

The republic of Bulgaria as the EU member: Scientific inquiry and findings

The paper focuses on the process of Bulgaria integration to the European Union and the initial period of the country development within this community. Directions of integration claims made by the EU towards Bulgaria, governments' and leading political parties' changes and activity have been analyzed. The emphasis is placed on the fact that the state undergoes the integration process, which is rather ambiguous from the point of view of further development methods and final outcomes, citizens' remonstrative attitudes, as well as the use of colossal experience in modernization of all spheres of society, transformation of Bulgaria's political system and economy, to achieve the level of the EU member.

Keywords: the republic of Bulgaria, political parties, parliamentary and presidential elections, European integration, European Union.

Республіка Болгарія як член Європейського Союзу: Наукові пошуки і знахідки

У статті досліджено інтеграцію Болгарії до Європейського Союзу та початковий період розвитку держави в умовах цієї спільноти. Проаналізовані напрями інтеграційних вимог ЄС до Болгарії, зміни і діяльність урядових команд та провідних політичних партій. Наголошено, що інтеграційний процес, який переживає держава неоднозначний, з точки зору способів подальшого розвитку і кінцевих результатів, великих протестних настроїв громадян, а також застосування колосального досвіду модернізації всіх сфер суспільства, трансформації державного устрою та економіки Болгарії, для досягнення рівня країни-члена ЄС.

Ключові слова: Республіка Болгарія, політичні партії, парламентські та президентські вибори, європейська інтеграція, Європейський Союз.

Problem Statement and Relevance of the Study. Objective and typical process of globalization as one of the main factors of modern social and economic progress, strategic element of

the world politics, has drawn all countries, including Bulgaria, into its orbit. Strengthening of the world's economy entity and mutual interweaving of economic processes, which force to search new ways to defend national state interests on the world stage, at the same time induced the Republic of Bulgaria (RB) to take a crucial decision – join the European Union. This decision was intensified by the collapse of other “integration formations”, a part of which it had been as a country of a socialist camp, namely the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance and the Warsaw Pact Organization.

The aim of the paper is to determine positive features and difficulties in Bulgaria's development in the course of its adaptation to the European community.

Overview of Recent Studies and Publications. In Ukrainian political science there aren't any papers or monographs, focused on the processes of integration development of this Balkan country; that is why the declared subject has not been fully investigated in the scientific literature. Most scientists investigating enlargement of the European Union to the East, have not dealt with the very problems of Bulgaria's integration into the EU, limiting themselves to the theory of integration, legal aspects of the EU functioning, problems of economic cooperation between the EU members, prospects for further development after the enlargement. The researchers refer to the problems of Bulgaria's integration only within the context of the enlargement of the EU to the East and do not carry out any particular analysis of the state's position, both at the point of its entrance and after joining the EU. Bulgarian scholars G. Karasimeonov, I. Baeva, S. Gerdzhikov, E. Kalinova, D. Bozhilov analyze the Euro integration processes casually, along with other problems of political sciences. In the national scientific thought there is a lack of specialized research, devoted to the development of Bulgaria's integration processes in the EU, what make the author analyze this problem.

Findings and Discussions. After four decades of the Communist Party ruling and difficult transition to democracy, the Republic of Bulgaria chose the European direction of development as the EU member and decided to become a part of the most progressive and well-developed countries of the world in terms of political, economic and social perspectives. In 1999 at a panel session in Helsinki, the European Union made a decision to satisfy Bulgaria's application, concerning its joining the European Union due to political reasons that was of crucial importance for further development of the country. By this decision the EU tried to avoid the appearance of instability in the middle of its eastern border, which was under the comprehensive control of Russia. For Bulgaria it meant deep inclination to the supremacy of law, democracy and free market economy, which acted in the EU. Thus, the EU made a new step to the unification of the continent, separated by history and ideology, and admitted the reality that Europe cannot go without Bulgaria, which supports the political course of the community.

There were concerns that both parties, on the day of Bulgaria's integration to the EU – January 1, 2007, would believe the issue to be closed and would stop further active integration.

In fact it was the end of a certain stage, commenced in 1999 after which, both parties laid foundations of the new period.

