assessment shared by various interviewees in Athens and Sofia.

³³ For more on both issues see below.

³⁴ See below.

³⁵ Interview with a former senior Greek diplomat, 10/02/2017.

³⁶ Reports of the Greek President's visit, available at <http://www.hri.org/news/balkans/bta/1995/95-11-21.bta.html> (last accessed: 14/02/2017).

³⁷ See Nurcan Ozgur, «Οι σχέσεις Τουρκίας-Βουλγαρίας από το 1989 μέχρι σήμερα», in Faruk Sonmezoglu (ed.) *Μύθος και Πραγματικότητα. Ανάλυση της Τουρκικής Εξωτερικής Πολιτικής*, translation from Turkish Χρήστος Τσιβιτζιογλου Τόμος Α' (Αθήνα: Ινφογνώμων 2001), σς. 506, 512, also Petko Bocharov, "Bulgaria: Turkey Opens New Chapter in Relations With Neighbor", *RFE/RL*, 9 December 1997.

³⁸ Vesselin Dimitrov, "Learning to Play the Game: Bulgaria's Relations with Multilateral Organizations", *Southeast European Politics*, Vol.1, No.2, December 2000, p.106.

³⁹ Γ.Ε. Δουδούμη, *Η σύγχρονη Βουλγαρία. Προβλήματα και προοπτικές*, (Αθήνα: Ίδιωτική 1999), σ. 92.

serious inter-ethnic conflict of 2001, it is reputed that Sofia suggested to Athens a coordinated dispatch of military forces into FYROM, a proposal turned down by the latter.⁴⁰

It could be argued that by the beginning of 2000s bilateral relations had acquired a dynamic of good, working relations irrespective, at large, by the political changes in both countries. Thus, following the election of Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha (Симеон Сакскобургготски) as Bulgaria's new Prime Minister, in July 2001, there were differences between the two sides concerning shares in the company that would run the Burgas-Alexandroupolis pipeline, or on the issue of the closure of the nuclear reactors at the nuclear power plant at Kozloduy.⁴¹ Nevertheless, when the Greek Premier Kostas Simitis (Κώστας Σημίτης) visited Sofia, in January 2002, he stressed Greek support for Bulgaria's accession to NATO and the EU, there was an agreement for the avoidance of double taxation, while the Greek Premier announced the Greek plan for the reconstruction of the Balkans, a project that also included Bulgaria.⁴² It was, however, bilateral economic relations that were "pushing relations forward": by 2004 around 1,100 Greek companies were present in Bulgaria providing employment to around 85,000 people⁴³, Greek tourists in Bulgaria were spending annually around \$130 million, Greek students another \$20 million, while it was estimated that around \$400 million were sent annually to Bulgaria by Bulgarian migrants in Greece.⁴⁴ Bulgaria's and Romania's entry into the EU, in January 2007, was greatly welcomed in Athens, as finally Greece was acquiring common borders with the rest of the EU.⁴⁵ During the same period, the new Greek government of Kostas Karamanlis (Κώστας Καραμανλής), and the new Bulgarian government of Sergei Stanisev (Сергей Станишев) finalized the agreement (March 2007) on the Burgas-Alexandroupolis pipeline.⁴⁶

Since the start of Greece's "debt crisis" its image has taken a hit in the Balkans (see separate section). Bilateral relations between the two countries continued despite the introversion of the Greek political system as a consequence of the crisis. Despite the negative publicity that Greece receives in the Bulgarian press, Bulgarian politicians are quite reserved in their judgments and do not, with some exceptions, appear to play down the role of Greece in the region and relations between the two countries. In fact, there are occasions when senior Bulgarian politicians openly expressed their support to Greece in its time of need; such was the case of former Deputy Prime Minister Meglena Kuneva (Μεγлена Κунеβα).⁴⁷

There were also observers and opinion makers in Greece who considered that, with the severe weakening of the Greek position in the region, Bulgaria will be seeking to take advantage of the situation in order to increase its own influence both in regional affairs and in the context of multilateral organizations like the EU and NATO.⁴⁸ However, this is not the message that one gets from the Greek MFA. A senior diplomat with knowledge of the Greek-Bulgarian relations insisted that relations between the two countries have considerably strengthened in recent years. The same diplomat also stressed that the current Greek political leadership considers relations with

⁴⁰ See below.

⁴¹ See below.

⁴² Νίκος Μαράκης, «Η ατζέντα του κ.Σημίτη στη Βουλγαρία», *ΤΟ ΒΗΜΑ*, 20 Ιανουαρίου 2002. For the project see below.

⁴³ «Στα 3,2 δις. Δολάρια οι ελληνικές επενδύσεις στη Βουλγαρία», *Ημερησία*, 8-11 Απριλίου 2004.

⁴⁴ Ibid, also *Dnevnik*, "Greek Business in Bulgaria", *Dnevnik Foreign Investments Supplement*, Monday, 23 June 2003.

⁴⁵ See below.

⁴⁶ See below.

⁴⁷ Conference "Duality of the crisis in Europe: Solidarity and foreign policy to a test", European Council on Foreign Relations, Sofia Office & European Debates, an initiative of the Deputy Prime Minister for European Policies Coordination and Institutional Affairs, Sofia, 5 February 2016. Kuneva also reminded the audience in the conference that Greece had supported Bulgaria in difficult times and that Bulgaria should respond in kind.

⁴⁸ Interview with a former senior Greek diplomat, 10/022017.

Bulgaria as being of “strategic importance” for Greece and that even at the personal level there has been ‘chemistry’ between the top officials that is beneficial for strengthening of relations.⁴⁹

Greek diplomatic sources also stress the importance and uniqueness of the *High Level Cooperation Council* between Greece and Bulgaria.⁵⁰ The Council kicked off in July 2010 under Yorgos Papandreou (Γιώργος Παπανδρέου) and Boyko Borisov (Бойко Борисов) governments. Its second session took place in Athens in December 2012 and included meetings between the PMs of the two countries, Samaras (Σαμαράς) and Borisov. The third session took place in August 2016 on the occasion of Greek PM Tsipras’ (Τσίπρας) visit to Sofia. The economic crisis affecting Greece is a reason cited for the four-year lull in the political dialogue.⁵¹ But PM Boyko Borisov stressed as such the continuing importance of bilateral relations: “though they may belong to different political families, the two governments are ‘unquestionably of one mind in all critical spheres’ and have always supported one another in times of crisis”.⁵² A few days before the visit Greek government sources were quoted as saying that “Turkey’s destabilisation will act as a catalyst” in the developments in the region”, while Tsipras wrote on twitter before his departure that “Bulgaria is our closest partner in the Balkan”.⁵³ The joint statements issued by the two Premiers “pointed to the role of the two countries as pillars of stability within the surrounding region, at a time of generalised destabilisation in their neighbourhood, and noted their agreement for deeper cooperation within the EU and NATO in order to strengthen this role and to ensure security, stability, peace and growth in the region”.⁵⁴ It is, thus, clear that this Council and bilateral relations in general have continued to operate throughout the turbulent period of the Greek debt crisis and under different governments.

It’s worth also noting that other developments in recent years have put relations between the two countries to test or in other cases reaffirmed their common interests. One example of the former is the refugee and migrant crisis of 2015, which became one of the most serious political and security crises in the EU in recent decades and brought the Schengen zone to the verge of collapse. During the crisis, the Hungarian diplomacy and the Viktor Orban, the unofficial leader of the Visegrad 4 in their attempt to challenge the European mainstream, repeatedly attempted to ‘recruit’ the Bulgarian government and to convince them of the need to isolate Greece. PM Borisov, despite his anxiety over the consequences of the crisis and his occasional ‘strict rhetoric’ on the issue, rejected the offers made by the Visegrad countries. According to diplomatic sources, he stressed that there cannot be a solution to the crisis that does not include also Greece.⁵⁵ While Greece is naturally a ‘frontline state’ for the EU when it comes to mixed migration waves, it is clear that for Bulgaria also the problem is a potential source of serious policy problems, economic consequence and security concern. Thus, the 2015 crisis showed that both countries should intensify their collaboration in the EU and beyond.

Another example is how both Bulgaria and Greece found themselves left out of the so called ‘Berlin process’, an initiative of the German Ministry for Foreign Affairs aiming to maintain the EU accession momentum in the Western Balkans. Neither Greece nor Bulgaria have been invited to participate in this process. And this is despite the fact that this initiative got extended in time

⁴⁹ Interview with a senior Greek diplomat, 9/02/2017. This point is confirmed also by sources in the Bulgarian diplomacy.

⁵⁰ Interview with a senior Greek diplomat, 9/02/2017.

⁵¹ Stoimen Pavlov, “Second Tsipras visit to Bulgaria buoys up Bulgaria-Greece relations”, *Radio Bulgaria*, 3 August 2016, <http://bnr.bg/en/post/100722507/second-tsipras-visit-to-bulgaria-buoys-up-bulgaria-greece-relations> (last accessed: 15/2/2017)

⁵² Ibid

⁵³ Saranthis Mihalopoulos, “Tsipras to ‘upgrade’ ties with Sofia after Turkish turmoil”, *EurActiv.com*, 1 August 2016, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/transport/news/tsipras-to-upgrade-ties-with-sofia-after-turkish-turmoil/> (last accessed: 15/2/2017)

⁵⁴ N. Lionakis, “Greece and Bulgaria can be an axis of stability, Tsipras and Borisov agree”, *Αθηναϊκό Μακεδονικό Πρακτορείο Ειδήσεων*, 1 August 2016, <http://www.amna.gr/english/article/14688/Greece-and-Bulgaria-can-be-an-axis-of-stability--Tsipras-and-Borisov-agree> (last accessed: 15/2/2017)

⁵⁵ Interview with a senior Greek diplomat, Athens, 9/02/2017.

(running now for a fourth year), in scope and gradually attracting several EU member states with role and stakes in the Balkan region (UK, France, Italy, Austria, Slovenia, Croatia). These developments reveal that Greece and Bulgaria should continue to put a premium in their coordination and collaboration in issues of common interest both in the region and in the context of multilateral organisations.

Greece and Bulgaria's accession to European Union

Bulgaria's and Romania's accession to the EU in January 2007 was hailed in Greece, as shaping a new "geopolitical reality" in the SE of Europe, beneficial to Greek diplomatic and economic interests - promoting commerce and tourism and safeguarding Greek investments in both countries.⁵⁶ It is, thus, important to look into the background to accessions and to understand the role that Greece played in aiding Bulgaria's accession process.

With the decision for the accession of the ten new members to the EU and the exclusion of Bulgaria and Romania, which was based on objective assessment of their progress in fulfilling conditionality reforms, it became clear that the main challenge would be to keep the realistic accession prospects alive despite the looming 'enlargement fatigue'.⁵⁷ Both countries aimed at maintaining the momentum for accession, continue negotiations and secure end dates for the finalization of the process and the eventual accession.⁵⁸ Their aims coincided with the broader goal of the Greek government of ensuring the continuation of the Balkan accessions. The Greek government of the time worked systematically during the period between the decision for the fifth wave of enlargement (2002) and the accession of Bulgaria and Romania (2007) to strengthen the agenda of the Balkan accessions.

Before Greece's 2003 Council Presidency, the Greek diplomacy worked to maintain the case of Bulgarian and Romanian accession high on the EU agenda. In May 2002, Greece submitted to the Council a non-paper in support of the accession process of the two countries, which was well-received by the rest of the EU members. The non-paper outlined the main arguments in favour of continuing the process, while providing proposals such as specific end dates for the finalization of negotiations and the actual accession as well as a generous increase in the pre-accession funds available for the two countries in the period 2004-2006.⁵⁹ Moreover, during the same period, the Greek diplomacy contributed to the success in the finalization of certain 'sticky' chapters of the accession negotiations. In particular, it contributed to the closure of the energy chapter in November 2002, despite the challenge posed by the requirement for the partial close down of Kozloduy nuclear plant.⁶⁰

It is worth recounting in some detail the issue of the Kozloduy nuclear reactor. Following the Chernobyl nuclear accident in 1986, there was growing concern in Western Europe that Soviet-build nuclear power stations all over Eastern Europe were "unsafe", posing a real danger for the

⁵⁶ See, for example the following article: «Η Ελλάδα, έως τώρα γεωγραφική ευρωπαϊκή νησίδα στη Νοτιοανατολική Ευρώπη, ενσωματώνεται στον χερσαίο εδαφικό κορμό της ΕΕ μέσω της Βουλγαρίας και της Ρουμανίας. Αποκτά ευρωπαϊκή ενδοχώρα, απρόσκοπτη πρόσβαση στις παραδουνάβιες περιοχές, τους οδικούς και ενεργειακούς διαδρόμους που συνδέουν την ΕΕ με τις αγορές της πρώην Σοβιετικής Ένωσης, ενώ το λιμάνι της Θεσσαλονίκης έρχεται πιο κοντά στον Δούναβη, τον μεγάλο αυτό υδάτινο δίαυλο μέσω του οποίου διακινούνται αγαθά και εμπορεύματα από τη δυτική Ευρώπη προς της Μαύρη Θάλασσα και τον Καύκασο και αντίστροφα. Πέρα αυτών, διασφαλίζονται οι πλούσιες ελληνικές επενδυτικές δραστηριότητες στις δύο αυτές χώρες, δημιουργούνται προϋποθέσεις για ακόμη πιο εύκολες οικονομικές συναλλαγές, ενώ ο τουρισμός, ειδικά στη Βόρεια Ελλάδα θα τονωθεί». Σταύρος Τζίμας, «Η Ε.Ε. αποκτά νοτιοανατολικό πυλώνα», *Η Καθημερινή*, 15 Οκτωβρίου 2006, σ. 12.

⁵⁷ This section is based largely on Σωτήρης Βαλντέν (Wallden), «Τα Βαλκάνια στην ελληνική Προεδρία της Ευρωπαϊκής Ένωσης (2003)», στο Τάσος Γιάννιτσης (επιμ.) *Η Τέταρτη Ελληνική Προεδρία στην Ευρωπαϊκή Ένωση*, Αθήνα, 2005, Κριτική

⁵⁸ Βαλντέν, op. cit., p.54.

⁵⁹ Ibid, pp. 54-55. The non-paper is available at Γιαννίτσης, op.cit.

⁶⁰ Βαλντέν, op.cit. pp. 54-55.

Continent. The *International Atomic Energy Agency* (IAEA) inspected for the first time Kozloduy in 1992 criticizing both the management and the maintenance of the station as “sloppy” and “inadequate”. As a result, the fate of the Kozloduy power station would become an issue in the negotiations between the EU and Bulgaria. The EU would be asking for the closure of four of Kozloduy’s reactors, out of a total of six reactors. Successive Bulgarian governments however, refused to agree, investing instead significant sums of money for the upgrading of Kozloduy, estimated at around \$200 million until 2000. Sofia was arguing that Kozloduy was vital for the Bulgarian economy, supplying as much as 40% of the electricity domestically, while Bulgaria was also exporting electricity all over the Balkans, to countries like Turkey, Greece, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Albania. Sofia was arguing that the shutdown of the four reactors, as demanded by the EU, would cost the Bulgarian economy as much as \$6.5 billion, both in lost exports and in the imports of electricity that Bulgaria would have to make in order to make up the domestic electrical power deficit. In its refusal to agree to the closure of the four reactors, Sofia had the solid support of Bulgarian public opinion. Many Bulgarians felt that Brussels were condemning their country to economic ruin as the price of entry into the Union. Various surveys indicated that a strong majority of Bulgarians (as high as 75%) were opposing the closure of the four reactors and would support postponing their shutdown, even if that delayed Bulgaria’s entry into the EU.⁶¹

Returning to the question of Bulgaria’s accession to the EU, during the European Council in Copenhagen (December 2002), the Greek proposals were largely adopted. It was decided that 2007 would be the target year for accession of Bulgaria and Romania. Moreover, an increase of 30% on average for the period 2004-2006 was agreed for the pre-accession aid to the two countries. However, no indicative date for the finalization of accession negotiations was adopted due to reluctance from several member states. During the period 2002-2003, Greece collaborated intensively and held meetings both at diplomatic staff and ministerial level with both candidate countries in view of better preparation for their accession process.⁶²

The implementation of the newly adopted strengthened pre-accession strategy for Bulgaria and Romania became one of the priorities of the Greek EU Presidency (Jan-June 2003). During the signing of the Accession Treaty of the ten new member states, which took place in Athens in April 2003, a declaration favourable to the quick accession of Bulgaria and Romania was adopted by the 25 old and new members. This move aimed to allay the fears that new member states would create obstacles to the accession process of the two Balkan candidates. In May 2003, the Council adopted revised accession partnerships with the two countries. Moreover, during the Greek Presidency the negotiating chapters with Bulgaria on transport policy and the environment were closed; by the end of the Greek Presidency on 30 June, Bulgaria had closed 25 of the 31 negotiating chapters.⁶³

The Greek Presidency was also beneficial to the aim of fixing a date for the finalization of the accession negotiations and for the handling of the ‘tough’ negotiating chapters that had fiscal implications.⁶⁴ Especially for the latter, the Greek Presidency worked to ensure that the finalization of the Bulgarian and Romanian accessions would not be impeded by the fact that their expected entry date would come after the expiration of the previously agreed fiscal framework that covered the accession of the fifth enlargement wave. The Greek Presidency worked laboriously to achieve a detachment of the accession negotiations from the tight fiscal framework previously agreed upon. Overall, as Wallden points out, the successful outcome of the Greek diplomacy’s wording could be clearly seen in the wording of the conclusions Presidency

⁶¹ Elena Yonceva, “Bulgaria Backtracks on Reactor Closures”, *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, BCR, No.375, 21 October 2002, www.iwpr.net/index.pl/archive/bcr2 (last accessed: 15/01/2003).

⁶² Βαλντέν, op.cit. p. 55.

⁶³ Ibid. pp.55-56.

⁶⁴ Ibid. pp.56-57.

after the Thessaloniki Summit, which were favourable to the two countries' unimpeded accession process:⁶⁵

“Bulgaria and Romania are part of the same inclusive and irreversible enlargement process. Following the conclusions of the European Council in Copenhagen and depending on further progress in complying with the membership criteria, the objective is to welcome Bulgaria and Romania as members in 2007. To this end, the pace of negotiations will be maintained, and these will continue on the same basis and principles that applied to the ten acceding states with each candidate judged on its own merits. Building on significant progress achieved, the Union supports Bulgaria and Romania in their efforts to achieve the objective of concluding negotiations in 2004, and invites them to step up their preparations on the ground. Discussions or agreement on future policy reforms, or the new financial perspective, will neither impede the pursuit and conclusion of accession negotiations nor be prejudged by the outcome of these negotiations. The European Council in December 2003, based on the regular reports from the Commission and the strategy paper, will assess progress achieved with a view to setting out the framework for the conclusion of accession negotiations”.⁶⁶

Signing of bilateral agreements

Bulgaria is the only country in the Balkan region with which the crisis-ridden Greece has increased agreements, memoranda, and protocols of cooperation both at the political and economic level.⁶⁷ The two countries have completed numerous projects and initiatives- bilateral or within existing EU frameworks- dealing with various parameters affecting directly or indirectly their economic relations, such as facilitation of transport, the improvement of infrastructure (roads, communication networks, cross-border passages), the twinning of cities and the easier circulation of citizens, especially in the period before the EU accession of Bulgaria. Many of these initiatives were realized through EU funding. There were and still are initiatives and projects on a strictly bilateral basis, such as the lifting of visa restrictions for Bulgarian citizens in 2001 and the Hellenic Plan for the Economic reconstruction of the Balkans (HiPERB).

Greece, Bulgaria and relations with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM)

Greek and Bulgarian perceptions of FYROM and the Macedonian question

Both Greece and Bulgaria have had a close involvement with the so-called Macedonian Question in its various historical phases, since its appearance in the last quarter of the 19th Century as part of the wider Eastern Question. Bitter adversaries, that had fought each other a number of times during the first half of the 20th Century over Macedonia, managed by the 1970s to overcome their historic antagonism and to establish friendly relations. With the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia facing a worsening crisis during the first half of 1991, both Athens and Sofia were called upon to deal with the prospect of a Yugoslav disintegration, viewing developments in Yugoslavia with apprehension but in a fundamentally different way. Athens expressed its support for the preservation of Yugoslavia's unity, as Yugoslavia constituted the main export route for

⁶⁵ Ibid. p.57.

⁶⁶ Council of the European Union, Thessaloniki European Council 19-20 June 2003, Presidency Conclusions, 11638/03, Brussels, 1 October 2003. Available at: <file:///Users/ioannis/Downloads/76279.pdf> (last accessed: 13/02/2017).

⁶⁷ Ritsa Panagiotou and Anastasios Valvis, “How is the sovereign debt crisis affecting Greece's relations with the Balkan countries and Greece's standing in the region? An initial impact assessment”, *ELIAMEP*, 2014, 138 p.

Greek products to the EC, and because the disintegration of the Yugoslav state would open the way for the emergence of an independent “Republic of Macedonia”. The internal, political dimension of the Yugoslav crisis was absent at large from Greece’s public debate. In Bulgaria’s case, its political class expressed at large sympathy for the democratic movements in Slovenia and Croatia, including their demands for self-determination and independence – Slobodan Milošević, by contrast, was seen as “the figurehead of oppressive Serb nationalism, bent on hegemony in the area”.⁶⁸

When the Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia declared its independence in September 1991, Greek and Bulgarian responses were quite diverse. The great majority of Greeks were more than certain that the new state had irredentist pretensions towards Greece’s northern part of territory; that the state’s irredentism was expressed via the name *Macedonia*, articles in the Constitution as well as symbols; and finally that the name *Macedonia* belonged to Greek historical and cultural heritage and that the Slavs living in that state had no right in using it. Athens will use its diplomatic power, seeking to block the international recognition of the new state until it had effected a change upon its constitutional name. In fact, diplomatic efforts to achieve that aim will dominate Greek foreign policy, from the end of 1991 until the signing of the so-called Interim Agreement in New York in September 1995, “overshadowing” the main preoccupation for Greek foreign policy and Greek public at large since 1974, namely the “Turkish threat”. In Bulgaria’s case, in discussions that took place in the parliamentary Committee for National Security & Foreign Policy during the second half of 1991, the view gained ground that Bulgaria ought to be one of the first countries to recognize the independence of the “Republic of Macedonia”, and that it was the right thing to do so.⁶⁹ This view was supported by the UDF, by the country’s President Zhelyu Zhelev, and a section of the BSP.⁷⁰ The merits of recognizing its newly-independent neighbor under its constitutional name were founded on the expectations that recognition would further reduce Serbian influence in the country, opening the way to a rapprochement with Bulgaria that would allow “the Bulgarian consciousness of the Slav population of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to be awakened” - a view that reflected “extremely powerful emotional currents” that had surfaced in Bulgarian society since late 1989, and which had to do with the identity of the Slav Macedonian population.⁷¹

On 15 January 1992, the Bulgarian government announced the recognition of the “Republic of Macedonia”. However it proved to be a hasty decision, taken without proper internal consultations.⁷² Not only that, speaking on television, President Zhelev expressed his agreement with the government decision, adding at the same time however that it was the “*Macedonian state*” that Bulgaria was recognizing, not the “*Macedonian people*”. While in a press conference a few days later, on 10 February, Foreign Minister Stoyan Ganev stated that Bulgaria “does not recognize the existence of a Macedonian nation and the presence of a minority linked to the Republic of Macedonia”. He also insisted that the “leadership of the Republic of Macedonia should give clear guarantees that the Republic had no territorial claims against Bulgaria, and that it had no intention of raising the issue of the existence of a (Macedonian) minority either in Bulgaria, or in Greece, or anywhere else”.⁷³ It was clear for many that Philip Dimitrov had proceeded with the recognition hastily, without Sofia having secured first any kind of commitment concerning Skopje’s specific positions and practices on matters that concerned Bulgaria; and although Sofia was unsuccessful in its delayed attempt to obtain the guarantees it sought from Skopje, there

⁶⁸ For Sofia’s policy see F. L. Altmann, ‘Ex-Yugoslavia’s neighbours: who wants what?’ *The World Today* 48.8-9 (Aug.-Sept.1992), p. 164.

