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THE IMPACT OF THE ATAKA AND THE MRF POLITICAL CAMPAIGN ON THE SOCIETY: (THE CASE OF KARDJALI IN 2009: POLITICAL PARTIES AND ETHNIC COMMUNITIES IN BULGARIA).

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1. INTRODUCTION

The different ethnic identities of regional groups in some European countries have often triggered political tension and conflicts. What such ethnic movements aim to achieve varies from obtaining cultural support to the complete political independence of their homeland, while their activities range from civic propaganda to violent actions. Societies with strong ethnical differences often pose a dilemma for democracy. Relevant ethnic divisions could obstruct the successful implementation of democratic competitive elections. As a matter of fact, many scholars underline that a "minimum degree" of ethnic harmony and the common adoption of the state borders are the pre-requirements for a blooming democracy.[1] One of the factors being studied in order to understand how to overcome significant ethnic cleavages, scholars emphasize that the institutional framework and the behavior of the elite are fundamental aspects in order to facilitate the implementation and consolidation of a democracy.

In particular, this article focuses mainly the second aspect – the behavior of the elite - by initially analyzing the history and the representation of ethnicities in Bulgaria and subsequently the behavior of two of its political parties, Ataka - the nationalist Bulgarian party, and MRF (Movements of Rights and Freedom), the so called Turkish party, taking into account the effect of their actions on the society after the political campaign in Kardjali – 2009.

Political elections and the representation of different ethnicities are considered to be crucial elements in order for a democracy to prevent ethnic divisions in a country. On the one hand, the political participation of each community represents a relevant democratic practice to implement minority rights. This assumption is confirmed by the Lund Recommendations on the Effective Participation of National Minorities in Public Life drafted under the auspices of the OECD High Commissioner on National Minorities and also by other international legislations, which have included provisions on the political participation of minorities. On

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1   Rabushka A. and Shepsle K. A., *Politics in Plural Societies: A theory of Democratic Instability*, Merrill C.E., Columbs, Ohio, 1972; Linz J. and Stepan A., *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1996.

the other hand, political elections and ethnic divisions have strongly connected effects on a democratic system as they both run in the same direction: the increase of ethnic divisions has a tendency to weaken democracy by introducing exclusion and polarization on electoral policies; polarizations on electoral politics have a tendency to create a rupture between different communities and this could degenerate into ethnic conflicts.[2]

Bulgaria and Balkans in particular provide a really interesting example for the analysis of the relation between ethnicity and political elections, for several reasons: the region is ethnically diverse, the existing minorities have a long historical and geographical background which generates potential for their ethnic political mobilization; furthermore, the collapse of communism systems has politicized ethnic identities among people, movements and parties. Furthermore, some scholars have stated that the fall of communism, a system based on the differentiation of social classes, has brought back to the forefront the issue of ethnicities, a key element in defining policies.[3]

This article will be structured as follows:

- The first part deals with theoretical issues regarding ethnicity, parties and electoral politics;
- The second part - paragraph 3 and 4 - examines how historical events in Bulgaria have highly influenced

the foundation of Ataka and MRF and their relevant political objectives;

- The third part focuses on Kardjali, the electoral campaign of 2009, MRF and Ataka's strategies and the reaction of society to the issue at hand. This last part is based on empirical data collected in July and August 2009, after the European and National elections campaigns. The research methods include a quantitative and qualitative approach with 120 questionnaires completed by citizens of Kardjali and some interviews by experts on the issue.

Kardjali is a town situated in the south of Bulgaria with one of the largest Turkish communities in the whole country. In terms of ethnicity, the Kardjali region is very interesting: Bulgarians account for 30% of the population; the Turkish ethnic group accounts for 63%; the remaining 7% are Roma and others.[4] Kardjali is therefore a good example of ethnic diversity due to its high concentration of Turkish people. Significant historical events are the Revival Process in 1984-85 during the Živkov Era (the Communist party forced the renaming of the all Turks of Bulgaria) and the numerous ethnic tensions in the early 1990s[5].