Political realities testify that in Bulgaria since the end of the 20th century the direction towards the general civilization “pendulum-likeness” of the democratic political regime has been established, and it carries on in the 21st century. Two main political forces in Bulgaria struggle for early democratic changes and legitimate power. General desire of the ruling and oppositional parties to enter the EU and NATO on the edge of millenniums, became a certain factor, which smoothed conflicts between them.

In Bulgaria (after 1989) parliamentary elections have been carried out for nine times (five pre-term elections), in which dozens of parties and blocs have participated, but only the very few of them have overcome 4% electoral threshold and entered the parliament – the National Assembly (NA). Despite the fact that in 1990 there was one type of the electoral system, and since 1991 appeared another one, the results have been quite similar and the bipolar model has been preserved. Every electoral campaign was accompanied by the appearance of new coalitions and breakdown of the old ones¹.

Bulgaria entered the 21st century with considerable economic difficulties, oppositions in the parliament, as regards to the NATO-members military interference in Yugoslavia's affairs, unstable relationship with Russia. After the 2001 elections a new coalition of parties, which promised economic salvation for people and technocratic efficiency, came to power. The National Movement Simeon II (NMSP) gained 42,7% of votes, and as a result of redistribution of votes of those political forces, which have not overcome 4% electoral threshold according to the proportional system, achieved exactly half (120) of deputy's seats².

New Prime-Minister (2001-2005) Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, former Bulgarian king (full name – Simeon Borisov Saxe-Coburg-Gotha), promised significant economic improvement “within 800 days”. In August 2001 the government set up the economic program, where they combined the extreme liberal approaches and real left populism. Such blurring of boundaries in the program and the absence of ideological lines were of benefit to the NMSP leader, as a part of the worked out tactics for achieving strategic goals – European integration of Bulgaria. Simeon government has almost realized these aims, as the preparatory work was conducted during its ruling. It made the history as the government, which appointed the ethnic Turk the minister, for the first time ever since Bulgaria gained its independence in 1878; enlisted many women to its electoral lists, enlarging their share in the National Assembly from 7,5% up to 25,4%³.

¹ Gerdzhirov S. Khaos i red sled Komunizma / S. Gerdzhirov. – Sofia: Extrem, 1998. – P. 375; Bozhilov D. Kakvi sa shansovete na BSP za vlasta? / D. Bozhilov // 24 Chasa. – 2002. – 26 Yanuari; Narodnoe sobranie Bolgarii [Electronic resource]. – Access mode: <http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/>

² Bychvarova R. Golemy ochakvaniia i kim tozi 6 april / R. Bychvarova [Electronic resource]. – Access mode: <http://www.capital.bg/show/index.php?broi=2003-13&page=5-13-18&rubr=komentar>.

³ Burdiak V.I. Respublika Bolgariia na zlami epoch: politychna transformatsiia suspilstva / V.I. Burdiak. – Monograph. – Chernivtsi: Ruta, 2004. – Pp. 318-321.

In February 2002 the government set up “National strategy for speeding up the accession to the EU”. Finishing negotiation concerning its accession (2000-2004), Bulgaria, as the European Commission (EC) stated, in general has implemented the Copenhagen criteria: formed acting market economy; democratic state, which ensured human rights; in whole adjusted its national laws to the EU general legislation (*acquis communautaire*). However, the RB did not achieve the promised improvement of life during these years. In 2000-2004 the level of unemployment raised up to 20%, and a quarter of population lived below the poverty line. The NMSP government succeeded in some reforms, non-executed by the previous government of the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF), in particular it cut the excessive role of the state in economy, attained 4-4,2% of the annual economic growth; ensured corresponding movement of economic reforms for the accession to the EU⁴. Therefore, the government’s promises concerning the economic welfare sharply contrasted with an obvious poverty of ordinary Bulgarians.

The reforms did not improve living standards, which led to the NMSP’s rating decrease and disturbing consequences – disappointment in political parties being the agents of positive changes. Bulgaria and Romania were not accepted to the EU on May 1, 2004, as well as other CEE countries, as they did not implement a number of the demands essential for accession. However, in a year, on May 25, 2005, the Agreement on accession of these countries to the EU since January 1, 2007 was signed and adopted by the European Parliament (EP). The Agreement included a safety point, which made it possible to postpone the accession for a year, if Bulgaria did not remove the defects, pointed out by the EU, till 2007.