⁶⁹ Желю Желев, *В голямата политика* (София: Труд, 1998) , с. 152.

⁷⁰ *ibid*, с. 153.

⁷¹ Maria Bakalova, “Bulgarian ‘Macedonian Nationalism in the post 1989 Decade”, *New Balkan Politics*, Issue 6, www.newbalkanpolitics.org.mk/Oldsite/issue_6 (last accessed 5/11/2004).

⁷² The decision was taken by a close circle of advisers of Phillip Dimitrov without however a government consensus regarding its timing. Alexandrov (ed.), *Bulgarian Foreign Policy after 10 November 1989* (Sofia: Intela 1997), p. 72.

⁷³ ‘Bulgaria does not recognize ‘Macedonian nation’, wants Balkan charter’, *BTA*, 10 February 1992, *BBC SWB* EE/1302 I, 12 February 1992.

were a series of initiatives to support FYROM in 1992-1994⁷⁴, as Sofia was attempting to bring closer the two countries, a policy dictated at large by the idea of “one people, one nation, two countries”.⁷⁵ By 1994 the emergence of the so-called “language dispute” between Sofia and Skopje would put a “freeze” at bilateral relations until 1999, as the latter made recognition of the “Macedonian language” by Bulgaria, essentially, a sine qua non for developing bilateral relations.⁷⁶

Sofia’s decision to recognize FYROM under its constitutional name generated the first serious, post-Cold War crisis in Greek-Bulgarian relations: the Greek government of Konstantinos Mitsotakis made it clear to Sofia that it had to stop counting on Greek support vis-à-vis the EC, at a time when Bulgaria was facing serious economic difficulties.⁷⁷ The crisis, however, proved temporary, and was soon over⁷⁸, as for both sides it was paramount to safeguard the good level of bilateral relations enjoyed since the 1970s.⁷⁹ The two countries, however, continued to often have divergent views on key issues. Sofia disagreed with embargoes imposed by Athens on Skopje, in August 1992 and in February 1994; Sofia offered to place the country’s ports at FYROM’s disposal.⁸⁰ During the inter-ethnic conflicts that broke out in FYROM in the first half of 2001, the Bulgarian Prime Minister Ivan Kostov suggested unsuccessfully to his Greek counterpart, Kostas Simitis the dispatch of military troops by the two countries in FYROM, with the prior consent of the FYROM government⁸¹. Athens rejected in principle the idea of Balkan countries getting involved militarily in regional conflicts⁸², a position that had already been formulated during the Bosnian crisis (1992-1995) when Greece objected Turkey’s proposals in favor of a military intervention in the conflict. In Bulgaria they would also watch with unease how, following the signing of the Interim Agreement of New York, in September 1995, Greece would expand its economic presence in FYROM, turning itself into one of the most important economic and trade partners of FYROM.⁸³

Greek-Bulgarian cooperation on FYROM within the EU

In July 2006 the Bulgarian Foreign Minister Ivailo Kalfin (Ивайло Калфин) stated that Sofia would support Skopje’s European ambitions, provided that Skopje ceased its “hostility towards the Bulgarian nation and its history” and “showed respect for the common historical and cultural

⁷⁴ See Γεώργιος Χρηστίδης, «Η διαμόρφωση της βουλγαρικής εξωτερικής πολιτικής απέναντι στην ΠΓΔΜ, 1989-2006», στο *Διαστάσεις της μετάβασης και η ευρωπαϊκή προοπτική των χωρών της Βαλκανικής*, Πρακτικά Α΄ Επιστημονικού Συνεδρίου του ΤΒΣΦ, (Θεσσαλονίκη 2007), σ. 179-180

⁷⁵ Interview with a former senior Greek diplomat, 10/022017

⁷⁶ Χρηστίδης, «Η διαμόρφωση της βουλγαρικής εξωτερικής πολιτικής απέναντι στην ΠΓΔΜ, 1989-2006, σ. 181.

⁷⁷ Κεντρωτής, οπ. παρ., σ. 411.

⁷⁸ See for example the statements and the results of Dimitrov’s and Ganev’s visits to Athens in May 1992. “Bulgarian Prime Minister Dimitrov on Visit to Greece”, *BTA*, 21 May 1992, *BBC SWB*, EE/1392 A1/1, 28 May 1992 και “Bulgarian Foreign Minister Visits Greece: Economic Protocol Signed”, *BTA*, 26 May 1992, *BBC SWB*, EE/1395 A1/2, 1 June 1992.

⁷⁹ As the Bulgarian Foreign Minister Stanislav Daskalov (Станислав Даскалов) stated in October 1993: “Differences between Bulgaria and Greece concerning the new state have their historical explanation and are expression of a sovereign policy. It’s important however not to become a wider, regional problem”. Quoted in Νίκος Χίος, «Μέσω της Ελλάδος αφομοιώνει η Σόφια τις ευρωπαϊκές δομές», *Η Καθημερινή*, 31 Οκτωβρίου 1993.

⁸⁰ Χρηστίδης, «Η διαμόρφωση της βουλγαρικής εξωτερικής πολιτικής απέναντι στην ΠΓΔΜ, 1989-2006, σ. 181

⁸¹ *TO BHMA*, «Τηλεφώνημα με σημασία για τα Σκόπια», 9 Μαρτίου 2001, cited in Αριστοτέλης Τσιαμπίρης, «Ελληνική Εξωτερική Πολιτική και Μακεδονικό Ζήτημα, 1991-2002», Παναγιώτης Τσάκωνας, *Σύγχρονη Ελληνική Εξωτερική Πολιτική. Μια Συνολική Προσέγγιση* Τόμος Β΄ (Αθήνα: Σιδέρης 2003), σ.484.

⁸² Interview with a former senior Greek diplomat, 10/2/2017

⁸³ During the official visit of the Bulgarian President in FYROM on 26-27 February 2002, an article in the authoritative Bulgarian newspaper *Kapital* noted characteristically that “in practice Greece has signed a few agreements with Skopje (less than we have), but the share of Greek companies in Skopje is huge”. Cited in Ulrich Buechschuetz, “Are Macedonian-Bulgarian Relations Improving?”, *Balkan Report, RFE/RL*, Vol.6, No.12, 8 March 2002, www.rferl.org/balkan-report/2002/03/12-080302.html, (last accessed: 11/3/2002).

past, and good-neighbourliness towards Bulgaria”⁸⁴- the very first time, after FYROM’s independence, that Bulgaria’s head diplomat had expressly linked Bulgaria’s political support for FYROM’s European ambitions with matters of history and culture. Kalfin’s statement made clear a feeling that had been present for some time in various Bulgarian circles – historians, diplomats and journalists – and in public opinion at large, i. e., that Sofia had followed a policy of one-way support for FYROM, without getting much in return, especially on sensitive issues such as historical heritage and minorities.⁸⁵

Nonetheless, no Bulgarian government raised, until 2012, any objections in EU institutions concerning FYROM’s European ambitions. A change in the Bulgarian position appeared to have taken place in 2012: describing his country’s position in July 2012, regarding Greece’s dispute with FYROM, the Bulgarian President, Plevneliev, delivered the following warning:

“Concerning the name, Bulgaria does not get involved in the dispute. We are sure that a solution will be found in the context of UN’s process. When this happens we state that the name should not create preconditions for territorial pretensions, whether from the one or from the other side... We support Macedonia’s European ambitions and its access to NATO. We, however, believe that when someone wants to become member of a family, he should prove that he respects every member of the family. That he appreciates the past, history and, of course, EU’s general principles regarding good-neighborliness... We judge what the officials do from their actions”.⁸⁶

Sofia’s threat of withdrawing its support from FYROM’s EU ambitions was “materialised” in December 2012. During an EU meeting that discussed opening accession talks with FYROM, Bulgaria stated that “it could not support a country that had failed to nurture good-neighborly relations”⁸⁷, siding in effect with Greece that during the meeting had underlined, once more, that it could not consent to setting a start date for membership talks, on the grounds of the well-known dispute. Bulgaria’s support was “not unconditional” Bulgarian President Plevneliev and Prime Minister Borisov warned, accusing FYROM “of waging an anti-Bulgarian campaign and of replacing historical facts”.⁸⁸ Furthermore, during the last one and a half years, Athens and Sofia have actually supported each other in insisting in EU organs on the need for Skopje to fully respect the principle of good-neighborly relations.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Quoted in X. Николов, "На хоризонта- "край на историята" по български", *Политика*, 11-17 август 2006.

⁸⁵ See Б. Димитров, "Македонският Гордиев възел", *Политика*, 28 юли - 3 август 2006· К. Узунов, "Македония - гробището на илюзиите", *Труд*, 2 август 2006.

⁸⁶ Interview of R. Plevneliev to Σταύρος Τζίμας, «Τα Σκόπια να σεβαστούν όλα τα μέλη της Ε.Ε.», *Η Καθημερινή*, 8 Ιουλίου 2012, σ. 16

⁸⁷ Sinisa Jakov Marusic, “Bulgaria and Greece Block Macedonia's EU Talks”, *BIRN, Balkan Insight*, 12 December 2012, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/bulgaria-joins-greece-in-blocking-macedonia-s-eu-bid>, (last accessed: 5/7/2016)

⁸⁸ Reportedly, before the meeting Sofia had set out three terms for its neighbor in exchange for its support in the EU: the signing of a friendship and cooperation deal, joint government sessions as well as an agreement for joint celebrations of notable personalities and events “in our common history”. Ibid

⁸⁹ Information provided by a senior diplomatic source.

2. BILATERAL PROBLEMS AND DISPUTES

Disputes over heritage

The return of the “Slavonic-Bulgarian History” to Athos (1998)

On 12 January 1998, Bulgaria’s President Petar Stoyanov (Петър Стоянов) and the Bulgarian Minister of Culture, Emma Moskova (Емма Москова) announced the return to the Zografos Monastery in Athos of the stolen “Slavonic-Bulgarian History” (История славянобългарска) book, written by the Bulgarian monk Saint Paisius of Hilendar (Свети Паисий Хилендарски) in the 18th century and considered as one of the most influential works of the Bulgarian national revival. The manuscript was removed in 1985 from Zografos monastery in Mount Athos by the Bulgarian State Security (държавна сигурност).⁹⁰ The monks took notice of the fact that the manuscript was missing only at the beginning of the 1990s, while in 1992 a former agent of the Bulgarian State Security claimed that the manuscript was kept at the office of the Head of the Bulgarian National Intelligence Service (Национална Разузнавателна Служба). In 1996 Brigo Asparoukhov (Бриго Аспарухов), the Head of the Bulgarian Intelligence Service, delivered the book to the Director of the National Historical Museum in Sofia, Bozhidar Dimitrov (Божидар Димитров), where it was put on public display. Petar Stoyanov took the decision to return the so-called “History” to its rightful owners at Zografos Monastery, receiving considerable criticism at home for “betraying” Bulgarian national interests.⁹¹

The issue of religious relics removed from monasteries in Northern Greece

The issue of the stolen religious relics goes back to the First World War, when in 1917 numerous relics were removed by force from two monasteries in the region of present-day Serres - the Timiou Prodromou Monastery (Μονή Τιμίου Προδρόμου) and the Monastery Ikosifinissa (Ιερά Μονή Εικοσιφοινίσσης) - and transferred to Bulgaria; a total of 691 ecclesiastical manuscripts and various utensils were stolen from the two monasteries. In 1920, based upon the Treaty of Neuilly (November 1919), 259 manuscripts were returned to Greece. During the Second World War, there was a further looting of the two monasteries by the Bulgarian occupation authorities. Following the end of the Second World War, the issue of the religious relics did not figure in the negotiations concerning the re-establishment of diplomatic relations (1954) between Greece and Bulgaria, neither was part of the important 12 agreements that were signed by the two countries in 1964. The issue of the “missing relics” would be reportedly discussed by Konstantinos Karamanlis and Todor Zhivkov in the 1970s, while in the 1980s it was raised by high-ranking Greek officials, like President Christos Sartzetakis (Χρήστος Σαρτζετάκης), MFA Karolos Papoulias, and Stelios Papathemelis (Στέλιος Παπαθεμελής). On 22 August 1990, during an international meeting organized by the Research Center for Slavic-Byzantine Studies “Ivan Dujcev” in Sofia, many “lost manuscripts” of the two monasteries were presented to the public, while it became known that other religious relics belonging to the two monasteries were kept at the National Historical Museum in Sofia, where some have since been put on display.⁹² In 2014, during preparations for the high-profile Bulgarian celebrations of the

⁹⁰ The precious book was taken, and replaced by a copy, by agents of the Bulgarian State Security. The planning for the operation, code-named “Marathon”, began in 1972, as there were “fears” in Sofia that the Zografos Monastery could pass under “Romanian control”, with only 6 elderly Bulgarian monks left in it, while Romanian monks were moving in; until the fall of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe the Greek state would not allow monks from the eastern Bloc to come to Athos. In addition, it was claimed by the Bulgarian State Security that “criminals were planning to steal the book and sell it in Western Europe”. For an account of the “Marathon” operation see Христо Христов, *Операция Маратон* (София: Ciela 2012).

⁹¹ Ibid, с. 258

⁹² For a brief history of the looting of the relics see the official webpage of the Bishopric (Ιερά Μητρόπολις Σερρών και Νιγρίτης) <http://www.imsn.gr/mitropoli/istoria/keimilia>. For a useful background information on the

1000 years since the death of Czar Samuel, negotiations between Athens and Sofia, concerning the return of the relics in exchange for the bones of Czar Samuel, took place. According to a media report on the issue:

“On occasion of the important anniversary, the Bulgarian side wanted the cloth and the bones to arrive in Bulgaria, pressing the Greek side to grant them, but not providing reasonable assurance that they would return the church relics in exchange for them. Athens did not object to this exchange but it did not approve the celebrations planned by the Bulgarian side in Prespa, including the erection of statues, marble crosses, patriarchal liturgy, in the presence of the political and state leadership of the country and did not allow the events to take place. The unspoken reason is that the Greek side does not want to turn Prespa into a place that is permanently linked to Bulgarian nationalism, thus challenging the Greek identity in the region... However, the door to negotiations was not closed, nor did Athens and Sofia intend to disrupt the excellent bilateral relations on the issue. The talks continued at a rapid pace as the Bulgarian side was rushing to achieve results before the celebrations and the negotiations reached Cardiff, Wales and Baku, Azerbaijan. Greek Prime Minister at the time Antonis Samaras and Bulgarian President Rosen Plevneliev talked in Cardiff, during a NATO summit, and the Greek Prime Minister stated before the Bulgarian President that the commemoration could not be held in Prespa. They continued the talks on Samaras’ plane while travelling to Baku... The two statesmen agreed on Rosen Plevneliev bowing to the bones and the cloth in the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki, as a symbolic gesture and on the dialogue to continue at the level of delegations led by Ambassador of Bulgaria to Rome for the Bulgarian side and Chief Secretary of the Ministry of Culture Lina Mendoni for the Greek. However, when Lina Mendoni went to Sofia in October 2014, she established during the meetings that there were strong centres opposed to the return of the relics, which did not seem to comply with the political will of the government, and at the highest level at that. Lina Mendoni even told her associates that a senior leader in the field of archaeology, who had a strong influence on the Bulgarian spiritual and political class, made very rude remarks regarding the diplomats involved in the negotiations and even the President himself, firmly stating, “you will take nothing”.⁹³

There has been obviously considerable internal opposition to the return of the relics in Bulgaria, while there has been apparently difficulty on the Greek side “in defining with accuracy its demands concerning the artifacts it wanted to be returned”.⁹⁴ On 9 November 2015, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew (Βαρθολομαῖος) statements at the presence of the Bulgarian President Rosen Plevneliev (Росен Плевнелиев) - while he was awarded the highest state medal in Bulgaria “Stara Planina” - concerning the return of the looted relics, caused a “storm”, with the leader of the BSP, Mihail Mikov (Михаил Миков), accusing the Patriarch of “challenging the autonomy” of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and of “insulting behavior” at the expense of the Bulgarian people.⁹⁵ Evidently, the issue remains open for the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which, it

issue see Σπύρος Κουζινόπουλος, «Τα «Ελγίνεα της Μακεδονίας», *ΤΟ ΒΗΜΑ*, 19 Μαΐου 2002, <http://www.tovima.gr/culture/article/?aid=142670> (last accessed: 1/6/2016).

⁹³ “Samuel bones in exchange for Greek church relics”, *GRReporter*, 16 November 2015, http://www.grreporter.info/en/samuel_bones_exchange_greek_church_relics_failure/13576, (last accessed: 1/6/2016).

⁹⁴ Information provided by a diplomatic source

⁹⁵ From his side President Plevneliev stated that “issues like these are dealt by diplomatic means... Bulgarian politicians and diplomats have been aware (a long time now) of the problem and, according to my opinion, it has been resolved a long time now”. For the reactions caused by Bartholomew’s statements see *Fokus*, 9 ноември 2015, <http://www.focus-news.net/news/2015/11/09/2149234/vselenskiyat-patriarh-vartolomey-i-poiska-balgariya-da-varne-otnetite-po-vreme-na-voyni-sveshteni-bogosluzhebni-tsennosti-v-severna-gartsiya.html>, (last accessed 20/12/2015), *Fokus*, 11 ноември 2015, <http://www.focus-news.net/news/2015/11/11/2150355/mihail-mikov-bsp-povedeniето-na-vselenskiya-patriarh-vartolomey-i-skandalizira-tsyaloto-obshtestvo.html>, <http://www.focus-news.net/news/2015/11/11/2150034/mihail-mikov-bsp-tsyalostnoto-povedenie-na-vartolomey-i-v-balgariya-beshe-obidno-za-balgarskite-grazhdani-i-hristiyani.html>, (last accessed 20/12/2015), *Fokus*, 11 ноември 2015, <http://www.focus-news.net/news/2015/11/11/2150100/prezidentat-rosen-plevneliev-problemat-s-pretentsiite-na-vselenskiya-patriarh-vartolomey-i-e-reshen-otdavna.html>, (last accessed 20/12/2015).

should be reminded, maintains still canonical jurisdiction over the dioceses of Northern Greece. More recently, on 17 February 2016, the issue of the removed relics was raised at the Greek Parliament by Kostas Gioulekas (Κώστας Γκιουλέκας), MP for *New Democracy* and head of the party commission for culture.⁹⁶ According to media reports, an “exchange agreement” - the bones of Czar Samuel for the relics - was expected to be part of the third meeting of the *High Level Cooperation Council* between Greece and Bulgaria held on 1 August 2016 in Sofia.⁹⁷

Bulgarian archives and documents kept in Greece

An issue that is almost unknown in both countries and demands further clarification is that of Bulgarian archives and documents kept in Greece: for example, the archives of the Bulgarian High School for Girls (Българска девическа гимназия "Св. Благовещение") operating in Thessaloniki until the aftermath of the Second Balkan War, and kept today at the National Library in Athens, or Bulgarian documents kept at the Greek General Archives (Γενικά Αρχεία του Κράτους) in Komotini. Yura Konstantinova (Юра Константинова), a Bulgarian Historian at the Institute for Balkan Studies in Sofia, has suggested that artifacts and documents that are seen as objects of "cultural patrimony" and are kept by the other side should stop being "hidden", should be recorded and, most importantly, be free to access by researchers and the wider public.⁹⁸ The same historian has suggested that the time has come to look at the “dark pages” of our bilateral relationship, by examining the controversial aspects involved in the era of confrontation, beginning with the establishment of the Bulgarian Exarchate in 1870, up to the end of the Second World War. There are many “difficult issues”, involving in particular persecution and crimes committed against civilians during that period, that historians from each country should examine, on the basis of “each side” examining its “own dark pages”. The community of historians in both countries is mature and professional enough, to conduct such an examination without inflaming public opinion, or damaging bilateral relations.⁹⁹

Water management

The majority of Northern Greece’s rivers originate in neighboring countries, with Greece being the downstream country in four out of the five shared rivers. Roughly 25% of Greece’s renewable resources being are “imported”¹⁰⁰, making management of transboundary rivers an important issue particularly for Northern Greece and its local economy. Among the four rivers that flow into northern Greece from neighboring countries, three originate in Bulgaria - Nestos/Mesta, Strymonas/Struma and Evros/Maritza – a fact that underlines the importance of a smooth relationship with Sofia.

⁹⁶ According to Mr Gioulekas the discussions on the issue were “frozen” at the end of 2014, while the new Greek government formed, following the January 2015 elections, “failed to display any interest on the issue”. Mr Gioulekas called upon the government to examine all possible means, including legal recourse. See «Σε νομικό αγώνα για την επιστροφή ιερών κειμηλίων από τη Βουλγαρία καλεί ο Κ. Γκιουλέκας», *Το Ποντίκι Web*, 18 Φεβρουαρίου 2016, <http://www.topontiki.gr/article/160236/se-nomiko-agona-gia-tin-epistrofi-ieron-keimilion-apo-ti-voylgaria-kalei-o-k>, (last accessed 20/5/2016)

⁹⁷ "Нерешен проблем. И костите на Самуил сред темите за обсъждане", *Труд*, 30-31 юли 2016, с. 3

⁹⁸ Interview with Yura Konstantinova, Institute for Balkan Studies, Sofia, 13 February 2017.

⁹⁹ Thus it should be mentioned that the Institute for Balkan Studies in Sofia, established by the eminent historian and former Ambassador to Greece, Nikolai Todorov (Николай Тодоров), signed in 1975 an agreement of cooperation with its Greek counterpart, the Institute for Balkan Studies in Thessaloniki (known in Greek as *Ίδρυμα Μελετών Χερσονήσου του Αίμου – ΙΜΧΑ*). As a result of that agreement a total of nine scientific conferences were organized during the period 1975-2007, with the participation of around 250 scholars from both countries. Information provided by Yura Konstantinova

¹⁰⁰ Y. Mylopoulos, E. Kolokytha, D. Vagiona, E. Kampragou & E. Eleftheriadou, “HYDRODIPLOMACY IN PRACTICE: TRANSBOUNDARY WATER MANAGEMENT IN NORTHERN GREECE”, p.2, <http://www.srcosmos.gr/srcosmos/showpub.aspx?aa=8348> (last accessed: 25/6/2016)

Negotiations between the two countries concerning the allocation and water management of the transboundary rivers have a history, described as “long and difficult”¹⁰¹, beginning in the 1960s. On 9 July 1964, Athens and Sofia signed a bilateral agreement according to which “the riparian countries are bound *inter alia* not to cause significant damage to each other by constructing or operating projects and installations on these rivers”, while they also agreed to exchange hydrological and technical data.¹⁰² In 1971, following the signing of a bilateral agreement, a committee was established to deal with electrical energy issues and the use of the waters of the trans-boundary rivers.¹⁰³ In November 1991, a protocol was signed by the joint Greek–Bulgarian Experts Committee for quantitative and qualitative monitoring of the transboundary rivers: the protocol included the establishment, on the Bulgarian side of the river, of four fixed monitoring stations - Strymon (Dragodan site), Nestos (Kremen site), Evros (Simeonovgrad site) and Taouza (Elhovo site). It also included the establishment of four mobile stations, one on each of the rivers and two chemical laboratories in Blagoevgrad and Dimitrovgrad.¹⁰⁴

Growing EU attention on the issue of water protection affected positively Greek-Bulgarian cooperation on the issue.¹⁰⁵ In 2002, a new agreement between Greece and Bulgaria was signed introducing “cooperation on environmental protection”. One of the “most innovative characteristics introduced by the 2002 agreement was the engagement of a broader network of actors including civil society, NGOs, universities, research institutions etc”.¹⁰⁶ During the first meeting of the *High Level Cooperation Council* between Greece and Bulgaria, on 27 July 2010, there was special emphasis on transboundary water cooperation¹⁰⁷: on the same day the two Ministers of the Environment signed in Sofia a Joint Declaration, confirming “the intention of the two countries to cooperate in the water resources management issues in the transboundary basins”, and establishing a Joint Expert Working Group, that held several rounds of talks, in 2011-14.¹⁰⁸

Nestos/Mesta

Negotiations concerning the allocation of the Nestos/Mesta waters began in 1964 and were resumed in the 1970s, failing however to produce any agreement.¹⁰⁹ Negotiations continued in

¹⁰¹ Interview with Lyubomir Kuchukov (любомир кючуков), Bulgarian ex-diplomat, and Director of the Institute of Economics and International Relations, Sofia, 31/1/2017.