Ataka and MRF represent the political interests of the two ethnic groups represented in the democratic parliamentary sphere: Bulgarians as a majority and Turkish as the largest

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2   Horowitz D.L, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, University of California Press, 1985.
3   Bunce V. and Casanadi M., *Uncertainty in the Transition: Post-communism in Hungary*, "East European Politics and Society", 7, 1993;

4   See http://www.nsi.bg/indexen.php; http://www.citypopulation.de/php/bulgaria-kardzali.php; www.investbulgaria.com;
5   Dainov E., *Transition, Violence and the Role of NGOs: the Case of Bulgaria*, Mansfield College, Oxford, September 2004;

minority in Bulgaria respectively.

This paper would like to demonstrate that the campaign and the elections in 2009 in Kardjali do not reflect the idea that people's views are extremist, despite the presence of a Bulgarian enclave in Kardjali. So, the political and social environment in Kardjali seems to be as strong as its democratic stability.

2. ETHNICITY AND POLITICAL ELECTIONS

The concept of ethnicity is based on a local group's sense of distinctiveness. This can sometimes evolve into ethno-nationalism.[6] The most common element of distinctiveness is having an own language which does not represent only cultural heritage but also a political issue. Today, due to the increasing number of attacks on different faith communities in the world, religion has also become more and more relevant as part of the distinctive heritage of a given ethnic group.

This group's sense of distinctiveness - within a democratic representative system - can often generate an ethnic

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6   Rokkan S. and Urwin D.W., *Economy, Territory, Identity. Politics of West European*, "Peripheries", Sage, London,1983; Connor's essays: Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding;
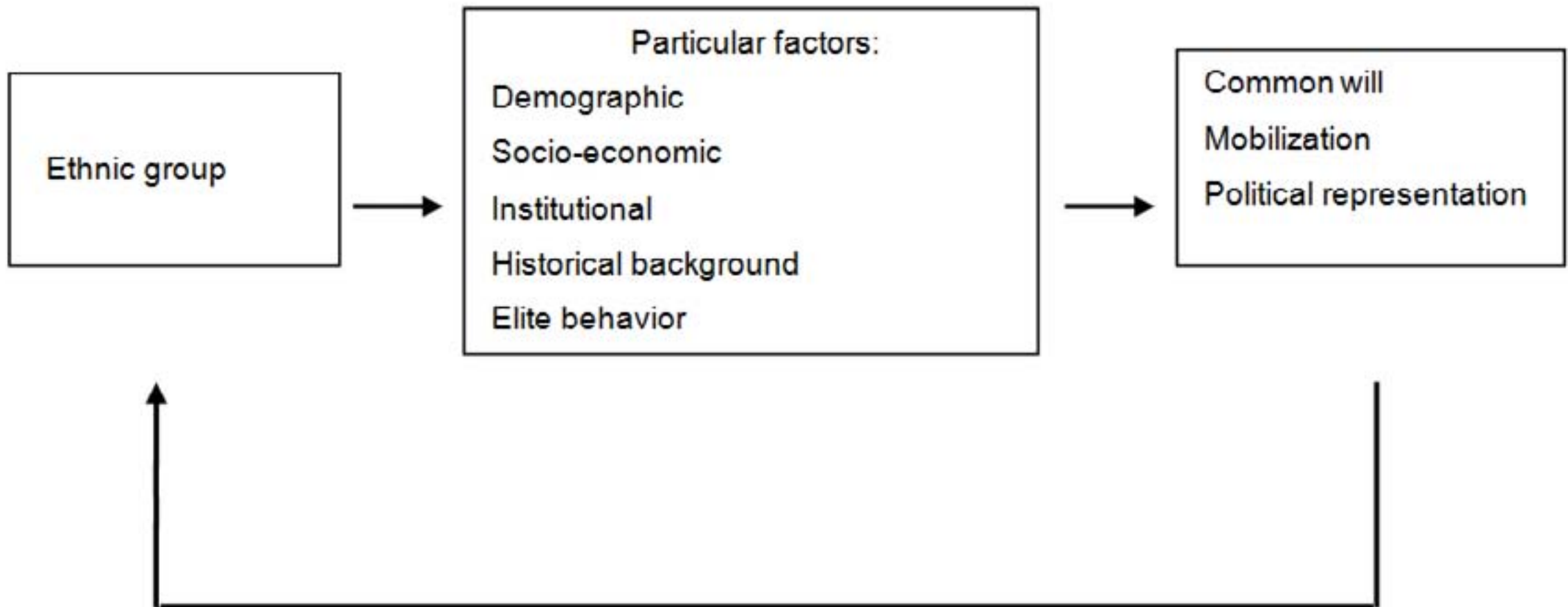
perspective, a mobilization of the group which can lead to the actual representation of these groups within the parliament.