Postponement of Bulgaria’s accession to the EU perturbed the Bulgarian society and intensified negative attitude towards the government. Simeon’s merit is that he was in the right place at the right time in 2001 and managed to take power into his hands. Parties, which in his absence could fill the political vacuum, would surely have had worse results. However, the NMSP lost the parliamentary elections of 2005 and it put an end to Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha’s political carrier.

In 2005 the favorite of the elections was the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), which was reorganized and included accession to the EU into its program and just before the elections weakened its rhetoric towards market reforms. The RB joined the EU and made its first steps within it under the governance of the coalitional government headed by Prime Minister Sergei Stanishev (2005-2009). June elections of 2005 did not bring victory to any party in the NA and with much difficulty the government was created only in August 2005, on the basis of the wide coalition of political forces: 8 ministers from the BSP, which had gained the biggest number of seats in the parliament, 5 ministers from the NMSP and 3 ministers from the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF). S. Stanishev assumed that three-party coalition is a sign of

⁴ Laver M., Benoit K. *Party Policy in Modern Democracies* / M. Laver, K. Benoit. – New York, Routledge, 2006. – P. 64.

European integration, economic growth and social responsibility, “wide coalition frame of the government is a sign for Brussels that European integration is our main priority”⁵.

The foreground job – preparation to the EU accession, played a stabilizing role in the coalition government’s activity. Orientation towards the EU determined the boundaries of the political life and made every political force accept a compromise, despite their own aims and tactics and approaches. Society’s attitudes and balance of extra-parliamentary political forces underwent some distancing from the governmental coalition, which was clearly proved by the results of the elections to the EP and local authorities in 2007. In the RB appeared a new party – the “Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria” (GERB). This right-wing party joined the European People’s Party (EPP). The process of structuring the political scene in the RB carried on, and its party system had not been clear and stable at that time. The opposition declared vote of non-confidence in S. Stanishev government, reasoning that in some spheres (education, health-care) appeared open dissatisfaction and negative assessment of the situation concerning corruption and organized crime in the EC’s monitoring reports.

In summer 2009 the elections to the EP and national parliament were held in Bulgaria. According to the election results the GERB delegated 5 members to the EP, the BSP – 4, the MRF – 3, the party “Ataka” and the NMSP – 2 members respectively, the UDF – 1, which in keeping with their ideological orientation joined the EPP, the Party of European Socialists (PES), European liberals, the representatives of the party “Ataka” joined European nationalists. The ruling coalition lost the elections to the parliament and the oppositional GERB gained 116 out of 240 seats (nearly a half) in the NA. After the elections of 2009 the two-party system was established, consisting of the left BSP and the liberal-conservative party GERB. But none of them could form the government independently, so they had to make a coalition with smaller parties. However, Prime Minister Boyko Borissov rejected the coalitional approach and stated that the main aim of the GERB government is to ensure and execute European development of the country. It should be mentioned that the government did its best to implement the election promises.

In autumn 2011 in Bulgaria there were presidential elections, where the candidate from the ruling conservative party GERB – Rosen Plevneliev won. He gained 52,5% of votes. His opponent, candidate from the BSP – Ivailo Kalfin had 44,7% of votes. On January 23, 2012 R. Plevneliev became the President of Bulgaria. Thus, the GERD was controlling all state institution for two years. He was in charge of the RB’s policy direction during this period. New president of Bulgaria had been unknown in the society till 2009. He actively worked in the sphere of construction and property administration, and did not participate in the political life. After the elections to the NA in 2009 at the suggestion of Prime Minister he became the minister of regional development and public services. In September 2011 less than two

⁵ Novyi Bolgarskiy Parlament [Electronic resource]. – Access mode: <http://www.politjournal.ru/index.php?action=Articles&dirid=408&tek=3907&issue=113>

months before the elections he had been nominated as a candidate for presidency from the ruling party. It was the first time since 1989, when the candidate, who did not take part in the political life of the country and was a non-party candidate, became the President of Bulgaria.