¹⁰² Anastasios Valvis, “Chapter 6: The Maritza-Evros-Meric River”, *Transboundary Freshwater Resources Management: Greece and its neighbors towards Cooperation or Conflict?*, unpublished PhD thesis, 2016, University of the Peloponnese, pp. 147-217.

¹⁰³ *ibid*

¹⁰⁴ *ibid*

¹⁰⁵ On 23 October 2000, the “[Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a framework for the Community action in the field of water policy](#)” or, in short, the EU *Water Framework Directive* (WFD) was adopted. As part of the WFD, a *River Management Basin Plan* is a requirement, containing “a detailed account of how the objectives set for the river basin (ecological status, quantitative status, chemical status and protected area objectives) are to be reached within the timescale required”. See “Introduction to the new EU Water Framework Directive”, European Commission, http://ec.europa.eu/environment/water/water-framework/info/intro_en.htm (last accessed: 17/1/2017).

¹⁰⁶ Valvis, *op. cit.*

¹⁰⁷ See Interview of the Greek President, Karolos Papoulias, to *Radio Bulgaria*, 16 November 2010, <http://bnr.bg/el/post/100114242/> (last accessed: 20/5/2016)

¹⁰⁸ The Group initially met in Drama on 16 May 2011, in Sofia on 12 October 2011, in Thessaloniki on 23 April 2013, and in Athens on 8 May 2014. “Report on the implementation of the Water Framework Directive River Basin Management Plans. Member State: GREECE”, *COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT*, European Commission, Brussels, 9.3.2015, SWD(2015) 54 final, p. 12, http://ec.europa.eu/environment/water/water-framework/pdf/4th_report/MS%20annex%20-%20Greece.pdf (last accessed: 16/1/2017).

¹⁰⁹ For Athens, Sofia had “arbitrarily created obstacles to the flow of Nestos/Mesta river in Greek territory” through a number of technical projects, reducing its total quantity from 1,500,000 to 1,100,000 cubic metres. Furthermore, information concerning impending technical projects in the Nestos/Mesta basin in Bulgaria only intensified Greek worries. See Κωνσταντίνος Σβολόπουλος, *Η Ελληνική Πολιτική στα Βαλκάνια 1974-1981* (Αθήνα: Ευρωεκδοτική 1987), σ. 58.

the 1980s¹¹⁰ and in the beginning of the 1990s, with no agreement on the “crucial issue” of water allocation, as Athens was asking for a minimum of 33 percent of Nestos/Mesta water to flow into Greece, while the Bulgarian parliament adopted a decision, according to which no more than 25 percent of Nestos/Mesta water should be allowed to flow into Greece.¹¹¹ It was only on 22 December 1995, that an agreement was reached - at a time when Athens and Sofia were intensifying their co-operation in all fields¹¹² - allowing a 29 percent of Nestos/Mesta water flow to enter into Greek territory, with the agreement remaining in force for 35 years.¹¹³ On 26 March 1996, during the debate for the ratification of the agreement at the Bulgarian Parliament, the Bulgarian opposition, the Union of Democratic Forces, voted against it, decrying the BSP government of Zhan Videnov for a “sellout” of national interests.¹¹⁴ The agreement has also received criticism in Greece, for being characterized by generalities, while it has been claimed that “the lack of a clear mutually based concept for regional development may create potential conflicts in the future”.¹¹⁵ Cooperation between the two parties in data exchange has also been problematic. According to Professor Ouzounis (Ουζούνης) of the Technical University of Thrace, “the Greek side has expressed strong complaints over the absence of official and regular information from the Bulgarian side about any waste discharges into the river and any retaining of the water”.¹¹⁶

Strymonas/Struma

Although there has never been an agreement over the allocation of Strymonas/Struma waters, over the years there have been a number of bilateral co-operation efforts. A protocol between Greek and Bulgarian experts for flood control was signed in 1980 and the preparation of a common proposal in EU for a joint monitoring system for the measurement of quantity and quality parameters of the river took place in 1991.¹¹⁷ More efforts have taken place since, especially concerning “efficient environmental protection”, although there has not been an international *River Basin Management Plan* (RBMP), as Bulgaria had already submitted its RBMP to the EC before Greece – Greece has also adopted its own RBMP for the Strymonas basin.¹¹⁸ There is concern that “the absence of an integrated management plan for the total river basin and

¹¹⁰ Meetings between representatives of the two riparian states took place in 1982 and 1988, where the allocation of the rivers flow was one of the dominant issues. In March 1988, Bulgarian and Greek experts met in Sofia to discuss “all relevant issues regarding water resources” of the Nestos/Mesta River. The outcome of the meeting was the agreement of the two parties to establish a bilateral Committee. In April 1989, Greece presented at Haskovo the so-called “long-term Program of Economic, Industrial, Scientific and Technological Collaboration”, involving a wide range of issues concerning the water resources of the river Nestos/Mesta. Valvis, op. cit.

¹¹¹ Vecheslav Tunev, *BTA*, 27 May 1992, *BBC SWB*, EE/1395 A1/2, 1 June 1992.

¹¹² For the intensification of Greek-Bulgarian ties following the formation of the Zhan Videnov government see Yorgos Christidis, “Акценти в гръцко-българските отношения след 1990 г.”, *Международни отношения*, кн. 2-3, година XXXIV, София, 2005, с. 159

¹¹³ “According to the agreement both parties are bound to exchange information concerning the water status and any development plans that would affect the natural flow of the river. International conventions, standards and European guidance are also applicable for the improvement of water quality and the conservation of the ecosystem. Moreover, a cross-border Commission of Hydroeconomy will be established, responsible for the observation and control of the application of the agreement. The commission will also be the intermediary factor for any possible disputes and in case of failure the matter will be forwarded to a governmental level”. *HYDRODIPLOMACY IN PRACTICE*, p. 3.

¹¹⁴ “Sofia ratifies important agreement”, *Diaspora Newsletter*, Vol. III, No.50, 26 April 1996, p. 2.

¹¹⁵ The agreement has received since then a lot of criticism, since “it was characterized by generalities... The agreed allocation scheme seems a result of political bargaining rather than aiming at meeting the requirements of the local population. For this reason, the agreement has not received the necessary public support so far. The co-operation of the two countries is problematic in relation to information exchange and so it fails to set the background conditions for future development of a common water management plan. No special attention was given to water quality issues or alternative allocation scenarios in cases of extreme phenomena”. *“HYDRODIPLOMACY IN PRACTICE”*, p. 3.

¹¹⁶ Valvis op. cit.

¹¹⁷ “HYDRODIPLOMACY IN PRACTICE”, p. 6.

¹¹⁸ “Report on the implementation of the Water Framework Directive River Basin Management Plans. Member State: GREECE”, p. 12.

of a joint water body may raise significant problems in the near future concerning the environmental protection of the river”.¹¹⁹

Evros/Maritza

Past Greek-Bulgarian efforts of transboundary co-operation for Evros/Maritza (and Meric in Turkish) date back to 1964 - there have also been agreements between Greece and Turkey concerning the control of hydraulic works on both banks of the river¹²⁰, while between Bulgaria and Turkey there is a recent agreement (2012) on cooperation on water resources management. The construction of dams in the Bulgarian territory has caused problems to both Turkey and Greece, affecting the quantity of water that ends up on the downstream part of the basin, while floods in the Greek and Turkish parts of the river basin have caused growing problems for the local economies. Thus, floods in 2014 and 2015 in the Prefecture of Evros caused extensive damage to the local economy. In November 2015, the mayor of the city of Soufli, Evangelos Poulilios (Ευάγγελος Πουλιλιός) declared that he was consulting with a law firm in Athens, in order to move legally against the Bulgarian state. Mr Poulilios accused the Bulgarian government of having ceded the management of dams to the private sector that was grossly mismanaging the dams “by not releasing gradually the water from the banks (as before)”. The Soufli mayor also accused Greek governments of having failed to come to an agreement with the Bulgarian state over transboundary co-operation for Evros/Maritza in the last 25 years.¹²¹ During the third meeting of the *High Level Cooperation Council* between the two countries in August 2016, it was reported that the “Bulgarian side on its part promised to keep dam reservoirs on Bulgarian territory 80 percent full so as to prevent flooding in Greece caused by Maritsa River”, while “in the meantime, Bulgaria will be working on its early warning systems”.¹²²

¹¹⁹ “HYDRODIPLOMACY IN PRACTICE”, p. 7.

¹²⁰ *ibid*, p. 6

¹²¹ «Στα δικαστήρια πάει ο δήμαρχος Σουφλίου τη Βουλγαρία για τις πλημμύρες στον Έβρο», *e-Evros*, 3 Νοεμβρίου 2015, <http://www.e-evros.gr/gr/eidhseis/3/sta-dikasthria-paei-o-dhmarxos-sovfliov-th-bovlgaria-gia-tis-plhmmvres-sto-dhmo/post28176>. (last accessed: 25/6/2016).

¹²² Pavlov, *op. cit.*

3. ECONOMY

Economic relations and foreign investment

The evolution of post- Cold War economic relations between Greece and Bulgaria followed a pattern similar to the bilateral diplomatic relations: intense and multi-level cooperation, search for mutually beneficial solutions and the capacity to uphold and enhance ties even in times of crisis (i.e. the first years after the collapse of Communism in Bulgaria, 1991- 1995 or the period of the Greek economic crisis, 2009-2016).

Scholars agree that the end of the Cold War unleashed a great potential for cooperation between the two countries based on historical and cultural ties.¹²³ The period between 1989 and 1995 could be characterized by a cautious and modest activity of Greek enterprises, which somehow reflected the more general climate of suspicion towards the Balkans in the Greek media and the political elites due to the Yugoslav wars and the “Macedonian” question. As Tsardanidis and Karafotakis have argued, whereas Greek enterprises saw opportunities in former Communist Balkan states, Greek media and the political elites saw risk and danger.¹²⁴ The cautious entry of Greek enterprises in Bulgarian economy between 1989 and 1995 was also the result of the turbulent situation in Bulgaria itself (political instability, lack of a clear legislation for foreign investments, problems with privatizations and rapid decrease of the population's financial resources). It was this instability, however, which kept major Western enterprises from investing immediately in Bulgaria, and thus gave the Greek companies an advantage, despite the initial hesitancy.¹²⁵

The second period, which started in the mid-1990s and lasted until the beginning of the Greek economic crisis (2009-10), saw the intensification of the economic relations between the two countries. During the late 1990s, it was the time of the major Greek companies to initiate and very rapidly broaden their scope of activities in Bulgaria (banks, telecommunications, food and beverage industries and energy). As Katsikis et.al. point out, during the period 1997-98, large and major Greek enterprises created vertical and horizontal partnerships while in the period 1998-2000, major Greek enterprises participated intensively in the Bulgarian projects of privatization.¹²⁶ By the year 2005, Bulgaria had established itself as a very reliable business destination for Greek enterprises.¹²⁷ To measure the extent of this activity one has to note that in 2010 there were as many as 4.100 enterprises of Greek or Greek-Bulgarian interests registered in Bulgaria with 650 being the most active.¹²⁸

For most of the post-Cold War period, Greece was consistently among the top foreign investors in Bulgaria and in 2002-2003 it was the single most important foreign investor.¹²⁹ It is estimated

¹²³ Charalambos Tsardanidis and Evangelos Karafotakis, “Greece's Economic Diplomacy towards the Balkan countries”, *Perceptions Journal of International Affairs*, 2000, Vol. 5, No. 3, pp. 78-95. Vassilis Monastiriotis and Achilleas Tsamis, “Greece's new Balkan economic relations: policy shifts but no structural change”, *Hellenic Observatory, London School of Economics and Political Science*, 2007, 40 p.

¹²⁴ Tsardanidis and Karafotakis, op.cit.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ioannis Katsikis, Gary Frigidis, Dimitrios Pashaloudis, “International and cross-border entrepreneurship: the case of Greece and Bulgaria”, *Business Systems and Economics*, 2013, Vol.3, No. 1, pp. 58-68

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ George Voskopoulos, “Greek-Bulgarian Relations in the Post-Cold War Era: Contributing to Stability and Development in Southeastern Europe”, *Mediterranean Quarterly*, 2008, Vol. 19, No. 4, pp. 68-80. According to data published by the National Bank of Bulgaria, in the course of the period 1992-2016, the average of Greek foreign investments in Bulgaria ranks in the 3rd position in a total of 36 countries. Data available in the following address: <http://www.investbulgaria.com/FDIByCountry.php>

that the total sum of direct Greek investments over the last 20 years is around EUR 3 billion, with Greek companies being well represented in the fields of metal processing, metallurgy, glass industry, beverages and construction materials.¹³⁰ Until 2015 there was also a substantial Greek presence in Bulgaria's financial sector, as one in four Bulgarian banks had majority Greek ownership¹³¹, holding 18.56 percent share of the total banking assets of the country.¹³² Bulgarian investments in Greece, traditionally in real estate and in small hotels (in northern Greece), a more recent development, have increased in 2015 "both in reserves and size and reached respectively EUR 47.2 million and EUR 13 million".¹³³ Bulgarian exports in Greece as well as Greek exports in Bulgaria present a constantly growing trend that resulted in the steady increase of the total trade between the two countries even in the midst of the Greek economic crisis.¹³⁴ In 2015 Greece was Bulgaria's fifth most important export destination, covering 7 percent of its total exports, while imports from Greece covered 3 percent of the total Bulgarian imports.¹³⁵ Tourism has been another important area of bilateral economic activity. In 2015, there were 192.490 Greek tourists in Bulgaria (mainly in winter resorts, like Bansko), while a total number of 1.024.526 Greek citizens visited Bulgaria.¹³⁶ During the same year, 1.043.078 Bulgarian citizens visited Greece, while the number of Bulgarian tourists was 459.165 (mainly in summer resorts in northern Greece) or 42.35 percent more than in 2014.¹³⁷

Needless to say, economic relations were not problem-free. There were a number of factors which impeded to a certain extent the economic interaction between the two countries: violation of customs laws (smuggling, fake exports, false declarations), low traffic capacity of border crossings, lack of infrastructure, bureaucracy, legislative problems, companies' difficulties in adjusting to a new environment.¹³⁸ Nevertheless, such factors did not undo the dominant trend of the intensification of economic relations between the two countries.

More recently, the crisis affecting Greece has evidently slowed down or limited Greek investments in Bulgaria.¹³⁹ For instance, the total amount of Greek investments reached their highest peak in 2007- 2008 with EUR 875 million, while in 2011 it returned to the levels of 2004 and EUR 180 million.¹⁴⁰ However, it is worth noting that the total amount of trade between the two countries, which reached its first highest peak in 2008 with over EUR 2.5 billion, was only temporarily slowed down by the Greek crisis and already in 2012 it surpassed the 2008 levels.¹⁴¹ Such data confirm that during the post-Cold War period the economic ties between the two countries became irreversibly strong and vital for both countries.

When it comes to the amount of Greek investments and the presence of Greek enterprises in Bulgaria since the beginning of the economic crisis there is an important qualitative difference with respect to earlier periods. In the early 2000s the expansion of Greek enterprises in Bulgaria was a strategic choice aiming at securing benefits from the modest yet existent economic growth in the newly liberalized former Communist economies. Since the beginning of the economic

¹³⁰ "Yearbook 2016-2017", *Hellenic Business Council in Bulgaria*, Sofia, p. 74.

¹³¹ United Bulgarian Bank Bulgaria S.A, Eurobank Bulgaria S.A., Piraeus Bank Bulgaria and the Alpha Bank Bulgaria.

¹³² "Yearbook 2016-2017", p. 76

¹³³ Ibid, p. 75

¹³⁴ Panagiotou and Valvis, op.cit.

¹³⁵ "Yearbook 2016-2017", p. 68

¹³⁶ Ibid, p. 80

¹³⁷ Ibid, p. 80

¹³⁸ Maria Boyadjieva, "Greek- Bulgarian Trade and Cross Border Cooperation: Future Perspectives", Paper submitted for the International Conference: "Restructuring stability and development in Southeastern Europe", *South and East European Development Center*, Volos-Greece, 2001, 8 p.

¹³⁹ Katsikis et.al., op.cit.

¹⁴⁰ Katsikis et.al., op.cit.

¹⁴¹ Panagiotou and Valvis, op.cit.

crisis, there is an unprecedented exodus of Greek enterprises, with even medium and small-scale businesses leaving Greece for benefitting from a more stable and beneficial economic environment in Bulgaria. Thus, during the last quarter of 2015, social security contributions for the private sector were 18 percent in Bulgaria (25 percent in Greece), corporate tax 10 percent, tax on dividends 5 percent, tax on interest rates 8 percent, VAT 20 percent (23 percent in Greece) and that only for companies with turnover more than 25,000 euro (in Greece from 10,000 euro); in addition, the average salary in Bulgaria was 449 euro, and the basic salary 194 euro.¹⁴² The exodus of Greek businesses existed in the years before the Greek economic crisis, but took in recent years alarming proportions.

The figures are revealing. According to various Greek media, the number of enterprises of Greek interests in Bulgaria in late 2016 ranges between 15,000 and 17,000.¹⁴³ According to the Bulgarian National Statistics Institute, at the end of 2015, 15,500 Greek enterprises were registered in Bulgaria, while during 2015, almost 6,000 Greek companies transferred their operations to Bulgaria;¹⁴⁴ the imposition of capital controls in Greece in the summer of 2015 as well as the wider uncertainty surrounding Greece's future in the Eurozone was major factors behind companies' decision to leave Greece.¹⁴⁵ Thus, reportedly, following the introduction of capital controls in Greece, the Bulgarian authorities received – by November 2015 - more than 60,000 new applications by Greek citizens, concerning either the registration of a company, or opening a bank account (personal or business).¹⁴⁶

There was a tremendous increase in the number of Greek companies registered in Bulgaria after 2010. This trend reveals an important disinvestment in Greece and inversely an important gain for Bulgaria. However, there is another key aspect regarding this emigration of enterprises and individuals. In the course of 2016, the Greek authorities announced their intention to verify how many of these enterprises have been really transported to Bulgaria and how many have created a *virtual* and *nominal* tax identity in Bulgaria, while they still operate fully in Greece. The goal of such an action for an enterprise would be to maintain all economic activity in Greece (including profits) but to be taxed according to Bulgarian laws, which in many cases violates tax laws.¹⁴⁷

According to data of the Greek Ministry of Economy, published in the Greek Parliament since December 2014, “most of the companies that have fled to the Balkans, including Bulgaria, present zero activity while they do not appear to have any employees”.¹⁴⁸ According to the same data, 9,000 out of 11,000 Greek enterprises in Bulgaria have no employees at all, while 6,000 among the same 11,000 present zero activity.¹⁴⁹ As the Greek media have repeatedly reported in 2016, Greek authorities have secured the cooperation of Bulgarian authorities in order to verify the number of such “ghost” companies in Bulgaria.¹⁵⁰ Furthermore, the Greek authorities mean to

¹⁴² Θάνου Τσίρου, «Μαζική φυγή ελληνικών εταιριών στα Βαλκάνια», *Η Καθημερινή*, 22 Νοεμβρίου 2015, σ. 19

¹⁴³ See for instance the following articles: «15.000 ελληνικές επιχειρήσεις βρίσκονται ήδη στη Βουλγαρία- Σοκ στην οικονομία», *iefimerida*, 19 Οκτωβρίου 2016, «Ξεπερνούν τις 17.000 οι ελληνικές επιχειρήσεις με έδρα Βουλγαρία», *CNN.gr*, 24 Νοεμβρίου 2016.

¹⁴⁴ “Yearbook 2016-2017”, p. 76, see also «Οι Βούλγαροι τρίβουν τα χέρια τους για τις νέες θέσεις εργασίας», *Τα Νέα*, 15 Μαρτίου 2016, «15.000 ελληνικές επιχειρήσεις βρίσκονται ήδη στη Βουλγαρία- Σοκ στην οικονομία», *iefimerida*, 19 Οκτωβρίου 2016. According to data provided by the Greek Embassy in Sofia-also cited in the above mentioned article of *Τα Νέα*, the number of Greek enterprises in Bulgaria in late 2014 reached 14.400.

¹⁴⁵ Assessment provided by various interviewees, businessmen, in Athens and Sofia.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ For more information see: Προκόπης Χατζηνικολάου, «Ελεγχοι για εικονικές επιχειρήσεις σε Βουλγαρία και Κύπρο από το ΥΠΟΙΚ», *Καθημερινή*, 15 Αυγούστου 2016. Έλενα Αποστολίδου, «Τι σπρώχνει τις ελληνικές επιχειρήσεις στη Βουλγαρία», *Μακεδονία της Κυριακής*, 29 Οκτωβρίου 2016.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ For more details on the matter see the following articles: «Ελεγχοι για εικονικές επιχειρήσεις σε Βουλγαρία και Κύπρο από το ΥΠΟΙΚ», *Καθημερινή*, 15 Αυγούστου 2016 και Βουργάνα Μαρία, «Επιχείρηση... Βαλκανιζατέρ: Μπλόκο για ελληνικές εταιρείες σφραγίδα στα Βαλκάνια», *ΕΘΝΟΣ*, 9 Φεβρουαρίου 2017.

impose considerable penalties to those companies.¹⁵¹ However, regardless of the important number of such enterprises, the loss of investment for Greece is undeniable and in fact such a massive effort to avoid taxation in Greece is the clearest indicator of a highly unstable economic environment.

The Hellenic Plan for the Economic Reconstruction of the Balkans (HiPERB)

According to Charalambos Tsardanidis, in the mid-1990's Greece became progressively more aware of its status as a regional power (politically and economically) in the Balkans and took steps for the improvement of its relations with neighboring countries, thus adopting a politico-economic approach.¹⁵² In the aftermath of the Kosovo war (1999), Greece consolidated its position as a *bridge* between the EU and Balkan states, since it fully supported the EU integration process for the entire region and participated in all major regional and EU initiatives aiming at the improvement of regional cooperation and at bringing the region closer to the EU (i.e. Southeast European Cooperative Initiative-SECI, Southeast European Cooperation Process, Regional Cooperation Council-RCC, Stability Pact for SEE). The *Hellenic Plan for the Economic Reconstruction of the Balkans* ("HiPERB", known as Ελληνικό Σχέδιο για την Οικονομική Ανασυγκρότηση των Βαλκανίων-ΕΣΟΑΒ in Greek) epitomized Greece's strategy to build upon its economic growth in order to serve both the country's and the EU's interests for political and economic cooperation in the Balkans.