In general, data concerning the political participation of ethnic minorities is extremely difficult to compare because it reflects both a different context and a sharply distinctive ideological framework. Hence, the ethnic cleavages can be manifested in the electoral democratic arena in several complex and composite ways. An ethnic minority, for instance, can represent itself as part of a coalition or as a single party, while the vote of its members can be cohesive and given to a specific party or it can be incorporated to a multitude of parties, split by divisions of region, culture or class. Furthermore, parties representing particular ethnic groups can put forth moderate proposals or extremist views. Pre-election and post-election stances of an ethnic group depend on different factors such as historical background, demography, institutions, elite interaction, and financial conditions.[9] In other words, the interaction between an ethnic group and the politics of a country depends on the historical integration of the group into domestic governance, the demographic concentration of the group, the electoral system (proportional representation, preference vote, alternative vote, single transferable vote), the behavior of the elite and the parties and the socio-economic exclusion/inclusion of the group. Evidently all these factors reflect on the common identity of the group and on its political will, causing a cycle which holds itself up.

Many authors argue that, especially when there is a political representation delineated by an ethnic party (ethnic party is defined as a party which is clearly supported by a specific ethnic group and it serves mainly the interests of the same group[7]), as is the case MRF in Kardjali, the democratic system could be altered in different ways. The party or parties of the majority ethnicity, for instance, may constitute a single monolithic party to rule and therefore end the democratic competitive scheme as a reaction to the perceived threat of the minority's electoral mobilization.[8] On the contrary, the permanent exclusion of a minority from the political arena tends to decrease the legitimacy of the governance and to strongly increase social tension among the groups. Furthermore, electoral systems characterized by ethnic outbidding among rival parties within each ethnic block, often lead to the polarization of the parties and the development of spiraling centrifugal dynamics within the block, engaging it in extremist and emotional ethnic claims and rejecting any form of cooperation. This environment that emphases the mutual threat could cause ethnic conflicts.[9] Rabushka and Shepsle in 1972 stated that: "Moderation on the ethnic issue is a viable strategy only if ethnicity is not salient. Once ethnicity becomes salient and, as a consequence, all issues are interpreted in ethnic terms, the rhetoric of cooperation and mutual trust sounds painfully weak. More importantly, it is strategically vulnerable to flame fanning and the politics

[7]   Horowith D.L., *Ethnic Group in Conflict*, Berkley, University of California Press – 1985, p.291;

[8]   Ibid., pp.83-89;

[9]   Ibid., pp.83-89 - pp.349-360; Rabushka A. and Shepsle K., *Politics in Plural Societies: A Theory of Democratic Instability*, Columbs 1972, OH Charles M. Merrill;

of outbidding".[10] They also declared "Democracy in plural societies is a casualty of communal politics, so that ethnic conflict resolution is not manageable within a democratic framework".[11] This theoretical approach, further analyzed by various authors[12] and known as Centrifugal Dynamics, describes how a polarized society between different ethnic groups may involve extremist ethnic minority parties and nationalist parties of the majority.

Recently Paul Mitchell, Geoffrey Evans and Brendan O'Leary demonstrated, by studying the case of Northern Ireland, that the perpetual extremist outbidding in ethnic party systems and consequently the exacerbation of the ethnic relations is avoidable if a particular behavior of the political elites were to contribute to the *moderation* of the political arena.[13] In this study the electoral success of the two major ethnic parties can be explained by their "tribune appeals" which brought them to a real *moderation.*

The purpose of this case study is exactly to study the status of the extremist outbidding in the ethnic party systems in Bulgaria, comparing the election campaign in Kardjali to

10   Rabushka A. and Shepsle K., op.cit.;
11   Ibidem.
12   See also Horowith D.L., op.cit.; Lijpard A., *Democracy in plural societies*, Yale University press – 1977; Snyder J., *From voting to violence: Democratization and Nationalism conflict*, New York, Norton 2000;
13   Mitchel P., Evans G. and O'Leary B., *Extremist Outbidding In Ethnic Party Systems Is Not Inevitable: Tribune Parties in Northern Ireland*, London School of Economics and Political Sciences - LSE -PSPE Working Paper N.6, 2006; McGarry J., O'Leary B., *Consociational Theory, Northern Ireland's Conflict, and its Agreement, Part 1: What Consociationalists Can Learn from Northern Ireland*, Government and opposition, 2006.

its impulse between the Turkish party of Bulgaria, MRF, and Ataka, the rising nationalist party founded in 2005 which adopted as key slogan "Bulgarian, to regain Bulgaria!"