Even before the elections R. Plevneliev stated that he was proud of the fact that during previous 20 years he had not been among that large number of politicians, none of whom felt the ideas of national identity as close as he did. He determined politics of the government institution as a pragmatic, dynamic model aimed at achieving specific results. To his mind, Bulgaria and Russia “have always been closely connected by friendly ties, which will undergo further development. Bulgaria will never become “the Trojan horse” for Russia in Europe, and quite the contrary, we will always be the doors to Russia for Europe and doors to Europe for Russia”. However, it is quite obvious that the President has been adhering to the common GERB’s line in all questions, concerning official Sofia’s policy, including policy towards Russia. Prime Minister B. Borissov, explaining the decision to nominate R. Plevneliev to the highest post in the country, named him their “insider in Brussels”⁶. Though, Bulgarians, first of all, consider him the “yes-man” for Borissov himself.

Having acquired the EU membership Bulgaria could rely on receiving all necessary financial support and defense of its interests on the international stage. Though, the RB only partially met the criteria and conditions for cooperation with the EU (unity of national interests, similarity of social and political systems, (non)comparison of levels of development, complementarity of economic systems, affinity of cultures, languages, historical traditions and religions), but till 2007 there had not been any serious discussions as to its accession to the European family.

At the same time, during the years, which have passed since the Agreement of accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the EU came into force, many changes have taken place. Pointing out positive sides of Bulgaria’s integration to the EU, we would like to stress, that the country again occupied its place in Europe, out of which it has been dropped out due to the changes in history. The RB conducts new international politics, which is of great benefits. It became a part of the leading community of democratic and highly-developed countries, which associate themselves with it and support it. Only within the line of structural funds during 2007-2013 the EU provided Bulgaria 6 billion 700 million Euros, but till 2009 the state had had some problems with putting it into production. Nowadays, as the EC states, the situation has stabilized. Thus, Bulgarians expect that during next program periods sums of money for the country will be increased. Over the years of the EU membership Bulgaria nominated two successful EU Commissioners – Meglena Kuneva, appointed the Commissioner in 2008 and Kristalina Georgieva, the best EU Commissioner in 2010. While choosing heads of the EU missions in the world, the former Bulgarian Prime Minister Philip Dimitrov became the ambassador of the EU in Georgia.

⁶ Novyi President Bolgarii [Electronic resource]. – Access mode: <http://kpravda.com/novyj-prezident-bolgarii/>

Till the end of 2011 Bulgaria had fulfilled the quota to appoint four heads of directories and one deputy director general in the EU structures. The country is seriously represented in the statistical service Eurostat, legal service of the EC and general directions “Agriculture”, “Regional policy” and “Employment”. The EU countries are the main trade partners of the RB. Though, access restrictions to the EU members’ labor markets have not been fully abolished yet, hundreds of thousands of Bulgarians work in the EU countries and only in 2012 remitted almost 700 million Euros, what exceeded the amount of foreign investment into the country.

Despite obvious benefits of the EU membership, another anniversary of the country’s accession to the EU causes contradictory feelings. Initial enthusiasm from the reform implementation has lowered and the RB remains the poorest EU country and its citizens do not feel material support from the advantages of membership. The country is severely criticized for corruption and organized crime, due to which the judicial system and internal law enforcement is subject to the EC’s monitoring missions. Regardless of the world financial crisis, little of money, provided to the country from the European funds, has been used and the administrative resource aimed at overcoming this problem has not been established. These facts give rise to skepticism within the Bulgarian society, which is confirmed by apathy as to the 6th anniversary of joining the EU⁷.

The EU analysts suppose that Bulgarian and Romanian thinking paradigm has not become a European one. And the countries consider the EU as a “rescuer”, which must solve all issues, when they need money. Gradually and especially during the crisis, this thinking pattern is changing and the Bulgarians start understanding that there is no easy money.

Economic difficulties in Bulgaria are projected on the ruling circle’s activity and cause negative attitude towards it. In February 2013, when in the RB there were several thousand protests against an increase in prices for electricity and Borissov government’s policy, seven people committed self-immolation (five died) and at least two policemen were wounded. At that time B. Borissov resigned, stating that he did not want to be a part of authority, whose policemen beat people⁸. The society blamed the government for the price increase, but he only implemented his electoral promises: closed four nuclear power units of the Atomic Power Station in Kozloduy and a project of the APS “Belene” construction as imperfect, too expensive and dangerous⁹. The Bulgarians agreed with the government at the referendum as to the APS closure in January 2013. None even thought, or believed that it would be better not to say that import of electricity would increase in three times and inevitably result in price growth.