At a general level, HiPERB can be regarded as an example of economic diplomacy in the context of the post-Cold War era. Tsardanidis notes that "the primary goal of economic diplomacy is to promote the goals of foreign policy via economic means. It, therefore, constitutes a part of a country's foreign policy".¹⁵³ From its initial conception by the Greek Ministry of Economy in 1999, HiPERB aimed at "providing funding for the creation or maintenance/repair of infrastructure in the transition economies of the Balkan area, as well as to facilitate Greek direct investment in those countries".¹⁵⁴ Apart from the political and the economic ambitions of this conception, HiPERB was the clearest sign of Greece's will to act according to its obligations as a member of OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC).¹⁵⁵

The implementation of the program was troublesome. From 1999 until 2002, the program showed very little results due to bureaucracy, the lack of coordination between the two ministries responsible for implementation (Economy and Foreign Affairs), financial problems and also deficiencies regarding the administration and infrastructure of recipient countries.¹⁵⁶ A fresh start was given to the program in 2002, when the corresponding legislation was adopted in the Greek parliament. The budget of HiPERB rose to 550 million euros for the period between 2003 and 2007. The recipient countries were the following: Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Montenegro, FYROM, Romania, Serbia and Kosovo.¹⁵⁷ It was determined that Bulgaria

151 Ibid

152 Tsardanidis and Karafotakis, op.cit. Also, Χαράλαμπος Τσαρδανίδης, «Οικονομική διπλωματία», in Δ. Τριανταφύλλου, Κ. Υφαντής, Ε. Χατζηνικολάου, *Διεθνείς Σχέσεις, Σύγχρονη θεματολογία και προσεγγίσεις*, Αθήνα: Παπαζήσης, 2008) σ. 485-511.

153 Tsardanidis, op.cit.

154 Panagiotou and Valvis, op.cit.

155 Greece was admitted to this committee in 1999. For more on the history of Greek development assistance see: Αστέρης Χουλιάρης, «Τα επτά παράδοξα της ελληνικής κρατικής βοήθειας», *Αγορά Χωρίς Σύνορα*, Τόμος 9 (2) 2003, σς 91-104.

156 Panagiotou and Valvis, op.cit.

157 According to the 2002 legislation and the specification of the project's goals for the 5-year period between 2003 and 2007 the recipient countries were to receive the following economic assistance: Albania (EUR 49,890,000), Bosnia-Herzegovina (EUR 19,530,000), Bulgaria (EUR 54,290,000), Montenegro (EUR 17,500,000), FYROM (EUR 74,840,000), Romania (EUR 70,430,000), Serbia (EUR 232,500,000), Kosovo (EUR

was to receive EUR 54 million (about 10 percent of the total budget) with the most significant amount of money being allocated to Serbia (EUR 232 million, or 42 percent of the total budget). For each country the allocation of the funds followed the same scheme, with 79 percent of the amount per country intended for the public sector and large project activities and 20 percent intended for the private sector and particularly projects involving Greek enterprises across the region.¹⁵⁸

Despite efforts made, the program had not really taken off until 2005-2006. In 2006 it was given a 5-year extension (2006-2011). In 2013, the Greek government, amidst efforts to cut public spending due to the economic crisis, notified all foreign governments concerned that any HiPERB-funded project that had not started to date would be cancelled.¹⁵⁹ Evidently, this second extension (2006-2011) did little to improve the efficacy of the program. According to Houliaras and Tsardanidis, during the 1st period of implementation (2003-2007) very few of the initial promises were materialized and there was effectively a significant gap between promises and real deliverables: “Perhaps rarely in the world history of development assistance was there such an important gap between promises and achievements. These inconsistencies seem to be independent of the political party in power as the leaderships of both biggest parties supported it at the level of declarations, but seem incapable of implementing it”.¹⁶⁰

In the case of Bulgaria, there have been various projects both in the public and private sectors financed in the context of HiPERB. According to the annual report on the evolution of economic and trade relations between Greece and Bulgaria, the major projects financed by HiPERB in the public sector dealt mostly with provision of medical equipment in health institutions or the creation of clinics.¹⁶¹ Another important project in the public sector was the financing of the “SeeLight Program” for the creation of a network of optical fibers and the interconnection of Universities.¹⁶² When it comes to projects in the private sector, the report notes: “The amount of subsidies reached EUR 10,765,361. Therefore, the absorption quota with regard to the total amount of funds for the financing of private investments in Bulgaria reached 99.1 percent. The number of employments created with the materialization of the above-mentioned investments reached 1,961 (of which 334 were seasonal)”¹⁶³. Among the projects that did not materialize was the railway connection between the port of Lom (North-Western Bulgaria) and the port of Thessaloniki.¹⁶⁴ In the end, HiPERB managed to finance projects that added up to EUR 20 million¹⁶⁵, which means less than half of the initial figure of EUR 54 million. The program failed to achieve the entirety of what was initially promised; yet, one could not underestimate the value of the projects successfully completed.

15,000,000). There was also a sum of EURO 16,020,000 for administrative reasons. Source: www.ypex.gov.gr or <http://old.mfa.gr>

¹⁵⁸ Panagiotou and Valvis, op.cit.

¹⁵⁹ Panagiotou and Valvis, op.cit.

¹⁶⁰ Χαράλαμπος Τσαρδανίδης και Αστέριος Χουλιάρας, «Η άνοδος και η πτώση του ελληνικού σχεδίου για την οικονομική ανασυγκρότηση των Βαλκανίων», *Αγορά χωρίς σύνορα*, Τόμος 11 (1), σ. 34-58

¹⁶¹ For more details on the projects financed by HiPERB in Bulgaria and their budgets see: The annual report on the economic developments and the evolution of economic and trade relations between Greece and Bulgaria during 2015 and the first half of 2016, Embassy of Greece in Sofia, pp. 56-57.

¹⁶² Ibid, pp. 56-57

¹⁶³ Ibid, pp 56-57.

¹⁶⁴ Τσαρδανίδης και Χουλιάρας, op.cit.

¹⁶⁵ This figure is based on the data available at the site of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

4. ENERGY AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Energy issues

The Burgas-Alexandroupolis oil pipeline

The construction of an oil pipeline, connecting the Bulgarian port of Burgas in the Black Sea with the Greek port of the Alexandroupolis in the Aegean Sea has been the main energy project that preoccupied Athens and Sofia for most of the two decades since the end of the Cold War. The idea of building a pipeline between the Bulgarian port of Burgas in the Black Sea, and the Greek port of Alexandroupolis in the Aegean Sea, for transporting Russian oil was born as a private initiative¹⁶⁶, as a means of bypassing the congested Turkish straits. Already by the end of 1993, following a series of accidents at the Bosphorus, Ankara had introduced restrictions to the navigation of tankers through the Bosphorus, citing environmental dangers.¹⁶⁷ On 20 December 1994, an initial memorandum concerning the construction of the Burgas-Alexandroupolis pipeline was signed in Moscow.¹⁶⁸ However, from the very beginning the whole project was hindered by various problems, with one of them, and the most public one, concerning percentages between the three participating states in the company, *Transbalkan Oil Pipeline* (TOP), that would undertake the construction and operation of the pipeline.¹⁶⁹ At the same time, the project did not enjoy the crucial endorsement of Washington that supported, instead, the construction of the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline.¹⁷⁰

In 2003, an agreement was reached on the percentages between the three participating states in TOP, with the Bulgarian share raised to 33.3 percent.¹⁷¹ Despite the breakthrough that was achieved in 2003, when Moscow agreed in principle that the three states participating in the project should have an equal share in the international company that would run the pipeline, the project effectively was stalled. Moscow backtracked, demanding a larger share for Gazprom, Rosneft and Sibneft, i.e. the three Russian companies participating in the project. In a meeting between Putin, Parvanov and Karamanlis held in Athens in September 2006 it was decided to accelerate the talks and to find a solution to all remaining open issues: guarantees that Moscow had to provide concerning the necessary volume of oil passing through the pipeline annually; Russian demands that Russian companies had to control the 285 km pipeline passing through Bulgarian and Greek territory; and, finally, after Moscow had succeeded in increasing the share of the three Russian companies to 51 percent, the Russian side insisted that the Greek and Bulgarian share of 24.5 percent in the international company should be reduced even further, as part of it should be given to other companies like the American Chevron that was involved in the exploitation of oil reserves in Kazakhstan. The negotiations that took place in November and December 2006 proved quite difficult - Greek officials would not comment, but a Greek businessman involved in the project would privately complain about Moscow's arrogance

¹⁶⁶ It was a close associate of the Greek businessman Latsis (Λάτσης), N. Grigoriadis (Νίκος Γρηγοριάδης) that conceived the idea, in the beginning of the 1990s, of building a pipeline from Bulgaria to Greece, in order to transport Russian and Central Asian oil and to bypass the congested Turkish straits. Grigoriadis' idea was adopted by the Latsis business group, which in 1994 together with another Greek business group, that of Kopelouzos (Κοπελούζος), established *ΘΡΑΚΗ Α.Ε.*, a company for the realization of the project, and began lobbying the Greek, Bulgarian and Russian governments. See «Βασικοί Σταθμοί στη Πορεία του Έργου», *Η Καθημερινή*, 3 Σεπτεμβρίου 2006.

¹⁶⁷ Kyriakos D. Kentrotis, "The Geopolitics of Energy in Southeastern Europe. The case of oil and gas pipelines", *Balkan Studies*, 39, 2, Thessaloniki, 1998, p. 326

¹⁶⁸ *ibid*, p.328-329

¹⁶⁹ For the disagreements around percentages in the Transbalkan Oil Pipeline company and other issues affecting the project see Kentrotis, *ibid*, pp. 327-329.

¹⁷⁰ Assessment shared by various interviewees in both Athens and Sofia

¹⁷¹ Α.Γ. Χριστοδουλάκη, «Επί ξυρού ακμής ο πετρελαιοαγωγός Μπουργκάς-Αλεξανδρούπολη», *ΤΟ ΒΗΜΑ*, 3 Νοεμβρίου 2002.

(“Moscow’s behavior in energy issues has always something imperial, it follows the logic that we want everything”). Finally, an agreement was reached and was initialed in Burgas on 7 February 2007.¹⁷²

On 8 March 2007 the Burgas-Alexandroupolis oil pipeline project was finally signed in Athens at the presence of Russian President Vladimir Putin, Bulgarian Premier Sergei Stanishev (Сергей Станишев) and his Greek counterpart Kostas Karamanlis (Κώστας Καραμανλής). According to the timetable included in the agreement, the pipeline would begin to be built in 2008 and concluded by 2011. It would transfer between 35 and 50 million tones of oil annually (with Russian companies holding 51 percent, and Bulgarian and Greek companies 24.5 percent of the shares of the international company that had to be established to run the pipeline).¹⁷³ There was also understanding that Bulgaria and Greece would sell part of their share to third companies involved in the exploitation and transfer of oil.¹⁷⁴

The new GERB government that was formed in Bulgaria following the June 2009 elections displayed a rather ambivalent attitude towards the energy projects involving Russia, an attitude no doubt assisted by Brussels and Washington’s policy of reducing Europe’s energy dependency on Russia. Already during the his first meeting with Vladimir Putin in September 2009 in Poland PM Borisov asked for a “postponement” of the big energy project.¹⁷⁵ In December 2011, Sofia decided to abandon the Burgas-Alexandroupolis oil pipeline project, “citing environmental and supply concerns”.¹⁷⁶ Reportedly, the Bulgarian government had initially tried to terminate the agreement with the mutual consent of Moscow and Athens; failing to do so, it terminated the agreement unilaterally, with the action approved by the Bulgarian parliament on 12 March 2013, despite BSP opposition.¹⁷⁷

There was some speculation about the possible revival of the pipeline project after the crisis in Russian-Turkish relations caused by the shooting down of the Russian military plane in November 2015. The justification for this was Moscow’s search for alternatives following the de facto suspension of the *Turkish Stream*. Moscow apparently approached Sofia and Athens. Greek Minister for Energy and the Environment Panos Skourletis (Πάνος Σκουρκλέτης) stated in January 2016, following a trip to Moscow, that he had “the impression... that the Russians really want [the pipeline project], and that they are looking for alternative routes via Bulgaria”.¹⁷⁸ Sofia on its part was looking for prior American consent to re-start the project¹⁷⁹, underlining, once more, the decisive American influence on the issue.¹⁸⁰ In July 2016, Nikolai Tokarev, the president of Russia’s Transneft oil transport company, stated that “Our Bulgarian partners have pleasantly surprised us. Just recently, we received an official notification that they support

¹⁷² Παναγιώτης Γαλιατσάτος, «Φουρτούνα για τα τάνκερ», *Τα Νέα*, 6 Σεπτεμβρίου 2006, σ. 6, Γιώργος Φιντικάκης, «Παιχνίδι των Ρώσων για τον αγωγό Μπουργκάς-Αλεξανδρούπολης», *Τα Νέα*, 16-17 Δεκεμβρίου 2006, σ. 3,5, Γ. Φιντικάκης, «Ρώσικη νάρκη στον αγωγό», *Τα Νέα*, 22 Δεκεμβρίου 2006, σ.53, Χρύσα Λιάγγου, «Αντίστροφη μέτρηση για τον αγωγό Μπουργκάς-Αλεξανδρούπολης», *Η Καθημερινή*, 3 Φεβρουαρίου 2007, σ. 5, Χ. Λιάγγου, «Στο κλαμπ των ισχυρών χωρών της ενέργειας εισέρχεται η Ελλάδα», *Η Καθημερινή*, 11 Φεβρουαρίου 2007, σ. 5.

¹⁷³ Χ. Λιάγγου, «Η Ελλάδα μπήκε στη σκακιέρα του πετρελαίου», *Η Καθημερινή*, 18 Μαρτίου 2007, σ.4

¹⁷⁴ See Асен Гагаузов, „Държавата може да остане само със златна акция на нефтопровода”, interview of Асен Гагаузов (Асен Гагаузов), Minister of Regional development and Public Works, *Политика*, 2-8 февруари 2007, бр. 147, с. 21.

¹⁷⁵ Къдринка Къдринова, „Евро-руският дебют на Бойко”, *сп. ТЕМА*, година IX, бр. 35 (410), 7-13 септември 2009, с.20

¹⁷⁶ Kyril Drezov, “Hard Bargaining amongst Friends: An Overview of Contemporary Russian-Bulgarian Relations”, in *Russian Analytical Digest*, No 125, 25 March 2013, p.13, <http://mercury.ethz.ch/serviceengine/files/ISN...359d.../RAD-125.pdf>, (last accessed: 10/04/2013)

¹⁷⁷ *ibid*, p. 13

¹⁷⁸ Ηλίας Μπέλος, «Ξανανοίγει ο Δρόμος για τον αγωγό Μπουργκάς-Αλεξανδρούπολης», 3 Ιανουαρίου 2016, <http://www.kathimerini.gr/844364/article/oikonomia/epixeirhseis/3ananoigei-o-dromos-gia-ton-agwgo--mpourgkas---ale3androypolhs> (last accessed 7/1/2017)

¹⁷⁹ *ibid*

¹⁸⁰ This is also confirmed by diplomatic sources in Athens.

keeping the Burgas–Alexandroupolis project alive. They are against dissolving the operator that had been created to implement the project. Its activities were later frozen. Now, everyone is interested in it, including the Bulgarians".¹⁸¹ Furthermore, In June, the Bulgarian Finance Ministry had said that the project's operator company, *Trans Balkan Pipeline BV*, "would not be dissolved"¹⁸². The new provisional Bulgarian government that was sworn in by the new Bulgarian President Rumen Radev (Румен Радев), following the resignation of Boyko Borisov's government¹⁸³, announced on 1 February 2017 that it had decided to raise the Bulgarian share in the *Trans Balkan Pipeline*, generating anew speculation about the fortunes of the project.¹⁸⁴

Interconnector Greece-Bulgaria (IGB)

On 10 December 2015 Athens and Sofia signed an agreement to build a natural gas pipeline, after a delay that had mobilized American and EU diplomatic pressure. The Interconnector Greece-Bulgaria (IGB), known also as Komotini-Stara Zagora pipeline, was high on Washington's and Brussels' energy diplomacy agenda since 2009 as its construction would reduce the dependency of Bulgaria, and of potentially other Southeastern European countries, from Russian energy giant Gazprom's gas.¹⁸⁵ The IGB will have an initial annual capacity of 3 billion cubic metres (bcm) per year, with an estimated to cost about €220 million - partially financed by an EU grant of €45 million. Bulgaria's state owned energy holding company BEH has a 50 percent in the joint venture, while Greek state energy firm DEPA and Edison hold 25 percent each.¹⁸⁶ A further agreement on the construction of IGB was signed on 1 August 2016, during the third meeting of the *High Level Cooperation Council*.¹⁸⁷

Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) terminal, Alexandroupolis

During the third meeting of the *High Level Cooperation Council* in August 2016 the two Prime Ministers agreed that Bulgaria would participate in the construction of a liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminal near the port city of Alexandroupolis.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸¹ "Bulgaria to keep Burgas-Alexandroupoli Pipeline Project for Russian Oil", *Sputnik*, 15 July 2016, <https://sputniknews.com/europe/201607191043276478-bulgaria-burgas-oil-pipeline/> (last access 8/1/2017)

¹⁸² *ibid*

¹⁸³ The Bulgaria's parliament approved the resignation of Prime Minister Boiko Borisov's center-right government on 17 November 2016, following the victory of Rumen Radev during the second round of Bulgaria's presidential elections. On 20 December 2016, following repeated failed attempts to form a new government, it was decided to establish a provisional government until the organization of new elections. Under the Bulgarian constitution however, President Rosen Plevneliev, whose term expired on 22 January 2017, was barred from dissolving parliament because he was in his final three months in office. It was up to his successor, Rumen Radev, to dissolve the assembly and declare parliamentary elections within 60 days.

¹⁸⁴ "Служебното правителство реанимира проекта „Бургас-Александруполис“, *News bg*, 2 февруари 2017, <https://news.bg/politics/sluzhebnoto-pravitelstvo-reanimira-proekta-burgas-aleksandrupolis.html> (last accessed: 12/2/2017)

¹⁸⁵ For US and EU diplomatic pressure on the issue see Chryssa Liaggou, "US diplomacy to push for the Greek-Bulgarian gas pipeline", *e-Kathimerini*, 13 October 2015, <http://www.ekathimerini.com/202487/article/ekathimerini/business/us-diplomacy-to-push-for-the-greek-bulgarian-gas-pipeline>, (last accessed: 1/7/2016), also Илин Цанев, "Голямата българо-гръцка газова сватба", *Капитал*, 21-27 май 2016, с 18-19

¹⁸⁶ "Bulgaria and Greece start building gas interconnector", *EurActiv*, 11 December 2015, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy/news/bulgaria-and-greece-start-building-gas-interconnector/>, (last accessed: 1/7/2016)

¹⁸⁷ Vassilis Nedos, "Energy tops agenda as Tsipras, Borisov meet in Bulgaria", *e-Kathimerini*, 1 August 2016, <http://www.ekathimerini.com/210925/article/ekathimerini/news/energy-tops-agenda-as-tsipras-borisov-meet-in-bulgaria> (last accessed: 9/8/2016)

¹⁸⁸ *ibid*

Infrastructure

The opening of new border crossings

It was in December 1995, during Greek Foreign Minister Papoulias visit to Sofia, that the opening of three new border-crossings, scheduled until the end of 1998, was agreed. The three new border crossings would connect Haskovo with Komotini (Ивайловград/Κυπρίνος), Gotse Delchev with Kato Nevrokopi (Илинден/Εξοχή) and Smolyan with Xanthi (Златоград/Θέρμεις) – adding to the two ones that already existed (Кулата/Προμαχώνας and Капитан Петко войвода/Ορμένιο). The opening of new border crossings however was delayed, and took place only in the 2000s. Administrative and technical obstacles and delays, not unusual in the region¹⁸⁹, affected negatively the opening of the new border crossings. At the same time, there were official circles in Athens that had reservations about the new border crossings, due to “possible implications arising by the greater possibilities for communication and contact between the Muslim populations in both sides of the border, affecting national security in Western Thrace”.¹⁹⁰ The opening of the new border crossings however has not endangered national security in northern Greece, proving to be a largely positive development, contributing to expanding trade and economic ties.¹⁹¹ There were also voices in Athens advocating using the opening of the new border-crossings – eagerly wanted by Bulgaria – as a tool in sticky negotiations about transboundary river issues.¹⁹²

Railways and Borisov stressed the need to step up the construction of a railway link

In August 2016 in Sofia, Tsipras between Alexandroupolis and Burgas, connecting the Aegean with the Black Sea, boosting trade prospects in the region.¹⁹³ This was an old idea that during the talks was “further elaborated upon and supplemented with projects for building two logistics centres”.¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁹For example, an agreement on the opening of a new border crossing between Bulgaria and FYROM, signed in 1999, was never materialized with people on both sides of the border bitterly complaining about the implementation of a project first talked about thirty years ago. Cvetlana Vasileva, “Ot 30 godini lazhat Balgari I Makedontsi, che shte im otvoriat KPP”, *Труд*, 7 януари 2017.

¹⁹⁰ Information provided by a senior diplomatic source

¹⁹¹ Interview with a former senior official of the European Commission, 9/2/2017

¹⁹² Information provided by a senior diplomatic source

¹⁹³ For Athens the construction of such a railway line was seen as also improving trade prospects with Russia. “PM Tsipras in Bulgaria for Council of Cooperation meetings”, *TO BHMA*, 1 August 2016, <http://www.tovima.gr/en/article/?aid=819172> (last accessed: 9/8/2016)

¹⁹⁴ Pavlov, op. cit.

5. SOCIETY

Migration

Greece became one of the first destinations for Bulgarian migrants after the democratic changes of 1989-1990, welcoming around 7 percent of the total migrant Bulgarian population, and becoming the fourth most important destination for Bulgarian migrants after Germany, the United States and Canada. This was due to the geographical proximity - a particularly “important fact in cases of immigrants who left underage children and family behind” - and the employment prospects it offered. This “first wave of migration” to Greece was largely illegal, taking place through tourism agencies: “Bulgarian ‘tourists’ would enter Greece legally, mainly with group visas and pre-paid tourist packages and the buses would return half-empty, as the “tourists” remained in Greece”. By 1993, there were already 7,000 Bulgarians living in Greece. In 1997-98 the first “major wave” of Bulgarian migration to Greece took place. Pushed by the severe economic crisis that hit their country in 1996-97, thousands of Bulgarians sought to migrate. It was also around that time that Greece introduced its first law legalizing irregular migrants in the country (adopted in November 1997, entered into force on 1 January 1998). At that time, many Bulgarians received “information and encouragement to enter the country from friends and acquaintances already working in Greece”. A second “major wave” of Bulgarian immigrants was recorded around 2001. According to the population census of 2001, there were around 35,000 Bulgarians residing in Greece, the second largest nationality of immigrants, following the Albanians. The third “major wave” of Bulgarian migration to Greece, was recorded following the country’s accession to the EU, in 2007. By 2009, it was estimated that the Bulgarian immigrants, legally residing in Greece, numbered approximately 77,000, “while their total number (including those without an official residence permit) must have been double that number, i.e. approximately 150,000 persons”. Their majority settled in urban centres, with approximately 1/3 of the population of Bulgarian migrants residing in Athens.¹⁹⁵

Bulgarian migration to Greece has been primarily “female in gender”, women between 40 and 60 years of age, of whom a large percentage are divorced or widowed who have left underage children and/or elderly parents behind.¹⁹⁶ And whereas in Bulgaria they worked as skilled employees or workers in the public or private sector, in Greece “they were employed as unskilled personnel, in most cases at the private premises of their employer”¹⁹⁷, mostly in positions in domestic elderly care and secondarily in the farming sector and tourism. They also faced exploitation, “mainly related to undeclared employment (and the consequent absence of social insurance) and to payment lower than the legally established minimum wage”.¹⁹⁸

A case at point, that attracted a lot of media publicity in Greece¹⁹⁹, was that of Konstantina Kuneva (known in Greek as Κωνσταντίνα Κούνεβα and in Bulgarian as Костадинка Кунева) who was the Secretary General of the *Pan-Attican Union of Cleaners and Domestic Workers* (Παναττική Ένωση Καθαριστών/-στριών και Οικιακού Προσωπικού). Due to her trade union activity, she was the victim of a vicious attack with vitriol in December 2008. Her case became the focus of a criminal investigation. In May 2014 Kuneva was elected to the European Parliament from the candidate list of radical left’s *Syriza*.