We will see how the experience in Bulgaria has not shown this more damaging aspect of ethnic party politics described by the abovementioned scholars; on the contrary, this research offers a different view: a stable political equilibrium within society was maintained after the campaign in the Kardjali district.

3. THE REPRESENTATION OF ETHNICITIES IN BULGARIA

During the last decades, minority rights have focused, in terms of the prevention of discrimination, on two key topics: linguistic and educational rights. The political participation of the different communities has not been the major focus of the minority rights even though many international legislations underline its relevance. Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, for example, guarantees: "The right and the opportunity to all citizens to participate in the political arena of the country, to take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives; the right to vote and to be elected; the free expression of the will of the electors; to have access, on general terms of equality, to public service in his country"[14]. In addition, in a document of the Committee of Experts on Issues relating the Protection

14   ICCPR, art.25 (a), (b), (c). Ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI) of 16 December 1966 – Entry into force 23 March 1976.

of National Minorities, Marko Joseph endorsed measures to try to facilitate the representation of minorities and criticized those who obstruct the minority representation, thus violating the principle of equality.[15] As outlined earlier, several scholars deem that the lack of participation in state institutions and the marginalization of minorities can lead to an alienation of minorities from the state of residence, where they could negatively perceive the dominant majority and refuse the legitimacy of the institutions and organize their own armed secessionist movements. On the contrary we argued also that a polarization of the ethnic discussion can fall into the above described centrifugal dynamics causing potential bloody conflicts. Thus, it is very difficult, if not almost impossible, to find the balance of the "correct representation"; a highly influential factor is behavior of a political elites and particularly systems which can ensure some seats of representation to minorities.

In 7 out of the 10 countries (including Kosovo) in Southeastern Europe, specific systems are in place to secure or facilitate the representation of minorities[16]; in Bulgaria on the other hand, article 11 of the Constitution bans the formation of any "ethnic party". This can be also seen as a consequence of the historical background of the country which flows in the so called Bulgarian ethnic model that we will further explore in the next paragraph.

15   Marko J., *Effective Participation of National Minorities. A Comment on Conceptual, Legal and Empirical Problems*, DH-MIN, Strasbourg – 2006, pp.5-7.
16   Bieber F. Introduction in Political Parties and Minorities Participation, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Skopje 2008, pp.26.

When analyzing the concept of "ethnic party", in terms of the link between a political democratic representation in a parliament and ethnicity, we can distinguish 4 categories of parties: Monoethnic parties; Ethnic parties with minority candidates; Diversity-sensitive civic parties; Multiethnic parties[17]. The Monoethnic party is formed by only one group (majority or minority): its programs, voters and candidates are from the same group. These usually are nationalist or conservative parties. The second category, the Ethnic party with minority candidates does not stand for a specific ethnic group; it involves large electoral programs and candidates from different communities: this approach is often adopted as a strategic policy to prevent a ban in a country where the formation of ethnic parties is prohibited. The third category, Diversity-sensitive civic party is a party dominated by a group, but it is able to recruit candidates from minorities and propose reforms to the minorities. The last category, the Multiethnic party, aspires to be really inclusive and represent the various communities of the current society.

In the Bulgarian political arena, if we take into consideration the two parties analyzed in this article, we can classified Ataka in the first category (Monoethnic party): it is openly against minorities, especially the Turkish and the Jewish[18]. Its aim consists in founding one unique state above ethnic and religious differences. MRF, instead, can be included in the second category (Ethnic party) as, even

17   Bieber F., op.cit, pp.13-15.
18   Hajdinjak M., *Thou Shall not take names ethnic or minority and I will bless thee: Political participation of minorities Bulgaria*, in Political Parties and Minorities Participation, op.cit.

though it defines itself as a liberal and national party, and it usually presents mixed candidate-lists in the elections, its voters are predominantly Turkish, Roma and Muslims. This unique parliamentary representation of these three groups which coexist in MRF marks the weakness of the Roma, the second biggest minority of Bulgaria. The Roma in the course of the years have never managed to unify behind one common party despite its potential, probably due to their in-group heterogeneity, family and regional contradictions, as described by Chukov[19]. In 2005, for instance, there were 26 Roma parties registered in the country and during the local elections in 2003 , there were 15 different lists which together collected more than 84.000 votes[20]. The vote fragmentation did not allow them to reach a percentage needed to build and keep a significant party; only Roma and Euroroma parties historically gained more than a symbolic victory.