Newly elected Prime Minister who held the MFA office concurrently Marin Raykov immediately took a detached position concerning Moscow. President R. Plevneliev declared that

⁷ Kak vstuplenie v ES otrazilos na stranakh-novichkakh [Electronic resource]. – Access mode: http://www.telegraf.in.ua/topnews/2013/12/21/kak-vstuplenie-v-es-otrazilos-na-stranah-novichkah_10033859.html

⁸ V Bolgarii tot zhe GERB [Electronic resource]. – Access mode: http://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2013/05/13_a_5318937.shtml

⁹ Posle mitinhov pravitelstvo Bolgarii ushlo v otstavku [Electronic resource]. – Access mode: <http://www.segodnya.ua/world/Posle-mitinhov-pravitelstvo-Bolgarii-ushlo-v-otstavku.html>

one of the main tasks of the new cabinet was to conduct a complex check of all price forming elements in electricity tariffs. Thus, M. Raykov observed that he “will not participate in risky undertakings” and would not allow external interference into power economy. The RB’s economic course threatens Russian energy projects in the country. To the analysts’ point of view, M. Raykov first of all meant their relationship with Russia. Among mutual Sofia and Moscow’s projects there is only one on the agenda, namely the “South Stream”¹⁰.

A great role was played by the fact that M. Raykov was in conflict with the RF’s ambassador in Sofia Yu. Isakov. Being the deputy of the MFA’s head, M. Raykov refused to install the monument to the Soviet submarine, explaining that during the WW2 the Bulgarian submarine sank due to the fault of Russia. And in 1998-1999 during the war in Kosovo M. Raykov rejected to provide the air-corridor for the Russian military air forces. However, new Prime Minister could not greatly influence the relations between two countries, as he headed the provisional government from March to June 2013, up to the new elections¹¹.

The president introduced the Prime Minister and newly elected ministers as the independent figures unconnected with the former political elite. It was important to demonstrate the electorate his break-off with the dissatisfying government and to show the EU and foreign investors that Bulgaria supports strict taxation policy and will not spend more money than it is planned by the budget.

After early parliamentary elections in May 2013 Prime Minister – technocrat Plamen Oresharski came to power (coalitional government was created by the BSP, MRF and “Ataka”)¹². The coalition hardly counted half of deputies in the parliament and fully depended on the nationalistic “Ataka”. Coordinating composition of the government with the President, P. Oresharski stated that “we offer a new ministry, which has been born as a result of the previous analyses, which showed that one of our weakest moments is the absence of projects in progress, on the basis of which we could freely realize European funds. I offer the ministry of investment projection, which, first of all, will deal with projecting and differ from the regional ministry”¹³. However, this government absolutely thoughtlessly appointed 32 year-old media mogul, a member of the MRF party Delyan Peevski the head of the State Agency for National Security, who already in 2007 was dismissed, due to the claims of corruption. Thus, it is quite obvious that the Bulgarians did not wish to see in the NA none of the present politicians. Being afraid that the situation in the country could fall outside the legal limits, the minister of internal affairs of Bulgaria stated: “If we allow protests to last long, these people will not be

¹⁰ Pobedivshiy na vyborah Rosen Plevneliev iz partii GERB protiv sozdaniia baz MCHS Rossii vdol gazoprovoda [Electronic resource]. – Access mode: <http://izvestia.ru/news/505483>

¹¹ Smena vlasti v Bolgarii mozhet navredit Rossii: novyi premer davno possorilsia s poslom RF [Electronic resource]. – Access mode: <http://www.newsru.com/world/14mar2013/marinraikov.html>

¹² V Bolgarii prokhodiat dosrochnye parlamentskie vybory [Electronic resource]. – Access mode: http://world.lb.ua/news/2013/05/12/199128_bolgarii_prohodyat_dosrochnie.html

¹³ Plamen Oresharski predstavil prezidentu Bolgarii novoe pravitelstvo [Electronic resource]. – Access mode: <http://novinite.ru/articles/3081>

able to find a real mechanism to solve their problems and then it will be the first step towards radicalization”¹⁴.