¹⁹⁵ Information and data on Bulgarian immigration retrieved from “Report on Bulgarian Immigrants in Greece”, *Institution of Social Innovation*, Athens, December 2011, p. 1-7, <http://www.participation-citoyenne.eu/sites/default/files/report-greece.pdf>, (last accessed 20/12/2016).

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 8

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 9

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 14

¹⁹⁹ See for example the special documentary produced on her case by the investigative program «Οι Νέοι Φάκελλοι» at SKAI TV channel, <http://folders.skai.gr/main/theme?id=78&locale=el>

In 1991, the first Bulgarian association in Greece was established in 1991 under the name “Paisii Chilendarski”, including Bulgarians from mixed marriages and Greeks born in Bulgaria who were repatriated during that time. “The incentive for creating the association was mainly to maintain contact with Bulgarian culture”.²⁰⁰ The first organized association of Bulgarian immigrants in Greece was established in late 1997 under the name “Vasil Levski”. In 1999, the editor of the newspaper “Bulgarian Voice”²⁰¹ founded an association named “Greek-Bulgarian Association of Friendship”. In 2001, another association, called “Bulgarian Community”, was founded receiving significant support from the *Greek Communist Party* (KKE).²⁰² In 2005, the “Bulgarian Cultural Centre” was established, mainly aiming at covering the cultural needs of the Bulgarian community in Greece, being essentially, “an extension of the activity of one of the Bulgarian newspapers published in Athens and addressing Bulgarian immigrants”.²⁰³ By 2011, there were five existing organisations of Bulgarian immigrants in Athens, with three of these organisations operating mainly “as social networking centres, which also operate Bulgarian language schools, financed by the Bulgarian state, that facilitate contact with the language and culture of Bulgaria and, for children that wish to be repatriated, provide the necessities for smooth re-entry upon return to Bulgaria”.²⁰⁴ Generally speaking, the participation of Bulgarian immigrants to Bulgarian associations in Greece has been limited primarily to sending their children to the Sunday schools, as the Bulgarian community in Greece (and not only) “is characterized to a great extent by a lack of culture of collective assertion and political organization”.²⁰⁵

National image and stereotypes

At the beginning of the 1990s there was certainly insufficient information in Bulgarian society concerning Greece. “The average Bulgarian saw Greece as a mixture of ancient Greek grandeur and capitalist affluence. Bulgarian migrants that arrived in Greece soon realized Greece’s true image”.²⁰⁶ Still Greece’s image in Bulgarian society in the 1990s was largely positive: “Greece was regarded, and rightly so, the most developed Balkan country, enjoying privileged ties with the West. It was considered as a destination for finding employment, while its enhanced image had a positive effect upon Greek language, generating improved prospects for its teaching”.²⁰⁷

Poor information and knowledge also characterized the image most Greeks, and in particular Greek businessmen who ventured in the country, had about Bulgaria in the 1990s.²⁰⁸ Negative stereotypes were also present in both societies, concerning “the other”. In Greece, negative stereotypes about Bulgarians were rather dominant in the 1990s, especially the ones concerning Bulgarian women.²⁰⁹ On the other hand, the two main negative stereotypes concerning Greeks in Bulgaria were that were “lazy” and the adjective “Byzantine” (византиец) as someone who is

²⁰⁰ “Report on Bulgarian Immigrants in Greece”, p. 20

²⁰¹ First published in Athens in 1999

²⁰² “The Communist Party supported the activity of the association by providing its immigrant members with services such as: Provision of information on the requirements for legalization by a specialised attorney of the party, networking for seeking employment, organisation of cultural and recreational events, such as excursions to various Greek locations, organisation of a poetry club, a painting club, a choir, events with prominent Bulgarian guests, etc”. “Report on Bulgarian Immigrants in Greece”, p. 21

²⁰³ Ibid, p. 21

²⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 24

²⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 25, an assessment also confirmed by a Bulgarian freelance journalist working in Greece. Interview, Athens 9/2/2017

²⁰⁶ Interview with an independent Bulgarian Analyst, Athens, 8/2/2017

²⁰⁷ Κ. Ντίνας, Τ. Σούτσιου, Α. Χατζηπαναγιωτίδη, Γ. Χρηστίδης, «Η Ελληνόγλωσση Εκπαίδευση στη Ρουμανία και στη Βουλγαρία», *ΕΛΙΑΜΕΠ*, Ρέθυμνο, 2011, σ. 159.

²⁰⁸ Interview with a Greek businessmen with business activities in Bulgaria, Athens, 8/2/2017

²⁰⁹ They were widely seen and regarded as women of “low morals” («εύκολες»). See Ioannis Armakolas, “Affinities, distance and unfulfilled promise: the paradoxes of Greece’s Balkan entanglement”, Lecture delivered at the University of Leipzig, 9 June 2015.

cunning and untrustworthy.²¹⁰ Greeks were also seen as the “spoiled kids of Europe”, that were thus allowed to join the EU despite Greece not being ready.²¹¹

²¹⁰ Interview with a Bulgarian journalist, working in Greece, 9/2/2017

²¹¹ Interview with a former senior official of the European Commission, 10/2/2017

6. EDUCATION AND CULTURE

Educational issues and teaching of Greek in Bulgaria

After 1990, there was a re-emergence of organized community life among Greeks in Bulgaria, especially in the Black Sea region. Beginning in 1992, a number of “Bulgarian-Greek Friendship Associations” were allowed to be established in a number of Bulgarian cities and towns, especially in the Bulgarian Black Sea region, by the “remnants” of the vibrant Greek communities that existed in the region until the anti-Greek riots of 1906, in places like Pomorie, Sozopol, Burgas, Byala, Meseber, Obzor and Varna. Most of those associations operated dance and chorus groups, and provided Greek language courses (usually every Saturday) for adults and children.²¹² At the same time, a growing number of Bulgarians expressed an interest in learning Greek, as a growing number of them intended to migrate to Greece. In a survey conducted in 1997 among 995 respondents of 15 to 28 years of age, in the question “Which foreign language is it most promising to study in Bulgaria?” 5.2 percent answered “Greek”, putting it in 6th place, below English, German, French, Russian and Spanish and above Italian and Turkish.²¹³ Classes of Greek Language as a foreign language were introduced in Bulgarian state schools, while courses of Modern Greek were introduced in Bulgarian universities.²¹⁴

More recently, the economic crisis in Greece has had an impact on the issue, seriously undermined the teaching of Greek in Bulgaria. The crisis has hurt Greece’s image and has undermined its attraction as an employment destination, reducing the interest for learning Greek among both Bulgarians and the children of mixed (Greek-Bulgarian) families living in Bulgaria.²¹⁵ It also reduced the material support provided by the Greek state (through, for example, reduced scholarships and secondment of teachers) undermining the operation of Greek courses in Bulgaria.²¹⁶

Teaching of Bulgarian in Greece

Bulgarian immigration in Greece also led to the establishment of Sunday schools teaching the Bulgarian language in Greece. The first one appeared in 2007 and their number increased after 2009, when the Bulgarian Ministry of Education began financing the operation of such schools abroad.²¹⁷ There are three such schools in Athens and one in Thessaloniki (Българско неделно училище “Свети Великомъченик Георги Зограф”). Their teachers are being paid by the Ministry of Education, with the ones teaching in Thessaloniki by the Zografos Monastery in Athos. Graduates of the schools have the right to participate at the entry examinations of Bulgarian universities.²¹⁸ Moreover, Bulgarian is thought as one of the key foreign languages in the Department of Balkan, Slavic and Oriental (BSOS) Studies of the University of Macedonia in

²¹² See «Η Ελληνόγλωσση Εκπαίδευση στη Ρουμανία και στη Βουλγαρία», σ.162

Although official Bulgarian censuses registered a fall in the number of Greeks in the country in the 1990s – 4,930 in 1992 and 3,408 in 2001- there were unofficial estimates of around 25,000 Greeks in Bulgaria. For example see Βλάχης Αγτζίδης, «Οι Έλληνες της Βουλγαρίας», σε Κώστας Λούκερης, Κυριακή Πετράκη (επιμ.) *Οι δρόμοι των Ελλήνων. Η ιστορία των ελληνικών κοινοτήτων στις πέντε ηπείρους* (Αθήνα: Polaris 2010), σ. 326.

²¹³ Survey carried out in the period 17 August – 1 September 1997. Cited in Petar-Emil Mitev, “Europe, the Europeans and the European values in the eyes of young people in Bulgaria”, *Bulgarian Youth Facing Europe*, International Center for Minority Studies, Sofia, 1999, p. 21.

²¹⁴ From the mid-1990s a growing number of Bulgarian pupils at school would choose Greek as a second/foreign language. The courses would be taught by Bulgarians, graduates of Bulgarian university departments with a degree on Greek. See «Η Ελληνόγλωσση Εκπαίδευση στη Ρουμανία και στη Βουλγαρία», σ. 166.

²¹⁵ See «Η Ελληνόγλωσση Εκπαίδευση στη Ρουμανία και στη Βουλγαρία», σ. 177

²¹⁶ *ibid*, σ. 177

²¹⁷ “Report on Bulgarian Immigrants in Greece”, p. 22

²¹⁸ Information provided by a Bulgarian journalist working in Greece, 9/2/2017

Thessaloniki. In recent years, a Bulgarian language teacher seconded by the Ministry of Education in Sofia also supports the teaching of Bulgarian at the BSOS.

Cultural interaction

In 2008, the *Hellenic Foundation for Culture* (*Ελληνικό Ίδρυμα Πολιτισμού*) opened a branch in Sofia seeking “to contribute to the development of cultural relations between the two countries... to highlight the common cultural elements that unite the two countries and... to promote the various aspects of Greek civilization in its historical evolution”.²¹⁹ Beyond the organization of various cultural activities, like exhibitions, The Hellenic Foundation offers also Greek language courses. In 2016 the Greek-Bulgarian Cultural Association “Aristotle a Bridge of Culture” («Αριστοτέλης – γέφυρα πολιτισμού») was established in Sofia sponsoring various cultural activities.²²⁰ However, with the start of the economic crisis things have changed dramatically; there was a sharp reduction of *Hellenic Foundation for Culture’s* budget by the Greek Ministry of Culture, at the beginning of 2012, has not left unaffected the operation of the Sofia branch.²²¹

Universities and Research Centres

It has not been possible to establish the number of Bulgarian students who have studied in Greek state universities in recent years; but given the large number of Bulgarians living and working in Greece the number must be noteworthy. Another important destination of Bulgarian students is the private universities in Thessaloniki. Furthermore, there have been innovative forms of cooperation that have been introduced, for example by the City College, the Thessaloniki-based outlet of the University of Sheffield, which has established outlets in Sofia and other capitals in the region. A significant number of Bulgarian students study in Thessaloniki and the Sofia-based outlet of City College:

The International Faculty of the University of Sheffield, CITY College - Number of active students who are nationals of Bulgaria and FYROM per academic year (sums of students studying in Thessaloniki and Sofia)²²²

Academic year	Bulgaria	FYROM
2009-10	88	55
2010-11	74	47
2011-12	120	62
2012-13	158	56
2013-14	179	74
2014-15	187	97
2015-16	175	95

²¹⁹ Statement in the webpage of the *Hellenic Foundation for Culture*, Sofia, www.hfc-sofia.com (last accessed: 7/7/2011).

²²⁰ See for example Βίντα Πιρόνκοβα, «Πρώτη συναυλία του ελληνοβουλγαρικού συνδέσμου για πολιτιστική ανταλλαγή «Αριστοτέλης» στη Σόφια», *Radio Bulgaria*, 6 June 2016, <http://bnr.bg/el/post/100701684> (last accessed: 12/2/2017)

²²¹ Νίκος Χειλάς, “Το Ελληνικό Ίδρυμα Πολιτισμού τρώει τα παιδιά του”, *ΤΟ ΒΗΜΑ*, 7 Φεβρουαρίου 2012, <http://www.tovima.gr/culture/article/?aid=442307> (last accessed: 2/7/2016).

²²² Data from the The International Faculty of the University of Sheffield, CITY College. We would like to thank Mr. Nikos Zaharis, Director of the South-East European Research Centre, for assisting us to obtain the data.

The same private university in Thessaloniki has also developed a number of collaborations with Bulgarian organisations in the context of the implementation of EU-funded research programs.²²³

Fewer Bulgarian students have taken up the opportunity to study in Greek departments that have programs focusing on Southeast European Studies. At the Department of Balkan, Slavic and Oriental Studies of the University of Macedonia, three students from Bulgaria have followed the postgraduate program 'Politics and Economics of Contemporary Eastern & South-Eastern Europe' (taught in English) and one the program 'History, Anthropology and Culture in Eastern and Southeastern Europe' (taught in Greek) since the inception of the two programs.²²⁴ At the Department of Political Science and Public Administration of the University of Athens, 25 Bulgarian students have attended the MA Program in Southeast European Studies since its inception.²²⁵

Moreover, an innovative initiative promoting the study of Bulgaria in Greece has been introduced at the Department of Balkan, Slavic and Oriental Studies, University of Macedonia. For four consecutive years, a student essay competition is being organised in collaboration with business communities and associations maintaining links to Bulgaria. The initiative is very successful and a significant number of students participate with essay entries, demonstrating increased interest and good understanding of the Bulgarian economy and the Greek-Bulgarian business and economic connections.²²⁶

Since 2011 there has been a significant rise in the number of Greek students, studying in Bulgarian universities, a development largely unrelated to the Greek crisis. Bulgaria's geographic proximity, the significantly lower fees paid in Bulgarian universities, in comparison with other EU countries²²⁷, and the fact that Bulgarian diplomas are automatically recognized by the Greek state, all contributed to a substantial rise of Greek students in Bulgarian universities. Thus, their number increased by 30 percent in 2012 and by a further 10 percent in 2013.²²⁸ More Greek students studied in Bulgarian universities by 2013-2014, than any other time (the 1980s and 1990s), while the Greek student community in Bulgaria is the second most numerous in Bulgaria, after the Turkish one: for the academic year 2013-2014, one in four foreign students in Bulgaria was Greek, a total of 2,510.²²⁹

²²³ See more details at: http://www.seerc.org/new/index.php?option=com_entities&view=track&Itemid=67

²²⁴ See more at: <http://mabsos.uom.gr/>

²²⁵ See more at: <http://www.see.pspa.uoa.gr/>

²²⁶ For the Department and its work, see more at: <http://www.uom.gr/index.php?newlang=eng&tmima=8&categorymenu=2>

²²⁷ In particular in relation to UK universities, that had dominated the market for Greek students in the 1990s and much of the 2000s, where however there has been a significant rise in student fees since 2010.

²²⁸ «ΣΤΡΟΦΗ ΓΙΑ ΣΠΟΥΔΕΣ ΣΤΑ ΒΑΛΚΑΝΙΚΑ ΑΕΙ», *Edu4u Admin*, 16 Νοεμβρίου 2013, <http://www.edu4u.gr/Comments.aspx?qId=45618>, (last accessed: 2/7/2016).

²²⁹ Official data of the Bulgarian Statistical Service. Cited in «Σε ποιές χώρες σπουδάζουν οι Έλληνες φοιτητές - Δείτε αναλυτικά!», *Φοιτητικά Νέα*, 29 Δεκεμβρίου 2014, <http://www.foititikanea.gr/φοιτητής/2389-φυγή-ελλήνων-φοιτητών-για-μεταπτυχιακά>, (last accessed: 2/7/2016)

7. GREEK PUBLIC OPINION

There is generally a shortage of polls focusing on foreign policy questions and/or attitudes towards neighbouring nations; but even the few existing ones tend to focus on Greece's relations with Turkey, the Cyprus question and the dispute with FYROM over the name Macedonia. Thus, data about attitudes towards Bulgaria and the Bulgarians are scarce. In this section, we briefly present evidence from studies conducted in the first two decades since the end of the Cold War before we turn our attention to recent polls conducted by ELIAMEP's research projects.

Various polls establish that Greeks do not see contemporary Bulgaria as a threat.²³⁰ Given the turbulent history between the two countries, this first finding is important and promising. We should, however, delve deeper the few existing studies to elaborate more on the relationship between the two countries.

Limited information can be found in a study about the perceptions of 'other' conducted in 1993.²³¹ In the study, respondents were asked to express their level of affinity with a number of countries from the Balkan region and beyond. Bulgaria is found in the lower half of the list; it is the third least liked country measured, after Turkey and Albania. Feelings of affinity with Bulgaria are at 8.6 percent, while feelings of antipathy at 57.7 percent. The difference in percentages is, thus, at -49.1 percent, with Turkey being at -80.5 percent and Albania at -67 percent. The mean for Bulgaria is at 3.6 (with 1 being total antipathy and 10 being great affinity). This is higher than the mean for Albania and Turkey (2.6 and 1.7 respectively), but lower than the mean for Russia, and much lower than the mean for Serbia, Great Britain, Germany, Italy, the USA and France.

What is interesting, however, is that these attitudes were likely determined mostly by historical feelings of affinity or antipathy, including a traditional distrust towards Slavic nations/countries, and not so much about developments in the post-Cold War era that were later to significantly Greeks' attitudes. We may draw this conclusion, for example, by the fact that Bulgarians are not among the nations that spontaneously came to mind when respondents were asked to identify other nationalities. That means that, back in 1993, Bulgarians were pretty much 'invisible' as "foreigners" to the average Greek, in contrast, for example, to Albanians, who were the first foreigner that came to mind to 40.5 percent of respondents of the survey. One more finding of the same study supports the argument that the negative attitudes to Bulgaria in 1993 were largely a product of historical experience. Together with Turkey, Albania and Bulgaria, as the three countries with the most negative perceptions, negative balance in percentages also had Russia, Serbia and Great Britain. In contrast, France, the USA, Italy and Germany had positive balance in percentages of affinity/antipathy. In subsequent years, levels of affinity with most Western partners and allies would drop drastically, while levels of affinity with Serbia and Russia would rise (see more below).

Moreover, interesting but limited data can also be found in the regular Eurobarometer surveys. These surveys measure a wide array of social and political issues in EU member states and candidate countries. Unfortunately, questions measuring attitudes towards neighbouring states and nations are typically not included. One question that is included and may give us some insights into the way Greeks perceive Bulgaria is the attitudes towards countries' accession to the EU. The Greek public opinion was a consistent supporter of Bulgarian accession in the years

²³⁰ See, for example, findings in polls conducted on behalf of ELIAMEP. In a 2013 poll Bulgaria does not register as a threat at all. Ioannis Armakolas, "The Greek public opinion towards Albania and the Albanians – Social attitudes and perceptions", Athens, 2013, ELIAMEP. In a 2016 poll Bulgaria is seen as a threat by a mere 0.5 percent of respondents. Ioannis Armakolas and George Siakas, "Greek public opinion and attitudes towards the 'name dispute' and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", Athens, 2016, ELIAMEP and University Research Institute, University of Macedonia.

²³¹ Γ. Βούλγαρης, Δ. Δώδος, Π. Καφετζής, Χ. Λυριντζής, Κ. Μιχαλοπούλου, Η. Νικολακόπουλος, Μ. Σπουρδαλάκης και Κ. Τσουκαλάς, «Η πρόσληψη του 'Άλλου' στη σημερινή Ελλάδα. Πορίσματα εμπειρικής έρευνας», *Ελληνική Επιθεώρηση Πολιτικής Επιστήμης*, τεύχος 5, Απρίλιος 1995, pp. 81-100.

before the country's entry in 2007. Between 2002 and 2006 the support of Greeks to Bulgarian accession was between 59 and 66 percent. Greeks' support to Bulgarian accession was also at well higher rates than the mean of the EU, i.e. between 10 (July 2005) and 23 (October 2002) percentage points higher.

Data for support to Bulgaria's accession to the EU²³²

Eurobarometer	Greece (%)	EU (%)
No.57 – Oct 2002	59.2	36.1
No.58 – Dec 2002	66	49
No.63 – July 2005	60	50
No.64 – Dec 2005	64	48
No.66 – Dec 2006	62	46

Comparative data of Greeks' and EU's support for select countries' accession to the EU²³³

Eurobarometer	Bul – Greece (%)	Bul – EU (%)	Rom – Greece (%)	Rom – EU (%)	Yug/ Serbia – Greece (%)	Yug/ Serbia – EU (%)
No.57 – Oct 2002	59.2	36.1	55.3	33.8	62.3	29.8
No.58 – Dec 2002	66	49	67	44	70	41
No.63 – July 2005	60	50	64	45	n/a	n/a
No.64 – Dec 2005	64	48	68	43	n/a	n/a
No.66 – Dec 2006	62	46	64	41	72	37

Greeks' support for Bulgarian accession was not unlike the support extended to Romania or Yugoslavia and (later) Serbia. In fact, with the exception of only one survey (October 2002), Greeks' support to Romanian accession was higher than support to Bulgarian one by rates that ranged from 1 to 4 percentage points; and support to Yugoslav/Serbia accession was higher by rates that ranged from 3 to 10 percentage points. Greeks' support to Romania and Yugoslavia/Serbia was higher than the EU mean by between 19 and 25 percentage points and 29 and 35 percentage points respectively. Interestingly, and in contrast to the Greek public opinion, the EU mean support was typically higher for Bulgaria than it was for Romania (between 2 and 5 percentage points) and much higher for Bulgaria than it was for Yugoslavia/Serbia (between 6 and 9 percentage points). The analysis, thus, shows that Greeks supported Romanian and Serbian

²³² Data from Standard Eurobarometer (Nos.58-66), Full reports, National Reports – Greece, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb_arch_en.htm (last accessed on: 22 January 2017)

²³³ Data from Standard Eurobarometer (Nos.58-66), Full reports, National Reports – Greece, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb_arch_en.htm (last accessed on: 22 January 2017)

accessions even more than they supported the Bulgarian one. Especially, in the case of Yugoslavia/Serbia, which was still a rather unpopular potential candidate in Europe even after the fall of the Milosevic regime, the support is much higher. This is consistent with Greeks' greatly positive attitudes towards Serbs and Serbia that we have found also in other surveys.²³⁴

It should also be noted here that at the period in question the Greek public opinion was in general much more supportive of enlargement than the EU average (in recent years this trend has been reversed). The only exception to Greeks' general support for accession were the three neighbouring countries with which Greece had (and continues to have) various bilateral disputes, namely Turkey, FYROM and Albania. Support for Bulgarian accession does not appear to be particularly noteworthy since Greeks supported the accession of all Balkan states that Athens did not have disputes with. Thus, Greeks supported also the accession of Croatia, Montenegro and Bosnia-Herzegovina, sometimes at higher rates than their support to Bulgaria (e.g. Eurobarometer No.66, December 2006).

Overall, the data of the Eurobarometer illustrate that the Greek public was in favour of Bulgarian accession to the EU more than most other European publics. But this was likely more a consequence of a general pro-enlargement 'bias' towards all potential candidates, except of 'unfriendly' neighbours. In fact, possibly due to remnants of historical animosities or due to economic and other considerations, Greeks' support was more moderate than the one demonstrated towards other candidates.

In a recent poll (December 2015) by the agency Public Issue, Greeks were asked about their preferred countries for closer cooperation.²³⁵ Bulgaria is favoured by 75 percent of respondents, with 21 percent of respondents being against such cooperation. Preferences for cooperation with Bulgaria are lower than ones for cooperation with Cyprus (95 percent) and Egypt (80 percent) and higher than ones for cooperation with Israel (66 percent), Albania (56 percent), FYROM (53 percent) and Turkey (52 percent).