Among the smaller ethnic communities that are politically organized in Bulgaria OMO Ilinden-Pirin, the Macedonian party is worthy of mention. OMO Ilinden-Pirin defends the respect of minority rights and the decentralization of the state[21]. The party participated in the 1999 elections which ran in some districts of Blagoevgrad, but it was declared unconstitutional by the National Constitutional Court on the 29th February 2000. OMO Ilinden-Pirin was accused of being a separatist party against the integrity of the Republic of Bulgaria[22]. The European Court of Human Rights ruled against the Bulgarian sentence for defying the Communitarian Convention of Human Rights, but this did not revoke the ban on the OMO party[23]. In 2006, their attempt to re-write their party constitution was unsuccessful; it did not lead to any change in the Bulgarian policy towards the Macedonian party. Sofia City Court refused once more its application for registration.

As a general conclusion at this point, we can say that all small minorities are marginalized; they find it difficult to have a voice in the political arena because any mechanism that could facilitate their representation is forbidden by the Constitution. The larger minorities, such as Turkish and Roma, instead, are well represented because they are united in one party, the MRF. This union provides a stronger chance to engrave this party's position in the public arena, but at the same time, it feeds the nationalistic ideology of Ataka. As a matter of fact, this party can perceive the harmony between Turkish and Roma to be a dangerous threat as it represents a potentially larger and stronger intrusion into the Bulgarian internal affairs.

In addition, the status of MRF prevents the Roma from having their own political self-identification group and this exclusion can facilitate the diminishing of the State's

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19   Chukov V., *Bulgarian Ethnic Model. A Pragmatical National Version of the Multiethnic Dialog*, in http://crcs0.tripod.com
20   http://izbori2003.is-bg.net/rez/partii.html
21   http://www.omoilindenpirin.org/documents/bylaws_old_e.asp

22   http://www.constcourt.bg/Pages/Document/Default.aspx?ID=1151
23   http://cmiskp.echr.coe.int/tkp197/view.asp?item=51&portal=hbkm&action=html&highlight=BULGARIA&sessionid=80633378&skin=hudoc-en

legitimacy which, in certain circumstances, can lead to violent acts between the communities as witnessed in Katuniza last September[24].

4. ATAKA & MRF: ETHNICITY AND THE ROLE OF HISTORY

The rise of both political actors could be justified if we consider the Bulgarian ethnic model and the interethnic historical heritage of the country which still has issues left unsolved and open wounds. History represents a fundamental part of Ataka's and MRF's policies and campaigns; both parties use history as the basis of their values.

The Bulgarian ethnic model is peculiar: it was developed as an answer to the ethnic policy in force during the Communist regime. After a first period of tolerance, at the end of the 1950s the Communist regime adopted an aggressive policy towards the national minorities in Bulgaria, especially towards Bulgarian Turks and Pomaks.[25] The process reached its peak during 1984-1985, under the Zivkof regime, during the so-called "Revival Process", when the Politbureau of the Communist regime voted a policy named "For the further unification and inclusion of Bulgarian Turks into the cause of socialism and the policies of the Bulgarian Communist Party". The aim of this ambitious plan was the *bulgarisation* of the names of Islamic minorities,

which at that time constituted around 15 per cent of the whole population. Very soon speaking Turkish, professing their religion and wearing traditional clothes were banned, while mosques were closed down.[26] The social result was a strife among the people and the ethnicities which culminated in 1989 with public protests on behalf of the Turkish minority. The regime reacted cruelly and after clashes with the police, which caused several hundreds of victims, around 350.000 of Bulgarian Turks emigrated to Turkey. Around 150.000 returned, at a later stage. The others decided not to.[27]

In order to placate the situation in the country, the ruling elite accepted proposals from the Committee for National Reconciliation to restore the peaceful co-existence among the communities. Hence, at the end of 1989, the government proclaimed the restoration of the names of Bulgarian Turks, adopting also several measures to support their re-integration into society. The success of this intervention, which was implemented as a tool to prevent future ethnic clashes, led to the creation of the so-called modern Bulgarian ethnic model.