New government election did not stop the protests, which Prime Minister believed to be unconstructive, as the protesters just demanded resignation of the government and did not want to communicate to voice disagreements.

P. Oresharski assumed that the protests could just strengthen instability in the RB, what would affect the economy and social position of the citizens. He declared that he was ready to such a difficult challenge, as his political opponents were in alliance with the oligarchic circles and were quite powerful and did not persevere their attempts to regain lost positions. “I conceived, he said, that the mission would be difficult, and it had all objective stipulations. The very fact that on the third day of the government’s work there appeared a group of people who deserved my resignation became the first sign of the organized struggle against new authority. Of course, appointment of Peevski was a great mistake and contributed to the increase in protest movements across the country. However, I believe that the government does its best to hear the protesters and take their views into account. Unfortunately, none constructive steps were made from their side”¹⁵. The President also expresses hope, that the approach towards stabilization in the country will be found.

Thus, in the RB from the first day of P. Oresharski’s work the protests against the government were commenced, and the reason was K. Tiholov’s appointment as the minister of investment planning and D. Peevski to the abovementioned position. Substitution of these politicians did not calm the protesters, who demanded resignation of the whole government. In the course of 2013-2014 the opposition initiated five ineffective ballots, concerning vote of non-confidence in the government (October 2 and October 17 in 2013, February 12, May 30, and June 13 in 2014). On July 23 P. Oresharski resigned and the parliament supported this decision – 180 deputies voted for that¹⁶. However, none of the parliamentary parties wanted to form a new government, thus President R. Plevneliev announced the creation of the official cabinet of ministers, headed by Georgi Bliznyaski. On July 27 the leaders of four parties: “GERB”, “BSP”, “MRF” and non-parliamentary “Bulgaria without Censorship” agreed to appoint early elections to the National Assembly on October 5, 2014¹⁷ and this date was approved by the President of Bulgaria.

Summary and Conclusions. It is obvious, that integration of Bulgaria to the EU is a complicated process, difficult for the Bulgarian society. It cannot be rapidly finished or terminated

¹⁴ V stolitse Bolgarii snova proshel antipravitelstvenni mitinh [Electronic resource]. – Access mode: <http://www.rosbalt.ru/main/2013/07/05/1148994.html>

¹⁵ Novoe pravitelstvo Bolgarii obnaruzhilo v biudzhete dyru okolo odnogo milliarda evro [Electronic resource]. – Access mode: <http://www.kp.ru/daily/26100.5/2998145/>

¹⁶ Bulgarian Parliament Approves Government Resignation. Sofia News Agency [Electronic resource]. – Access mode: <http://www.2bmoto.com/search/info/Bulgarian%20parliamentary%20election%2C%202014>

¹⁷ Vneocherednye vybory v Narodnoe Sobranie Bolgarii sostoiatsia 5 oktiabria [Electronic resource]. – Access mode: <http://www.newsbg.ru/obschestvo/89-obschestvo/9312-vneocherednye-vybory-v-narodnoe-sobranie-bolgarii-sostojatsja-5-oktjabrja.html>

in short-term prospects. Political parties, expressing their electorate's will, defend their interests and describe them in their programs. Bulgaria achieved great success, having become the EU member. However, to satisfy the demands of the EU it must overcome a lot of obstacles.

The state is undergoing rather ambiguous integration process, from the point of view of further development and final outcomes, citizens' huge protest moods, as well as vast experience in modernization of all spheres of the society, transformation of the political system and economy of Bulgaria to achieve the level of the EU-member. If we state the most important benefits for Bulgaria from the EU membership, they are the following: modernization of political institutions; changes in the economic sphere of the country; increase in treasury revenues by means of European funds; free movement for Bulgarian citizens across the territory of the EU; possibilities for the specialists to find highly-paid jobs in the EU countries.

It should be stressed, that Bulgaria's European integration experience is of high priority for Ukraine, which traces its further development within the frames of European integration, and moreover, Ukraine as well as Bulgaria has deep cultural differences between two realities (modern condition of the state development and the EU community), what can turn a crucial factor in its advance in European integration.