Turning now to recent studies conducted by ELIAMEP's South-East Europe Programme, there are a number of useful data. More specifically, in a 2013 survey²³⁶, we measured the importance that public opinion assigns to bilateral relations with Bulgaria using a 10-point scale in which point 1 equals 'no importance' (καθόλου σημασία) and point 10 equals 'maximum importance' (μέγιστη σημασία). The mean of importance that Greek public opinion assigns to relations with Bulgaria is 6.35. This is the third highest after Serbia (6.93) and Turkey (6.56) and is higher than the mean for relations with Albania (5.61) and FYROM (5.41). Importantly, Greek respondents consider Turkey a threat, in contrast to Bulgaria that is not perceived as a threat. Thus, Bulgaria can be seen as the second favourite country, after Serbia, at least among the five that we measured in the particularly study.

The data illuminate how different segments of the population view relations with Bulgaria. More specifically (in parentheses the mean rate):

- Male respondents assigned more importance to relations with Bulgaria than female ones (6.59 v. 6.12).
- The age groups 25-34 (6.55) and 55-64 (6.54) assigned more importance to relations with Bulgaria than age groups 18-24 (5.83), 35-44 (6.04). The age groups 45-54 (6.42) and 65+ (6.37) were slightly above the mean.
- Higher education respondents (6.77) considered relations as much more important than respondents with middle (6.06) or basic (6.12) education.

²³⁴ E.g. Iannis Konstantinidis and Ioannis Armakolas, "How Greeks view Kosovo: The findings of a public opinion survey", in Kosovo Foundation for Open Society, *Being Greek, Being Kosovar... A report on mutual perceptions*, Pristina, 2014.

²³⁵ Public Issue, Πολιτικό Βαρόμετρο 151, «Η Ελλάδα & οι γείτονες. Στάσεις απέναντι στις διμερείς σχέσεις της Ελλάδας με τις γειτονικές χώρες & τις χώρες της ευρύτερης περιοχής – Ειδικό Αφιέρωμα: Εξωτερική Πολιτική», Δεκέμβριος 2015.

²³⁶ Armakolas, 2013, op.cit.

- Students (7.71), public sector employees (6.69) and pensioners (6.49) assigned more importance than self-employed (6.24), unemployed (6.24) and housewives (5.74).
- Respondents living in semi-urban considered relations as slightly more important than respondents in urban and rural locations.
- Respondents living in the regions of Epirus (7.19), South Aegean (7.04), Crete (6.80), Western Greece (6.68), and East Macedonia-Thrace (6.66) assigned more importance to relations; respondents in Thessaly (5.96), Ionian Island (5.89) and the Peloponnese (6.02) were well below the national mean. Respondents in the regions of Western Macedonia and Central Macedonia (6.27 and 6.41 respectively) were close to the national mean despite the relative proximity to the borders with Bulgaria. Moreover, respondents from the Thessaloniki area (6.59) and the Athens area (6.18) were above and below the national mean respectively.
- Respondents self-identifying with the left (6.89), centre-left (6.73) and centre-right (6.68) were above the national mean, while those self-identifying with the centre (6.15) and the right (6.06) were below the national mean.
- Finally, predictably, more cosmopolitan respondents favoured with Bulgaria much more relations than less cosmopolitan respondents.

Another poll was conducted by University Research Institute of the University of Macedonia on behalf of ELIAMEP's South-East Europe Programme in 2013.²³⁷ Among the issues examined was the existence of strong stereotypes towards members of neighbouring Balkan nations. Respondents were asked to associate people of certain national origins (nationals of Albania, Kosovo, FYROM, Serbia and Bulgaria) with a distinctive attribute. The options provided were: 'criminal', 'business associate', 'worker', 'tourist' and 'student'. In all the nations that were measured, the label/attribute that was the most popular was 'worker'. Bulgarians had the second highest (after Albanians) rate of the label 'worker' surpassing 55 percent. For Bulgarians, all other labels, both negative ('criminal') and positive ('business associate', 'tourist', 'student'), were at rates below 10 percent, with the label 'student' being below 5 percent. These figures were much better than the rates of Albanians (with 20 percent of Greeks associate them with the attribute 'criminal'). Interestingly, on balance, rates for Bulgarians were slightly worse than those of nationals of FYROM. The figures for Bulgarians were also much more negative than those for Serbs. Greeks associate Bulgarians with the attribute 'worker' by more than 20 percentage points compared to the rates for Serbs; they assign to Bulgarians the attribute 'criminal' more often compared to Serbs; and they associate Serbs with attributes 'business associate', 'tourist' and 'student' much more compared to Bulgarians.

Interesting data can finally be found also in a more recent opinion poll, which was conducted in 2016 by the University Research Institute of the University of Macedonia on behalf of ELIAMEP's South-East Europe Programme.²³⁸ Among other issues, this study measured the personal stance of respondents towards various neighbouring countries, major powers and international organisations. Half of the public opinion (50 percent) had neutral attitudes towards Bulgaria. Positive attitudes were at 18.5 percent and very positive at a miniscule 0.5 percent. In contrast, the negative attitudes were at 26 percent and very negative at 3 percent. In other words, the cumulative positive attitudes totaled 19 percent, while the cumulative negative attitudes totaled 29 percent. Thus, on balance the attitudes of the Greek public opinion towards Bulgaria tend to be either neutral or more negative than positive. It's little soothe that in that particular study it was shown that, with the exception of Russia and Serbia, Greeks tend to have negative opinions about all partners, allies and neighbours, irrespective of whether bilateral disputes exist or not. By way of comparison, the cumulative negative attitudes for Turkey were at 69.5 percent, for Albania at 42.5 percent, for FYROM at 42 percent, for Kosovo at 35 percent, for Germany at 56 percent, for the USA at 34 percent, for the EU at 51.5 percent and for NATO at 42 percent. Thus, Bulgaria has the lowest rate of negative attitudes in the Greek public opinion, at least among those that on balance have a negative tally. But given the high levels of political and economic

²³⁷ Konstantinidis and Armakolas, op.cit.

²³⁸ Armakolas and Siakas, op.cit.

relations and collaboration between the two countries such a fairly neutral picture is quite frustrating.

In the same study, rather negative attitudes were registered also towards Bulgaria with regards to the opinions of governmental migration policies. It's important to note here that Bulgaria's role in the recent refugee and migrant crisis was not reported much by Greek media. Yet, in the survey Greek respondents considered Bulgaria's migration policy as negative (41.5 percent) or very negative (12.5 percent). This cumulative 54 percent of negative attitudes is topped only by Turkey (87.5 percent negative attitudes) and FYROM (77.5 percent). Germany's policies were seen as negative by 51.5 percent and Greece's policies by 39.5 percent.

What do we make of all these data? Clearly, it would be much more useful if polls focusing exclusively or mainly on relations with Bulgaria were available. But even if taking into account only the above-mentioned studies a number of interesting observations can be made here. The lack of serious bilateral disputes, and consequently the lack of very negative media coverage, means that negative attitudes towards Bulgaria are not particularly pronounced, at least not to the extent that negative attitudes are reserved for Turkey, Albania and FYROM. Moreover, Bulgaria does not make the list of countries that are perceived by the Greek public opinion as security threats. This is totally understandable given the lack of serious bilateral disputes, but it is still a welcome feature given the often-turbulent historical relationship between the two countries. However, despite the strong political and economic links between the two countries, Bulgaria remains fairly invisible in the Greek public and surely not a particularly favoured neighbour. Consistently in the above-mentioned studies that covered a period of more than two decades, Bulgaria and the Bulgarians rated better than 'problematic' neighbours, but were still not perceived in highly favourable terms. Whenever they were compared to countries and nations other than the three with which Greece has serious disputes, Bulgaria and Bulgarians tended not to be among the most popular options. Clearly, more solid conclusions could be drawn through a survey that would focus mainly on Bulgaria, and this is a study that should be pursued in the future. But, the preliminary overall conclusion here is that Greeks' attitudes towards Bulgaria and the Bulgarians is not hostile, but not particularly friendly either.

8. MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS

Representations in Greek media before the economic crisis

If we focus on the issue of the representations and more generally the coverage of neighboring Balkan countries in Greek newspapers during the post-Cold War era, a key remark to keep in mind is the constant emphasis and the priority given to the coverage of the countries of former Yugoslavia for more than a decade (1989-2001). From this point of view, the coverage of Bulgaria by Greek newspapers, during this period, bears a lot of similarities to that of Albania and Romania, in the sense that it appears to be more sporadic compared to the coverage of the area of the former Yugoslavia. For instance, many Greek newspapers engaged permanent or special correspondents in the former Yugoslavia. In contrast, the coverage of Bulgaria depended mostly on reports provided by the international (AFP, Reuters, AP) or Greek press agencies (Athens Press Agency-Macedonian Press Agency). And they focused on major developments mostly related to politics and economy (elections, relations with neighboring countries, progress of EU integration), while more interest was exhibited in cases of bilateral political or economic relations.²³⁹

In the period that followed the conflict in FYROM (2001), Greek newspapers started to cover Bulgaria more systematically, with a growing interest in bilateral relations with Greece and other key political and economic developments (i.e. the activities and opportunities for the Greek enterprises and the progress of Bulgaria's EU integration process.²⁴⁰ Taking the case of left-wing daily *Ελευθεροτυπία*, between 1999 and 2007 many of the articles dealing with bilateral relations between Greece and Bulgaria manifest a clearly positive disposition especially when it comes to Greece's support for Bulgaria's integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures.²⁴¹ When it comes to the economy, many of the articles of *Ελευθεροτυπία* focused primarily on the dynamic presence of Greek enterprises in Bulgaria.²⁴² Other articles highlighted the beneficial role of Greek investments for the Greek as well as the Bulgarian economy.²⁴³ It is worth noting here that one of the most recurrent catchwords used in relation to the intensification of Greek economic activities in the Balkans was that of *El Dorado* (e.g. «Βαλκανικό Ελντοράντο για Εθνική», 14 December 2003).²⁴⁴

²³⁹ Panagiotis Paschalidis, op.cit. La reconstruction des Balkans: Analyse des discours politiques et médiatiques, Doctoral thesis obtained in December 2012, Université Paris III- Sorbonne nouvelle. The complete text of the thesis is available at the following Internet address: <http://www.theses.fr/2012PA030173>.

²⁴⁰ Ibid

²⁴¹ See, for example, «Η Βουλγαρία θέλει να μπει στο NATO μέσω Ελλάδας», 21 October 1999, «Υποστήριξη στη Βουλγαρία για NATO-ΕΕ-προτάσεις για αγωγό», 2 November 2001, «Αθήνα σπρώχνει Σόφια σε Ε.Ε., NATO», 30 November 2001, «Βίζα τέλος με Βουλγαρία», 11 April 2001, «Επίσκεψη για Ρουμανία, Βουλγαρία βλέπει ο Σημίτης», 22 January 2003, «Σημίτης-Κοστόφ συμφωνούν για τη λύση στα Σκόπια», 4 April 2001, «Ελλάδα και Βουλγαρία έχουν κοινό δρόμο προς το μέλλον» 17 November 2001. For a more elaborate analysis of *Ελευθεροτυπία*'s coverage of Bulgaria between 1999 and 2007, see: Paschalidis, 2012, op.cit.

²⁴² See, for example, «Η Ελλάδα 3^{ος} επενδυτής στη Βουλγαρία από την Ε.Ε.», 7 August 1999, «Βουλγαρική και τουρκική πρόσκληση προς Έλληνες επιχειρηματίες», 3 November 1999, «Επένδυση ασφαλείας η Βουλγαρία», 7 November 1999, «Δρόμοι, ρεύμα και αέριο με Ρουμανία, Βουλγαρία», 20 April 2004, «Παζαρεύει ο ΟΤΕ με Βουλγαρία», 28 January 2000, «Νέο άνοιγμα Eurobank στη Βουλγαρία», 24 December 2003.

²⁴³ See, for example, «Συμβολή των ελληνικών επενδύσεων στη χεμαζόμενη Βουλγαρία», 22 October 1999, «Στα συν οι ελληνικές εξαγωγές στα Βαλκάνια», 16 December 2001, «Βαλκανική ανάσα στο εμπορικό μας ισοζύγιο», 27 January 2002.

²⁴⁴ *El dorado* (Spanish for the "Golden one" is often used as a metaphor of a quest for a valuable prize. The term "El dorado" can be found in 30 of the articles of *Ελευθεροτυπία* pertaining to the coverage of the Balkans between 1999 and 2004, a rather important frequency given the strong connotations of the term. However, in all cases it is

On the other hand, one finds a much smaller number of articles evoking the negative aspects of the Greek companies' economic involvement in Bulgaria.²⁴⁵ At a more general level, *Ελευθεροτυπία* referred quite frequently to the economic hardships that Bulgarian society endured due to its lengthy post-communist transition and the efforts to join the EU.²⁴⁶ Another aspect of economic relations between Greece and Bulgaria that was covered regularly by *Ελευθεροτυπία*, mostly after 2003, was the transfer of Greek companies, from Northern Greece in particular, to Bulgaria.²⁴⁷

Bulgaria's official admission into the EU was undoubtedly viewed as a major development by Greek newspapers. In the months of December 2006 and January 2007, numerous articles dealt with the issue and presented various parameters associated with the political and economic profile of the country. The coverage could be characterized as generally positive.²⁴⁸ There were, however, articles that demonstrated a more skeptical approach as to the readiness of Bulgaria to integrate the EU and moreover the effect that this development would have on Greece's economic relations with Bulgaria.²⁴⁹ A very indicative passage is found in the report «Πόσο επηρεάζει την Ελλάδα η ένταξη της Ρουμανίας και της Βουλγαρίας στην Ε.Ε.: Μετράμε τα συν και τα πλην»: "The EU accession of Bulgaria and Romania creates a new economic environment in the Balkans and forces the Greek economy (both the public and private sectors) to adjust to the new and less beneficial situation. The accession of the two countries will gradually limit the role held by Greek enterprises, according to financial experts, as it will reinforce the presence of powerful countries of Central Europe". Another passage from the report «Βουλγαρία και Ρουμανία μας βλέπουν αφ' υψηλού και μας κοντράρουν στις εξαγωγές» explores a similar theme: "Our national pride and the perception of a *vital space*, of the *conquest of the Balkan hinterland* start to receive important blows. Romania and Bulgaria are realizing that for the promotion of their ambitious plans they should rely not so much on neighbors such as Greece but on the powerful of Europe".

In summing up, between 1989 and 2009 Bulgaria was not covered as systematically and exhaustively as countries of former Yugoslavia in the Greek press. However, one notices a growing interest for bilateral relations in the period from 2001 onwards, a tendency associated with the intensification of the activities of Greek enterprises and the close cooperation between the two countries in the context of Bulgaria's EU accession. Interestingly, the 2007 Bulgarian accession to the EU gave the opportunity to the Greek newspapers to revisit and rethink Greece's economic presence in the Balkans. The corresponding articles indicate a strong sense of uncertainty as to Greece's status in the wider economic region, which could also be seen as a growing realization of problematic aspects, such as social cost of the migration of Greek enterprises in neighboring countries, including Bulgaria.

used in relation to the Balkans as a whole (i.e. "Balkan El dorado" and not in relation to a specific country and Bulgaria in particular. For more see: Paschalidis (2012), op. cit.

²⁴⁵ See, for example, «Βάρβαρη εκμετάλλευση: ασύδοτοι οι Έλληνες φασονίστες στη Βουλγαρία», 5 May 2004, «Σόφια: Απειλή για Βουλγαρία ο ΟΤΕ», 23 February 2000, «Επενδύσεις χλιδατής προβολής του ΟΤΕ στα Βαλκάνια», 8 June 2000.

²⁴⁶ See, for example, «15 χρόνια μακριά από το ευρώ η Βουλγαρία», 7 July 1999, «Από τη μαύρη αγοράζει η Βουλγαρία», 24 May 2000, «Νεκροί από το κρύο στη Βουλγαρία», 5 January 2000, «Σκληρές αυξήσεις στη Βουλγαρία», 21 August 2001, «Βουλγαρία: 'Σώστε τα παιδιά μας από την πείνα», 31 January 2000.

²⁴⁷ See, for example, «Τώρα μεταναστεύουν οι επιχειρήσεις μας» 7 May 2003, «Μεταναστεύει το ελληνικό χρήμα», 14 December 2003, «1,200 εταιρείες μετανάστευσαν τα τελευταία χρόνια στα Βαλκάνια», 11 May 2003, «Μακεδονία ξακουστή...του ανέργου η χώρα», 6 January 2006.

²⁴⁸ See, for example, *Ελευθεροτυπία*: «Καραμανλής στη βουλγαρική TV: Ευτυχείς για την ένταξή σας στην Ε.Ε.», 3 January 2007, *Καθημερινή*: «Πιο ισχυρή Ε.Ε. με την ένταξη Βουλγαρίας- Ρουμανίας», 28 December 2006, «Η Ελλάδα στήριξε την ένταξή μας», 31 December 2006, «Η Ελλάδα αποκτά νέους Ευρωπαίους γείτονες», 31 December 2006, «Η Ελλάδα διεθνής επενδυτική βάση για Ρουμανία και Βουλγαρία», 6 January 2007.

²⁴⁹ See, for example, *Καθημερινή*: «Ευρωπαϊές μεν, φτώχες δε...», 3 January 2007, «Η βαλκανική περιπέτεια της Ε.Ε.», 31 December 2006, *Ελευθεροτυπία*: «Έχουν ανάπτυξη, ανεργία και φτώχεια», 27 December 2006, «Σε αυστηρή επιτήρηση για μια τριετία», 27 December 2006, «Πόσο επηρεάζει την Ελλάδα η ένταξη της Ρουμανίας και της Βουλγαρίας στην Ε.Ε.: Μετράμε τα συν και τα πλην», 31 December 2006, «Βουλγαρία και Ρουμανία μας βλέπουν αφ' υψηλού και μας κοντράρουν στις εξαγωγές: Τώρα είμαστε και εμείς Ευρωπαίοι», 27 December 2006.

Representations in Greek media since the start of the economic crisis

An overview of the coverage of Bulgaria by Greek press during the economic crisis indicates that key characteristics in coverage have not changed. The coverage of Bulgaria depends heavily on the reports of international and national press agencies, whereas when there is a bilateral aspect—particularly in politics and economy—newspapers tend to engage correspondents as well as columnists. Greek newspapers continue to show a great interest in the economic aspect of Greek-Bulgarian relations, but as of recent, mostly with regard to the massive exodus of Greek companies to Bulgaria. One finds many articles on the subject.²⁵⁰ In general terms, it could be argued that when it comes to bilateral relations at the political level, the Greek newspapers frequently emphasized the intense cooperation between the two countries, notably on the occasion of visits of government officials in either country.²⁵¹ For the bigger part of the period of the economic crisis, one notes the continuation of a coverage that affirmed the overall good relations between the two countries.

On the other hand, there were signs of tension due to intensification of the refugee crisis (2015-2016) and the negative impact of the mobilization of farmers in Northern Greece (February 2016), whose decision to block the border station of Promahonas (Prefecture of Serres) provoked the strong reaction of both the Bulgarian government and many Bulgarian enterprises.²⁵² The Greek newspapers paid strong attention to Bulgaria's reactions and criticism.²⁵³

Apart from the emphasis of the negative feelings towards Greece, one also notes the effort of Greek newspapers to interpret the reasons behind such dispositions. An indicative passage is found in the opinion of pro-opposition newspaper *Καθημερινή*: “Our northern neighbors roughen their stance”: “Those who had believed that the refugee crisis would not affect relations with our northern neighbors were proven wrong. Instead of coordinating its action with Sofia, Skopje, Tirana and Belgrade, Athens simply assumed the role of a traffic controller. (...) Athens' inability to contain the refugee flow was interpreted by leaders of neighboring countries prone to conspiracy theories, such as Prime Minister Borisov and [FYROM's] President Ivanov, as a malevolent Greek plan to destabilize their respective states”. Evidently, the analysis of Greek newspapers did not focus particularly on Bulgaria, but rather on the wider problem of Greece's isolation from its Balkan neighbors.

In the case of the mobilization of Greek farmers (February 2016), there are numerous articles that reflect the tension in the relations between the two countries.²⁵⁴ Interestingly, *Καθημερινή*

²⁵⁰ See for example, *Πρώτο Θέμα*: «Δέκα ελληνικές εταιρείες την ημέρα ιδρύονται στη Βουλγαρία», 15 March 2016, *Καθημερινή*: «Μαζική φυγή εταιρειών και επαγγελματιών για να αποφύγουν την υπερφορολόγηση», 30 January 2017.

²⁵¹ See *Καθημερινή*: «Οι αγωγοί φέρνουν κοντά Ελλάδα- Βουλγαρία», 18 October 2013, «Συνάντηση Κοτζιά-Μίτοφ για την ενεργειακή πολιτική Ελλάδας- Βουλγαρίας», 14 May 2015, «Δημιουργία διακρατικού ελληνο-βουλγαρικού διαχειριστικού φορέα του ποταμού Έβρου», 22 December 2015, «Π. Καμμένος: Τόξο σταθερότητας Βουλγαρία και Ελλάδα», 26 July 2016.

²⁵² See more below.

²⁵³ See *Καθημερινή*: «Υψώνει φράχτη και η Βουλγαρία», 25 March 2016, «Επίθεση Μπορίσοφ κατά της Ελλάδας» 13 April 2016, «Πολιτική όξυνσης από τους βόρειους γείτονές μας», 30 April 2016, «Η Βουλγαρία θα αποτρέψει την είσοδο μεταναστών στο έδαφός της από την Ελλάδα», 29 May 2016, *Πρώτο Θέμα*: «Μπορίσοφ για προσφυγικό: Τα Σκόπια συμπεριφέρονται υπεύθυνα ενώ η Ελλάδα όχι», 26 March 2016, «Η Βουλγαρία στήνει φράχτη 484 χιλιομέτρων με την Ελλάδα», 10 August 2016, «Επίθεση Μπορίσοφ: δίνετε λεφτά στην Ελλάδα για το προσφυγικό επειδή ο επίτροπος είναι Έλληνας!», 15 September 2016.

²⁵⁴ See *Πρώτο Θέμα*: «Αντίποινα από Βούλγαρους νταλικέρηδες για τα μπλόκα- Έκλεισαν τα σύνορα με την Ελλάδα», 16 February 2016, «Μας πήραν στο ψιλό οι Βούλγαροι- Η Ελλάδα δεν είναι κράτος που λειτουργεί λείο ο Μπορίσοφ», 19 February 2016, «Η Βουλγαρία ζητά παρέμβαση της ΕΕ για τα αγροτικά μπλόκα», 19 February 2016, *Καθημερινή*: «Απειλούνται οι σχέσεις μας με τη Βουλγαρία», 20 February 2016, «Ασκοούν τα τρακτέρ εξωτερική πολιτική;», 26 February 2016.

focused extensively on the negative impact of the disruption of transports with Bulgaria via the wider scope of Greek-Bulgarian relations: “The ongoing blockage of the border stations with Bulgaria by the Greek farmers threatens to damage bilateral relations with Bulgaria at a time when Athens seeks and enjoys Sofia’s support on the refugee crisis. (...) The traditionally pro-Greek (*φιλελληνική*) public opinion in Bulgaria appears to be irritated and presses the political leadership to take measures against Athens, seen by media in Sofia and government cycles as indifferent and fearful” (*Καθημερινή*, «Απειλούνται οι σχέσεις μας με τη Βουλγαρία»). An even more critical- towards the Greek side and positive towards the Bulgarian side- view is found in the opinion “Do the tractors exercise foreign policy?”: “What do the Greek farmers do to achieve their goals? They turn against Bulgaria. They punish their colleagues, businessmen, seasonal workers and pensioners... (...) Greek farmers are like *kulaks* opposite their Bulgarian counterparts who receive petty European subsidies, starvation pensions, who work hard on their fields and rightfully ask why they should suffer due to a Greek problem. (...) The Bulgarian public opinion, the leadership and the media are criticizing us and this is very dangerous in the difficult period that we go through. For, it is the only people in our neighborhood with whom we do not have conflicts over history. The Bulgarian government is the friendliest towards Greece”. *Καθημερινή*, contrary to *Πρώτο Θέμα*, which often presents its stories with sensationalist overtones, seized the opportunity given by the dramatic situation due to the blockage, in order to remind its readership not only of the good relations between Greece and Bulgaria but also of their strategic significance. Thus, taking into account that the farmers’ mobilization marked the highest point of tension between Greece and Bulgaria, it is interesting to note that it was presented- at least by a newspaper with certain horizontal approval as *Καθημερινή* - not in conflicting terms but as a potentially harmful factor for the bilateral relations between the two countries.

A final aspect that should be taken into account regards the numerous references found in Greek media (both print and electronic) to-what is termed «*Βουλγαροποίηση*» of Greek society due to the gradual deterioration of living standards, of the lowering of wages in the private and public sector and more generally to the pauperization of a very important part of the population. As it was already mentioned above, such a discussion is seen in Bulgaria as particularly offensive as it seems to regenerate negative stereotypes about the country and its society. Our research approaches the matter under three perspectives: a) a historical, aiming at determining the time-frame marking the emergence of such references, b) a semantic, aiming at mapping key meanings of the notion, and c) a social, political and cultural, aiming at situating such a phenomenon in a wider context.

Beginning with the historical perspective, it is observable that with very few exceptions, the references to the «*Βουλγαροποίηση*» of Greek society are found in the context of the Greek economic crisis. The multiplication of such references in newspapers consulted in the context of this study (*ΤΟ ΒΗΜΑ*, *Καθημερινή* and *Πρώτο Θέμα*) occurs in the course of 2011 and carries on frequently until present time. In other words, the notion of «*Βουλγαροποίηση*» as it is found at present in the media is inextricably associated with the period of the Greek economic crisis. That is not to say that negative stereotypes were absent in the previous period but that such perceptions were not formulated in a similar manner, in other words a direct analogy and metaphor regarding Greek social realities.

In terms of semantics, one finds various expressions that seem to form a family of meanings associated with Bulgaria (i.e. *Βουλγαροποίηση*, “We will become Bulgaria: Θα γίνουμε Βουλγαρία”, “Bulgarian wages- Μισθοί Βουλγαρίας”).²⁵⁵ In the vast majority of cases, the dominant meanings implied by such expressions connect the drastic lowering of living standards for the Greek society with the experience of Communist and post-Communist Bulgaria. However, in most of these articles the association with Bulgaria is not explained and remains implicit. In other words, the meaning that should be made of the expression seems to be almost taken for

255 Some indicative headlines coming from *Πρώτο Θέμα*: «Η βουλγαροποίηση της Ελλάδας», 28 September 2011, «Κι αν δεν γίνουμε Βουλγαρία, μπορούμε κάλλιστα να μοιάσουμε στη Βόρεια Κορέα», 23 February 2013, «Μισθούς Βουλγαρίας για το δημόσιο και τον ιδιωτικό τομέα βλέπει ο ΣΥΡΙΖΑ», 14 February 2013.

granted.²⁵⁶ The fact that such powerful connotations are not really discussed or debated is perhaps the stronger indication of a stereotype whose origins could be traced in the perception of Greek society with regard to the socio-economic hardship of Bulgaria and the differences in comparison to Greece.

With regard to the wider social, political and cultural context of these references, one must take into account the depth of transformations that Greek society is undergoing in the context of the economic crisis. There is a widespread sentiment of insecurity, which in some cases was formulated as a fear of *becoming something different/else, something worse*. Bulgaria is by no means the only country that has become a means of projecting such fears. Our research has been able to identify 20 to 30 countries that have been referred to in a similar manner (i.e. in Latin America: Argentina, Venezuela, Colombia, Cuba; in Africa: Zambia, Uganda; in Asia: North Korea, China, India; and in Europe: Balkans, Albania, Ukraine, Romania, Estonia and others). On the other hand, in quantitative terms, Bulgaria along with the Balkans (“balkanization of Greece” - Η βαλκανιοποίηση της Ελλάδας, “We will become Balkans” - Θα γίνουμε Βαλκάνια) and Albania (“albanization”, “Hoxha's Albania”) are by far the most recurring metaphors or elements of comparison and analogy. This could be seen as the result of the important familiarization of the two countries and societies (immigration, economy, tourism, cooperation).

To sum up, the references to the probability of a «Βουλγαροποίηση» of Greek society should be thought in a wider context, not as an exception, but as a symbolic confirmation of a widespread and deep sentiment of insecurity characterizing the Greek society. From this perspective, it is interesting to note the reversal of perceptions regarding Greece's standing in the Balkans, the idea of the *El Dorado* having turned into a fear of experiencing the hardships that all of the peoples of former communist countries had to endure in the course of their post-Communist transition. From a cultural point of view, such a perception seems to confirm the traditionally ambivalent disposition of Greece towards the Balkans and its proper Balkan identity. In the context of the economic crisis, such perceptions regard not so much the elements of differentiation but the elements of similarities when it comes to the downgrading of living standards.

256 The examples confirming this trend are numerous: i.e. “It won't be easy to find 11 billion Euros until June. The option of reaching the level of the wages of Bulgaria won't solve the problem”, «Σαχνίδης: Οι μισθοί Βουλγαρίας δε θα λύσουν το πρόβλημα», *TO BHMA*, 4 April 2012.

9. IMPACT OF THE ECONOMIC CRISIS ON GREECE'S STANDING IN THE REGION

Overestimated role?

When considering an evaluation of the crisis' impact one has to take into account the fact that Greece held an inflated self-perception of its diplomatic role in the Balkans; in other words, Greece's positive role in the region was probably not as significant as Athens was perceiving. In a mini survey of Balkan opinion makers conducted by ELIAMEP's South-East Europe Programme the discrepancy between Greece's perception of its diplomatic importance in the region and the opinion of these opinion makers became clearer.²⁵⁷ Overall, the attractiveness of Greece during the decade of 2000 is fairly high (53 percent attractive and very attractive). However, this image likely rested more on the appeal of Greece as an economically strong country of the region and less on the attractiveness or effectiveness of its policies. A good percentage of these opinion makers, when asked whether Greece had a leading role in the Europeanisation of the Balkans in the period 2000-2008, were rather neutral (40 percent) and on balance more negative than positive (35 percent non-leading role v. 25 percent leading role). On the questions of whether the role of Greece during the same period was overestimated, 45 percent were neutral, while the majority of the remaining respondents thought that the role of Greece was indeed overestimated. When it comes to Greek diplomatic activity in the period 2000-2008, the responses are totally balanced: 30 percent neutral, 35 percent active and very active, and 35 percent inactive and little active. Thus, it becomes clear that the assessment of Greece's role in the region during the 'golden years' is not as positive as it is often assumed in Greece.

The same opinion makers confirm that since the start of the economic crisis the image of Greece has taken a significant blow. According to opinion makers who participated in the survey, 85 percent of the media coverage of the Greek crisis was negative, while 52 percent thought that the comments made by politicians and opinion makers in response to the crisis were negative and very negative (with 45 percent saying the comments were neutral). These findings show the potential for negative impact of the crisis on the image of Greece in the region. Indeed, one in two (49 percent) respondents in the same survey thought that the Greek crisis has greatly or somewhat affected the image of the country in the region, while only one in four (24 percent) thought it was little or not at all affected. In fact, another 49.5 percent thought that the Greek debt crisis affected also the image of the EU as a whole in the region, while only one in four (26.5 percent) remained neutral on the question and another one in four (24 percent) thought that the image of the EU was not affected. Finally, the Balkan opinion makers surveyed thought that the crisis has also affected Greek diplomatic activity in the region. More than one in two (55.5 percent) thought that Greek diplomacy was inactive or little active since 2008 and only a 15.5 percent thought that the Greek diplomacy remained quite or very active.

Bulgarian perceptions of the Greek crisis

The beginning of the debt crisis in Greece was closely watched by Bulgarian society and the political world, with initial statements by Bulgarian officials declaring that "what happened to Greece could not happen to us".²⁵⁸ Bulgarians were in particular worried about the possible

²⁵⁷ Ιωάννης Αρμακόλας και Αναστάσης Βάλβης, «Οικονομική κρίση και ελληνική εξωτερική πολιτική στα Βαλκάνια: τα αποτελέσματα μιας διαδικτυακής έρευνας», Αθήνα, Κείμενο Εργασίας no.52, Αύγουστος 2014, Αθήνα, ΕΛΙΑΜΕΠ.

²⁵⁸ See for example one of the first statements of Bulgarian officials, in May 2010, by Foreign Minister Nikolai Mladenov (Николай Младенов) where underlined that "Sofia follows closely the situation in Greece" and that

effects of the crisis on Greek banks in Bulgaria, given their important place in the Bulgarian banking sector.²⁵⁹ By 2011, Bulgarians were observing how the crisis was forcing a growing number of Greek businesses and capital to move into Bulgaria²⁶⁰, while labor unrest in Greece was also benefiting the Bulgarian economy in other ways, for example in the case of the port of Burgas gaining new clients that stopped using the port of Thessaloniki because of labor protests.²⁶¹ As crisis deepened, in November 2011, new worries about the effects on the Bulgarian banking system surfaced, while there were calls for a serious debate in Bulgaria, "instead of silence and assurances".²⁶² By 2012, Athens' inability to deal with the debt crisis, the aggravated socio-economic situation and the prospect of Greek "exit" from the euro, were forcing Bulgarians to examine all possible scenarios and their impact on Bulgaria:

"Even in the most optimistic political development, compliance with the... measures imposed by Brussels would mean continuous recession in Greece... And that affects Bulgaria in a number of ways. Greece is still among its main trading partners, and many forms depend upon the Greece market. The export sector has been finding (for some time) alternatives and is turning its attention to the East; however that can only alleviate the negative effects, not to eliminate them. And these (negative effects) are particularly strong in the border regions, and in particular among medium and small size businesses that cannot find easily alternatives. A number of south Bulgarian cities depend upon winter and shopping tourism by Greeks that and that will probably weaken.... The Bulgarian financial sector is dominated by Greek institutions... In the most optimistic scenario they will manage gradually to recapitalize and will stop hang by the Greek Central Bank and the European Central Bank... From the worsening situation in Greece we could expect and certain positive effects, however, it is naïve to think that they can compensate for the negative ones. Foreign and Greek forms could prefer to move their headquarters in Bulgaria, because of its higher stability, lower taxes and more liberal labor market. However, the main pillars of the Greek economy are tourism and agriculture and they can hardly move to Bulgaria, thus the effect cannot be huge. While at the same time, the continuous insecurity will probably push away investors from the whole region." Scenario No1: "Aide, to Remain Together". "The effects from the apocalyptic scenario for Greece in all its aspects are almost unforeseen both for Europe and for Bulgaria. If there is one thing certain, that is that the hardest hit will be felt first by the banking sector... In an eventual removal of Greece from the Eurozone, the Greek banks will probably sell their Bulgarian branches to a new owner. Scenario No2: "Goodbuy and Thank you for the Euro".²⁶³

The new uncertainty over Greece's position in the Eurozone in the first 9 months of 2015, and the deterioration of the economic climate in Greece - with the imposition of capital controls by the Greek banks in the summer of 2015 - generated anew intensive interest and speculation in Bulgaria, with a feeling of general amazement about developments taking place in the neighboring country.²⁶⁴ In social media Bulgarians would comment that Greeks had been living

"Greece could not happen to us" as "the Bulgarian economy and the structure of its financial system are quite different (from those in Greece)". Quoted in Красимира Темелкова, "Младенов сменя лимузина с Мазда", *Стандарт*, 8 май 2010, с. 5

²⁵⁹ See Светослав Спасов, "Финансистите у нас са спокойни - гръцките баки нямали проблем", сп. *ТЕМА*, бр. 25, 27 юни-3 юли 2011, с. 12-13

²⁶⁰ *ibid*

²⁶¹ Калина Горанова, "Добре дошли, контейнери", *Капитал*, 23-29 юли 2011, с. 24

²⁶² Коментар, *Капитал*, 5-11 ноември 2011, с. 1

²⁶³ *Капитал*, 19-23 май 2012 с. 26-27.

²⁶⁴ According to the Bulgarian economist Giorgi Angelov (Георги Ангелов), "during the last thirty years we got used to see Greece as a rich and developed country, where everything is better than in Bulgaria. That's why now we can hardly believe that all that is collapsing within a few days". Quoted in Татьяна Ваксберг, "200 хиляди

beyond their means “and now it was time to pay for all that”, while there were also those who would remark that “despite the crisis, Greeks continue to live better than us”.²⁶⁵ There were, again, worries concerning the effects of developments in Greece over the Bulgarian banking sector²⁶⁶, with the Bulgarian Premier Borisov, reassuring Bulgarian public, stating that the crisis in Greece could not threaten the Bulgarian banking sector.²⁶⁷ At the same time, the Bulgarian Premier declared that the Greek crisis might discourage Bulgaria from joining the Eurozone.²⁶⁸ There were also worries concerning the effects of the crisis upon the 200,000 Bulgarians working in Greece (among them around 80,000 seasonal workers)²⁶⁹, with the assessment being that those being employed in the tourism sector or in agriculture faced less risk of losing their jobs, than in other sectors.²⁷⁰

Bulgarians also watched with irritation how Greek politicians would use in domestic public debate Bulgaria as an example of poverty and backwardness inside the EU and “where the country (Greece) was potentially heading for, the so-called *Βουλγαροποίηση* (roughly translated as ‘turn into/become Bulgaria’)”. Two in particular statements by two high ranking *Syriza* politicians received a lot of attention in Bulgaria: the *Syriza* MP and Vice President in the Greek Parliament, Alexis Mitropoulos (Αλέξης Μητρόπουλος) state in July 2015 that “we are at a tragic situation... The dilemmas that the creditors have put on the table are either enforced *Βουλγαροποίηση* of Greek society or exit and termination of relations with us”²⁷¹; Rena Duru (Ρένα Δούρου), Governor for the Attica region, stated in the same period that “we are not going to find a solution, if the plan for my country is to reduce pensions at the level of Croatia and other Balkan countries or to throw us out of the EU. You cannot have Bulgaria and Romania as members of the EU and Greece thrown out of the European family”²⁷². The two statements drew a variety of responses in Bulgaria:

“There is no way for Greece’s Balkan neighbors to feel particular happy by statements like these. At the same time, those insinuations are a poisonous mix of arrogance and a lack of interest. Even if we accept that the busy *Syriza* politicians did not intent to say anything wrong about their neighbors, we again come to the conclusion, that they openly expressed what most Greeks truly believe: that the poor Balkan neighbors deserve less respect, attention and prosperity than the Greeks. It is also scandalous that politicians from a supposedly left wing political party are feeding similar, old-fashioned nationalist

българи в страната на бруталния шок”, *Deutsche Welle* (DW), 7/7/2015, <http://www.dw.com/bg/200-хиляди-българи-в-страната-на-бруталния-шок/a-18565778> (last accessed: 15/7/2016)

²⁶⁵ Марко Арндт, “И в криза гърците живеят по-добре от българите”, DW, 3/08/2015, <http://www.dw.com/bg/и-в-криза-гърците-живеят-по-добре-от-българите/a-18623280>, (last accessed: 29/7/2016)

²⁶⁶ Following the Greek elections of January 2015, the Bulgarian regulatory authorities had asked all Bulgarian subsidiary banks to move their capital assets from Greece to Bulgaria. “200 хиляди българи в страната на бруталния шок”

²⁶⁷ Е. Лилов, “Ще зарази ли Гърция и България?” DW, 2/7/2015, <http://www.dw.com/bg/ще-зарази-ли-гърция-и-българия/a-18557570> (last accessed: 15/7/2016)

²⁶⁸ “If we were now in the Eurozone, we would have to pay for Greece – in other words one poor country would have to finance a richer country. In that there is no logic. Until the countries of the Eurozone do not become more disciplined, I don’t see a reason to hurry joining the Euro”. Quoted in “Ще зарази ли Гърция и България?”

²⁶⁹ Data by the Bulgarian Minister of Labor Ivailo Kalfin (Ивайло Калфин), cited in “200 хиляди българи в страната на бруталния шок”

²⁷⁰ “200 хиляди българи в страната на бруталния шок”

²⁷¹ Quoted in Георги Папакочев, “България и Гърция - какво ги свързва и разделя”, DW, 12/8/2015, <http://www.dw.com/bg/българия-и-гърция-каково-ги-свързва-и-разделя/a-18642472> (last accessed: 15/7/2016).

²⁷² Quoted in Ф. Хьофлинг, А. Андреев, “Българизация” в Гърция? Не съвсем. DW, 10/7/2015, <http://www.dw.com/bg/българизация-в-гърция-не-съвсем/a-18574889> (last accessed: 15/7/2016).

prejudices. As far as I can remember, the leftists were internationalists and protected the rights of the poor and the defenseless”.²⁷³

Similarly, in August 2015, the Bulgarian PM Borisov characteristically stated: “our neighbors, if they have the courage and the decency, they should come out publicly and apologize for the insults they have made at our expense in their political, populist appraisals”.²⁷⁴

Turning to Bulgarian media representations of the Greek crisis, the picture has been mixed. There have been those that have expressed sympathy towards Germany and criticism against the “Greek inability” to implement the agreed reforms. Among left-wing media there was disappointment from Tsipras deference to the creditors.²⁷⁵ There were also cases of crude misinformation of the Bulgarian public opinion, with most characteristic example the days after the June 2015 agreement between Greece and its creditors with certain Bulgaria media claiming that “Bulgaria and the other 8 member-states that are not in the Eurozone, will participate in Greece’s salvation...”, or that “Bulgaria will also have to pay for the urgent salvation of Athens”.²⁷⁶

²⁷³ Александър Андреев, “Когато къщата на съседа гори...”, *DW*, 24/07/2016, <http://www.dw.com/bg/когато-къщата-на-съседа-гори/a-18605512> (last accessed: 27/7/2016).

²⁷⁴ Quoted in “България и Гърция - какво ги свързва и разделя”

²⁷⁵ “И в криза гърците живеят по-добре от българите”

²⁷⁶ Quoted in Ясен Бояджиев, “Колективната българска истерия”, *DW*, 27/7/2015, <http://www.dw.com/bg/колективната-българска-истерия/a-18608921> (last accessed: 29/7/2016)

10. RECENT PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES

The Greek farmers' protests and the closure of the border crossings

On 25 January 2016, Greek farmers demonstrating against proposed fiscal measures by the Greek government began a series of “dynamic protests”, involving the closure of roads and of all the 6 border crossings between Greece and Bulgaria.²⁷⁷ The protests disrupted transportation and commerce between the two countries and caused serious damages to a whole range of businesses. Three weeks after the beginning of the blockades, around 80 Bulgarian transport firms were preparing documents to claim losses from the border blockade, estimated at around EUR 150 every day for every lorry owner or EUR 300-400,000 daily for the Bulgarian transport sector;²⁷⁸ around 30 Bulgarian bus companies that conduct regular, daily trips between the two countries, reported losses from the border blockade estimated between 25 to 30,000 leva daily.²⁷⁹ There was also a negative effect on winter tourism in Bulgaria. In the town of Bansko, the well-known Bulgarian winter resort, mayor Giorgi Ikonov (Георги Икономов) reported at the end of February that the number of Greek tourists visiting Bansko during February 2016 was reduced between 15 and 20 percent;²⁸⁰ at the end of February 2016, Bulgarian tour operators calculated their losses from the 40-day blockade of the border crossings at around 1 million dollars, with the cities of Melnik, Bansko, Sandanski and Smolyan being among the worst affected;²⁸¹ there were also reports of a Greek firm stop buying Bulgarian tobacco from the region of Gotse Delchev.²⁸²

The arbitrary closure of the borders by the Greek farmers and the evident inability of the Greek government and the authorities to safeguard a basic EU principle, that of the free movement of people and products, generated a lot of discontent in Bulgaria. Many Bulgarians were incensed that following for 45 years that an undemocratic regime had denied them their freedom of movement, they once more faced obstacles due to the actions of an interest group in a neighboring state.²⁸³ In media and social forums there was no shortage of articles raging against “Greek impertinence”:

²⁷⁷ Kulata-Promahonas (Кулата-Промαχόνας), Pinden-Exohi (Илинден-Еξοχή), Kapitan Petko Voivoda-Ormenio (Капитан Петко войвода-Ορμένιο), Zlatograd-Thermes (Златоград-Θέρμες), Ivailograd-Kiprinos (Ивайловград-Κυπρίνος) and Makasa-Nimfaia (Μακασα-Νυμφαία).

²⁷⁸ „По 150 евро на ден губи всеки собственик на камион при блокада”, *Kapital*, 4 февруари 2016, http://www.capital.bg/politika_i_ikonomika/bulgaria/2016/02/04/2698172_po_150_evro_na_den_gubi_vseki_sobstvenik_na_kamion_pri/ (last accessed: 15/5/2016), “Който иска да ходи в Гърция, да си измисля други маршрути, препоръча Московски”, *Дневник*, 18 февруари 2016, http://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2016/02/18/2706992_koito_iska_da_hodi_v_gurciia_da_si_izmislia_dруги/ (last accessed: 15/5/2016).

²⁷⁹ Statements by the President of the National Association of Bus Carriers, Galia Topalova (Галия Топалова) to Agency *Fokus*. Quoted in “Опасността от нова блокада на границата остава, загубите тепърва ще се пресмятат”, *Дневник*, 22 февруари 2016, http://www.dnevnik.bg/biznes/companii/2016/02/22/2709738_opasnostta_ot_nova_blokada_na_granicata_ostava/ (last accessed: 20/5/2016).

²⁸⁰ Румен Жерев, Кулата свободна, фермерите изтеглиха тракторите”, *Монитор*, 29 февруари 2016, <http://www.monitor.bg/a/view/44632-%D0%9A%D1%83%D0%BB%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B0-> (last accessed: 1/7/2016).

²⁸¹ „Лятна блокада на Гърция, ако не ни плати 15 млн. Евро”, *Труд*, 22 февруари 2016, <http://www.trud.bg/Article.asp?ArticleId=5318878> (last accessed: 10/8/2016).

²⁸² “Опасността от нова блокада на границата остава, загубите тепърва ще се пресмятат”.

²⁸³ Interview with a member of the *Hellenic Business Council*, Sofia, 14/2/2017

“Since last year Greece has surpassed itself in impertinence. As we all know, it was facing bankruptcy (and) the EC literally offered it EUR 60 billion, clearly understanding that they would never be returned. By and large, since Greece joined the Union, it has turned into its spoiled child; and as it is well known, the spoiled child becomes capricious – it wants more than it gives. In this case, Greek farmers have been entrusted with this role”.²⁸⁴

Outraged Bulgarian lorry drivers²⁸⁵ would respond with their own border closure with public, government consent, with old stereotypes resurfacing:

“We know your Byzantine tricks, you are preparing the next trap. We are not going to lift the blockade, until you move your tractors from Promahona. Your impertinence is unlimited – your tractors are a gift from the EC, you got your petrol until now for free, (while) until two years ago you did not know what it meant to pay taxes. The time has come to return those 400 millions, which you have drunk and eaten all those 30 years”.²⁸⁶

Ministers of the Bulgarian government did not hide their irritation at both the behavior of the farmers and the stance of the Greek authorities, with the Bulgarian Transport Minister Ivailo Moskovski (Ивайло Московски) characteristically stating “I’ve never seen in my life such a big mockery at the expense of Bulgarians”.²⁸⁷ Another time, following a failed attempt of negotiations to lift the border blockade, Minister Moskovski declared, that “There is no way to conduct negotiations with a few hundred drunken farmers, while Greek authorities have abdicated of their responsibilities”²⁸⁸. Premier Borisov could also not hide his annoyance with the Greek government:

“It turns out that during the 21st Century this is the only way [referring to the reaction of Bulgarian lorry drivers to close the border crossings with Greece on the Bulgarian side]. In states that are functioning normally... and I am sorry, but Greece right now is not such a state, as much as they feel insulted. When a Prime Minister calls the other, he expects some decision. I called him [Mr Tsipras] twice for the same thing and they don’t send the police... to open a corridor. They should have done that a month ago. The Greek Premier said: Boyko, I am sorry I don’t have any control over the situation. Then, why don’t you close the ports, close them inside the country. Why do you give a hard time to Bulgarians? And (all that) at a time when I am refusing money to... put up a

²⁸⁴ Проф. Драгомир Драганов, “Балканското християнско безумие”, *24 Chasa*, 20 февруари 2016, <https://www.24chasa.bg/Article/5313436> (last accessed 10/8/2016).

²⁸⁵ Businessman Vasil Tilev (Васил Тилев), owner of a TIR firm from the city of Sandanski, would characteristically state “Greeks like always, but especially now have shown that they are the parasites of EC... The Greeks are grossly violating our rights, we are nevertheless living in the 21st Century, they don’t respect any rule. What an insolence”. Румен Жерев, “БГ шофьори блокираха Промахон”, *Монитор*, 9 февруари 2016, <http://www.monitor.bg/a/view/22055-%D0%91%D0%93-> (last accessed 2/7/2016).

²⁸⁶ Statement by Bulgarian lorry drivers, blocking the Kulata–Promahonas border crossing, responding to proposals by Greek farmers. Quoted in Румен Жерев, “Бой на ГКПП "Илинден", *Монитор*, 17 февруари 2016, <http://www.monitor.bg/a/view/34116-%D0%9F%D0%B8%D0%BB%D0%B5-%D0%BD%D0%B5> (last accessed 2/7/2016)

²⁸⁷ Quoted in “След провал на опита за преговори блокадата на границата с Гърция остава”, *Дневник*, 20 февруари 2016, http://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2016/02/20/2708837_sled_proval_na_opita_za_pregovori_blokadata_na/ (last accessed: 20/5/2016).

²⁸⁸ Quoted in “Московски посъветва блокадата от българска страна на границата с Гърция да продължи”, *Дневник*, 17 февруари 2016, http://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2016/02/17/2706892_moskovski_posuuetva_blokadata_ot_bulgarska_strana_na/, (last accessed: 20/5/2016)

fence at the border with Greece. I am refusing the assistance of my colleagues in order to show loyalty to my neighbors”.²⁸⁹

On 19 February 2016, the Bulgarian parliament, following a proposal by the parliamentary committee of foreign affairs, adopted unanimously a resolution calling upon the European Commission “to legally move against Greece” as a result of the continuous blocking of Greek-Bulgarian border crossings by the farmers protests, and the failure of the Greek authorities and the Greek government to protect the principle of free movement, causing substantial losses upon Bulgarian transporters.²⁹⁰ It was the first time since Bulgaria’s entry into the EU that the Bulgarian parliament had adopted such a declaration, underlying the negative repercussions caused by the protest actions of the Greek farmers.

The prospect of new protests by Greek farmers, at the beginning of 2017, mobilized Sofia. The Bulgarian Minister of the Interior Romyana Vachvarova (Румяна Бъчварова) send a letter to her Greek colleague Nikos Toskas (Νίκος Τόσκας) expressing her concern about a potential closure of the border, and recalling an agreement at the last meeting of the *High Level Cooperation Council* of the two countries, whereby the two governments “will take preventive measures to avoid any tension at the borders”.²⁹¹ Furthermore, in a letter to EU officials, Bulgarian MEP and *Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization* (IMRO) deputy leader Angel Djambazki, (Ангел Джамбазки) urged “EU institutions to do their best to prevent a blockade of the Bulgarian-Greek border by discontented Greeks farmers and other citizens because this will affect thousands of EU transport companies and citizens again”.²⁹²

The refugee/migrant crisis and its impact on bilateral relations

Migration flows have become recently another issue in the agenda of Greek-Bulgarian relations. The number of migrants that have entered Bulgaria is relatively small - Bulgarian reception centers had registered about 4,500 refugees by April 2016.²⁹³ Most migrants tend to steer clear of Bulgaria, as it “has a reputation of being a country where vigilantes “hunt” refugees”, while most migrants are trying to reach the “European welfare state”... and that happens to be in the West”.²⁹⁴ Nevertheless, the growing influx of migrants has preoccupied Bulgarian public opinion and politicians, with the worry being that the country could become an “entry point” for Middle Eastern and other Asian migrants that would be “stuck” in the country, posing a threat for the ethnic and religious balance. These concerns were often linked also to the acute demographic problem facing Bulgaria as well as with the ever-present concern about the demographic vitality of the ethnic Turkish and Roma minorities.

Sofia refused to join the so-called Visegrad initiative (the Visegrad 4 plus Austria) in advocating the “reinforced protection” of EU borders – in practice “fencing” its borders with Greece. At the

²⁸⁹ Quoted in “Пълна блокада на българо-гръцката граница, Борисов подкрепя акцията”, *Дневник*, 19 февруари 2016, http://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2016/02/19/2707943_pulna_blokada_na_bulgaro-gruckata_granica_borisov/ (last accessed: 15/5/2016)

²⁹⁰ *СЕГА*, 20 февруари 2016, с.3, also Мина Маринова, Румен Жерев, “НС: Гръцките власти да вдигнат блокадата”, *Монитор*, 19 февруари 2016 <http://www.monitor.bg/a/view/10175-%D0%9D%D0%A1> (last accessed: 10/8/2016)

²⁹¹ «Ανήσυχη η Σόφια για το ενδεχόμενο αποκλεισμού των ελληνοβουλγαρικών συνόρων από αγρότες», *Ναυτεμπορική*, 18 Ιανουαρίου 2017, <http://www.naftemporiki.gr/story/1195094/anisuxi-i-sofia-gia-to-endexomeno-apokleismou-ton-ellinoboulgarikon-sunoron-apo-agrotes> (last accessed: 17/1/2017)

²⁹² “Bulgarian MEP Warns EU about Possible New Blockade of Border with Greece”, *ΒΤΑ*, 18 January 2017, <http://www.bta.bg/en/c/DF/id/1501215> (last accessed: 20/1/2017)

²⁹³ Mariya Ilcheva, “Why few refugees want to stay in Bulgaria”, *DW*, 27/04/2016, <http://www.dw.com/en/why-few-refugees-want-to-stay-in-bulgaria/a-19218637> (last accessed: 27/7/2016)

²⁹⁴ *Ibid*

same time, Bulgaria has constructed a fence in part of its borders with Turkey²⁹⁵, while on 5 May 2016, Sofia and Ankara signed a protocol, according to which Bulgaria “will be able to send back migrants who have crossed its border with Turkey illegally from June 1”,²⁹⁶ which however has not entered into force yet. Criticism by Sofia against Athens and its policies on the migrant issue has been present. Talking to the Parliament on 25 March 2016, the Bulgarian Premier Borisov warned that his country was expecting a refugee wave from Greece, criticizing their living conditions in Greece:

“(For Bulgaria) the greatest danger of a refugee wave comes from Greece and not from Turkey... Their living conditions in the camps are horrible... Right now, groups of around 1000 are getting organized (in order to come to Bulgaria), because they know that we cannot stop them easily”

Borisov noted his “indignation” for the fact that Greece had received 700 million euro for the refugee crisis, without having fulfilled its obligations.²⁹⁷ Bulgarian policemen participate in the FRONTEX force patrolling in the island of Lesbos (for the period 1-5 May and 1-5 July 2016).²⁹⁸ The negative developments of EU-Turkey relations following the failed coup d’etat in Turkey on 15 July 2016, and the prospect of a collapse of the EU-Turkey agreement of 18 March 2016, has further increased fears in Sofia about growing migrant flows coming from Turkey. Thus, the refugee crisis was discussed by the Prime Ministers of Greece and Bulgaria on 1 August 2016, and in particular “the need for Greece and Bulgaria to play a constructive role within the EU in order to preserve the EU-Turkey agreement and keep refugee flows low, while continuing to put pressure on EU countries to continue relocation programmes”.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁵ The construction of the security fence began in January 2014. It is around 140 km long.

²⁹⁶ Maria Cheresheva, “Bulgaria to Return Migrants to Turkey from June 1”, *BIRN, Balkan Insight*, 06 May 16, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/bulgaria-%D1%82%D0%BE-start-sending-migrants-back-to-turkey-from-june-1-05-06-2016> (last accessed: 25/7/2016)

²⁹⁷ *Труд*, 26 март 2016, с. 3

²⁹⁸ “МВР праща полицаи на остров Лесбос”, *Труд*, 30-31 юли 2016, с. 2

²⁹⁹ Mihalopoulos, op. cit. The Bulgarian Premier also stated that “Bulgaria and Greece are faced with a huge problem - I shared that with my colleague Alexis Tsipras... while he was in Sofia. They can’t take any more, they have around 50 to 60,000 at the moment...” Interview of Boyko Borisov, “Заплашва ни мигрантска супер криза”, *Труд*, 13-14 август 2016. с. 4-5

CONCLUSIONS

- Athens and Sofia have managed to significantly expand their bilateral ties since 1989: flourishing social and economic relations and a common membership to the EU and NATO have buttressed a good, working diplomatic relationship that had developed already in the 1970s and 1980s. Energy cooperation has been added recently as another important dimension in the bilateral relationship.
- History and geopolitics “keep alive” certain sensitivity in both countries vis-à-vis their powerful Eastern neighbor, Turkey, whose growing assertiveness and domestic authoritarianism and instability, makes them feel unease. The issue of the refugee flows coming through Turkey has underlined once more the need for closer cooperation between Bulgaria and Greece.
- Economic co-operation (trade, investments, energy and tourism) remains the most “dynamic element” of the bilateral relations. The Greek economic presence in Bulgaria has been reduced lately (for example in the financial sector with the sale of Greek owned banks), but overall it remains considerable. Bulgarian investments in Greece are at their infancy, but they are increasing (especially in northern Greece) and will probably continue to grow as Bulgaria’s GDP is steadily growing. Energy cooperation has added another important dimension to bilateral relations, despite the rather disappointing failure of the Burgas-Alexandroupolis pipeline project. The contribution of tourism to both economies cannot be stressed enough with thousands of Bulgarians spending their holidays in summer resorts in northern Greece and Greeks visiting winter resorts in south Bulgaria.
- Athens and Sofia have followed a fundamentally different policy vis-à-vis FYROM since the collapse of Yugoslavia. But in both countries there is a strong disapproval of the newly promoted nationalism in FYROM as well as serious concerns about the domestic and regional consequences of the process of ‘antiquisation’, which is seen as not only challenging history and cultural identity, but also the notion of “good-neighborliness”. In recent years, Greece and Bulgaria seem to be on the same page with regards to using their EU membership as a tool for moderating FYROM’s nationalist excesses.
- Despite the establishment of the High Level Cooperation Council in 2010, political dialogue between the two countries was, until recently, far below its “full potential”. The countries could potentially cooperate much closer on regional issues as well as in promoting their common interests in Brussels, on issues such as EU structural funds or migration pressures. It is encouraging that political dialogue between Athens and Sofia has intensified as of recent, as it was underlined by the third meeting of the High Level Cooperation Council in August 2016.
- Both countries are going through a phase of protracted crisis. In Bulgaria’s case, the crisis of course is much longer. Although the period of transition (that has preoccupied so much public debate) came to an end with Bulgaria’s accession into the EU in 2007, the country hasn’t managed to deal with the deep-seated socio-economic problems, generated by the transition since 1990. In Greece’s case, the debt crisis that began in 2010 continues, with the country appearing unable to recover from the crisis. In the meantime, Greece begins to suffer from issues, well-known to Bulgaria, such as widespread contempt for the political system and the political elite, brain drain, a deepening demographic crisis, and growing trend of depopulation and abandonment of the countryside.

- The debt crisis in Greece and the inability of successive Greek governments to deal effectively with it has generated a variety of responses in Bulgaria, but overall there is no doubt that it has harmed Greece's image in the country. The "attraction" of the Greek brand name has been reduced, as for example less Bulgarians are interested in learning the Greek language since the onset of the crisis. The fact that many important Greek businesses and banks in Bulgaria have been bought by third parties has also strengthened public perceptions of a Greece's reduced power and status.
- The use of the demeaning term *Βουλγαροποίηση* in Greece, signifies also a major shift in the bilateral relationship: standards of living are getting closer, as the substantial differences that divided for more than two decades the two societies - and led so many Bulgarians to look for a better life in Greece - are shrinking fast. Now, it's Greeks that are looking towards Bulgaria: during the last six years, a growing number of Greeks (businessmen, mixed families) have chosen to live and work in their neighboring country.
- Neither Athens nor Sofia have managed to duplicate their close relationship with any other of their Balkan neighbors in the last two and a half decades. Athens, in particular, does not enjoy a "problem free relationship" with any of its other three immediate neighbors. In fact, such a good and stable relationship, as the one enjoyed between Greece and Bulgaria, cannot be found anywhere in the Balkans (with the possible exception of Albania and Kosovo, that however constitute an exception due to their ethnic affinity). Given the general instability and turbulence in the post-Cold War era and the long history of hostility, relations between Bulgaria and Greece should be seen as a truly Balkan success story.
- The close ties and good working relationship that the two counties have managed to build are not however "immune" to the challenges they have appeared. As the case of the protests by Greek farmers underlined, "unchecked" social protests that unjustifiably harm the interests of the other side have the capacity to generate substantial public discontent, harming and undermining bilateral ties. They also bring to the surface negative stereotypes about Greece and Greeks (such as that of the "cunning and untrustworthy Byzantine") that although have largely retreated from public domain, remain nevertheless "dormant" in Bulgarian society.

APPENDIX: GREEK NEWSPAPER ARTICLES USED FOR MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS ANALYSIS

- Έλενα Αποστολίδου, “Τι σπρώχνει τις ελληνικές επιχειρήσεις στη Βουλγαρία”. Μακεδονία της Κυριακής, 29 Οκτωβρίου 2016
- Μαρία Βουργάνα, “Επιχείρηση...Βαλκανιζατέρ: Μπλόκο για ελληνικές εταιρείες σφραγίδα στα Βαλκάνια”, ΈΘΝΟΣ. 9 Φεβρουαρίου, 2017
- Θάνος Τσίρος, “Μαζική φυγή ελληνικών εταιρειών στα Βαλκάνια”, Η Καθημερινή, 22 Νοεμβρίου 2015, σ.19
- Προκόπης Χατζηνικολάου, “Έλεγχοι για εικονικές επιχειρήσεις σε Βουλγαρία και Κύπρο από το ΥΠΟΙΚ”, Καθημερινή, 15 Αυγούστου, 2016
- Ελευθεροτυπία, «Η Βουλγαρία θέλει να μπει στο NATO μέσω Ελλάδας», 21 Οκτωβρίου 1999
- Ελευθεροτυπία, «Υποστήριξη στη Βουλγαρία για NATO-ΕΕ-προτάσεις για αγωγό», 2 Νοεμβρίου 2001
- Ελευθεροτυπία, «Αθήνα σπρώχνει Σόφια σε Ε.Ε., NATO», 30 Νοεμβρίου 2001, Ελευθεροτυπία, «Βίζα τέλος με Βουλγαρία», 11 Απριλίου 2001
- Ελευθεροτυπία, «Επίσπευση για Ρουμανία, Βουλγαρία βλέπει ο Σημίτης», 22 Ιανουαρίου 2003
- Ελευθεροτυπία, «Σημίτης-Κοστόφ συμφωνούν για τη λύση στα Σκόπια», 4 Απριλίου 2001
- Ελευθεροτυπία, «Ελλάδα και Βουλγαρία έχουν κοινό δρόμο προς το μέλλον» 17 Νοεμβρίου 2001
- Ελευθεροτυπία, «Η Ελλάδα 3ος επενδυτής στη Βουλγαρία από την Ε.Ε.», 7 Αυγούστου 1999
- Ελευθεροτυπία, «Βουλγαρική και τουρκική πρόσκληση προς Έλληνες επιχειρηματίες», 3 Νοεμβρίου 1999
- Ελευθεροτυπία, «Επένδυση ασφαλείας η Βουλγαρία», 7 Νοεμβρίου 1999, «Δρόμοι, ρεύμα και αέριο με Ρουμανία, Βουλγαρία»
- Ελευθεροτυπία, 20 Απριλίου 2004
- Ελευθεροτυπία, «Παζαρεύει ο ΟΤΕ με Βουλγαρία» 28 Ιανουαρίου 2000
- Ελευθεροτυπία, «Νέο άνοιγμα Eurobank στη Βουλγαρία», 24 Δεκεμβρίου 2003).
- Ελευθεροτυπία, «Συμβολή των ελληνικών επενδύσεων στη χεμαζόμενη Βουλγαρία», 22 Οκτωβρίου 1999
- Ελευθεροτυπία, «Στα συν οι ελληνικές εξαγωγές στα Βαλκάνια», 16 Δεκεμβρίου 2001
- Ελευθεροτυπία, «Βαλκανική ανάσα στο εμπορικό μας ισοζύγιο», 27 Ιανουαρίου 2002 Ελευθεροτυπία, «Βαλκανικό Ελντοράντο για Εθνική», 14 Δεκεμβρίου 2003
- Ελευθεροτυπία, «Βάρβαρη εκμετάλλευση: ασύδοτοι οι Έλληνες φασονίστες στη Βουλγαρία», 5 Μαΐου 2004
- Ελευθεροτυπία, «Σόφια: Απειλή για Βουλγαρία ο ΟΤΕ», 23 Φεβρουαρίου 2000, Ελευθεροτυπία, «Επενδύσεις χλιδατής προβολής του ΟΤΕ στα Βαλκάνια», 8 Ιουνίου 2001
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- Ελευθεροτυπία, «Σκληρές αυξήσεις στη Βουλγαρία», 21 Αυγούστου 2001
- Ελευθεροτυπία, «Βουλγαρία: Ώστε τα παιδιά μας από την πείνα'», 31 Ιανουαρίου 2000

- Ελευθεροτυπία, «Τώρα μεταναστεύουν οι επιχειρήσεις μας» 7 Μαΐου 2003
- Ελευθεροτυπία, «Μεταναστεύει το ελληνικό χρήμα», 14 Δεκεμβρίου 2003
- Ελευθεροτυπία, «1,200 εταιρείες μετανάστευσαν τα τελευταία χρόνια στα Βαλκάνια», 11 Μαΐου 2003
- Ελευθεροτυπία, «Μακεδονία ξακουστή...του ανέργου η χώρα», 6 Ιανουαρίου 2006
- Ελευθεροτυπία, «Καραμανλής στη βουλγαρική TV: Ευτυχείς για την ένταξή σας στην Ε.Ε.», 3 Ιανουαρίου 2007
- Ελευθεροτυπία, «Έχουν ανάπτυξη, ανεργία και φτώχεια», 27 Δεκεμβρίου 2006
- Ελευθεροτυπία, «Σε αυστηρή επιτήρηση για μια τριετία», 27 Δεκεμβρίου 2006,
- Ελευθεροτυπία, «Πόσο επηρεάζει την Ελλάδα η ένταξη της Ρουμανίας και της Βουλγαρίας στην Ε.Ε.: Μετράμε τα συν και τα πλην», 31 Δεκεμβρίου 2006
- Ελευθεροτυπία, «Βουλγαρία και Ρουμανία μας βλέπουν αφ' υψηλού και μας κοντράρουν στις εξαγωγές: Τώρα είμαστε και εμείς Ευρωπαίοι», 27 Δεκεμβρίου 2006
- Καθημερινή: «Μαζική φυγή εταιρειών και επαγγελματιών για να αποφύγουν την υπερφορολόγηση», 30 Ιανουαρίου 2017
- Καθημερινή, «Πιο ισχυρή Ε.Ε. με την ένταξη Βουλγαρίας- Ρουμανίας», 28 Δεκεμβρίου 2006
- Καθημερινή, «Η Ελλάδα στήριξε την ένταξή μας», 31 Δεκεμβρίου 2006
- Καθημερινή, «Η Ελλάδα αποκτά νέους Ευρωπαίους γείτονες», 31 Δεκεμβρίου 2006,
- Καθημερινή, «Η Ελλάδα διεθνής επενδυτική βάση για Ρουμανία και Βουλγαρία», 6 Ιανουαρίου 2007
- Καθημερινή, «Ευρωπαίες μεν, φτωχές δε...», 3 Ιανουαρίου 2007
- Καθημερινή, «Η βαλκανική περιπέτεια της Ε.Ε.», 31 Δεκεμβρίου 2006,
- Καθημερινή, «Οι αγωγοί φέρνουν κοντά Ελλάδα- Βουλγαρία», 18 Οκτωβρίου 2013,
- Καθημερινή, «Συνάντηση Κοτζιά-Μίτοφ για την ενεργειακή πολιτική Ελλάδας-Βουλγαρίας», 14 Μαΐου 2015
- Καθημερινή, «Δημιουργία διακρατικού ελληνο-βουλγαρικού διαχειριστικού φορέα του ποταμού Έβρου», 22 Δεκεμβρίου 2015
- Καθημερινή, «Π. Καμμένος: Τόξο σταθερότητας Βουλγαρία και Ελλάδα», 26 Ιουλίου 2016)
- Καθημερινή, «Υψώνει φράχτη και η Βουλγαρία», 25 Μαρτίου 2016
- Καθημερινή, «Επίθεση Μπορίσοφ κατά της Ελλάδας» 13 Απριλίου 2016
- Καθημερινή, «Πολιτική όξυνσης από τους βόρειους γείτονές μας», 30 Απριλίου 2016
- Καθημερινή, «Η Βουλγαρία θα αποτρέψει την είσοδο μεταναστών στο έδαφός της από την Ελλάδα», 29 Μαΐου 2016
- Καθημερινή, «Απειλούνται οι σχέσεις μας με τη Βουλγαρία», 20 Φεβρουαρίου 2016,
- Καθημερινή, «Ασκούν τα τρακτέρ εξωτερική πολιτική;», 26 Φεβρουαρίου 2016
- Πρώτο Θέμα: «Μπορίσοφ για προσφυγικό: Τα Σκόπια συμπεριφέρονται υπεύθυνα ενώ η Ελλάδα όχι», 26 Μαρτίου 2016
- Πρώτο Θέμα, «Η Βουλγαρία στήνει φράχτη 484 χιλιομέτρων με την Ελλάδα», 10 Αυγούστου 2016
- Πρώτο Θέμα, «Επίθεση Μπορίσοφ: δίνετε λεφτά στην Ελλάδα για το προσφυγικό επειδή ο επίτροπος είναι Έλληνας!», 15 Σεπτεμβρίου 2016
- Πρώτο Θέμα, «Δέκα ελληνικές εταιρείες την ημέρα ιδρύονται στη Βουλγαρία», 15 Μαρτίου 2016
- Πρώτο Θέμα, «Αντίποινα από Βούλγαρους νταλικέρηδες για τα μπλόκα- Έκλεισαν τα σύνορα με την Ελλάδα», 16 Φεβρουαρίου 2016
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