The respect of human rights and some specific minorities rights were established by the new Bulgarian Constitution in 1991 (art.36; art.54).

It was in those years that the mobilization of the Bulgarian Turks founded the MRF, Movement for Rights and

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24   http://www.btv.bg/videos/novini/video/1467126439-Bunt_v_selo_Katunitsa.html
25   Zhelyazkova A., *The Bulgarian Ethnic Model*, East European Constitutional Review, volume 10 n.4, fall 2001, http://www.law.nyu.edu/eecr/vol10num4/focus/zhelyazkova.html;

26   Zhelyazkova A., *The Bulgarian Ethnic Model*, opt.cit.; Dainov E., *Transition, Violence and the Role of NGOs: the Case of Bulgaria*, Paper prepared for "Cultures of Violence" – Mansfield College, Oxford, September 2004;
27   Novakovic I., *The rise of political extremism in Bulgaria – The political party Ataka*, Master Thesis Miirees, 2008, pp.36-41;

Freedom, headed by Ahmed Dogan, as a reaction to the "Revival Process" and the cruel Communist policy against minorities. This is confirmed by the website of the party which declares:

> The Movement for Rights and Freedoms is a centrist, liberal political party formed initially to protect the rights of minorities in Bulgaria in the period of communism and other parts of Europe.

> Back in the contemporary Bulgarian history the period from 1984 to 1989 is known with the repression practiced by the communist regime over the ethnic Turkish population and other ethnic groups in Bulgaria. It was during the same period that organized opposition reactions to that regime started to appear. The origin of the movement dated back namely in the government repression policies in the country.

> Founded in 1990 to represent the interests of the Turkish ethnic minority, the MRF has broadened its goals and platform to embrace all issues of civil rights in Bulgaria, aiming „to contribute to the unity of the Bulgarian people and to the full and unequivocal compliance with the rights and freedoms of mankind and of all religious and cultural communities in Bulgaria". Moreover, the movement has called for the promotion of measures designed to alleviate the economic problems facing minority populations in Bulgaria.

> Nowadays, the movement is an all-national party representing all Bulgarians and strongly opposes to any "manifestation of national chauvinism, revenge, Islamic fundamentalism and religious fanaticism". The MRF categorically renounces Islamic fundamentalism, terrorism, all kinds of discrimination and political and religious extremism.[28]

Although article 11 of the forbids the formation of parties based on ethnic, religious and racial grounds, according to the National Court of Bulgaria, MRF is a legitimate party (21 April 1992) because its official focus is not on minorities; it has a liberal stance and its party ranks are open to all citizens of Bulgaria.[29]

On the one hand, the existence of the MRF has eased the relations between Bulgarians and Turks offering an adequate democratic platform of representation for not just Bulgarian Turks, but also for other ethnic minorities like Roma; on the other hand, it inspired the formation of a nationalist political party namely Ataka. In fact, besides the claim to the constitutional article against MRF, Ataka often emphasizes the five centuries under the Ottoman Empire,

28   See http://www.dps.bg/en/History.aspx [Retrieved 10th December, 2010];

29   Bernd R., *Inter-ethnic and inter-confessional relations in post-communist Bulgaria*, RIME Project Workshop 2A "Releasing Indigenous Multiculturalism" Tuzla, 21-25 June 2005;

as a current potential risk. The extremist phenomenon of Ataka appeared in the mid-2000s with twenty principles, the first three of which state:

> Bulgaria is mononational and integrated country that cannot be a subject of division according to any of the following principles: religion, ethnos, and culture. The difference in origin or confession cannot dominate over the national identity. Those who neglect these principles separate themselves from the Bulgarian nation and country and don't have the right to make any further claims to the State.

> The official language in Bulgaria is Bulgarian. Therefore the use of no other language is acceptable in the programs of national media supported by the State budget. Prohibition and clear legal sanctions for ethnic parties and separatist organizations.

> Severe sanctions for violating Bulgarian national relics and defaming Bulgaria.[30]

History has a relevant role in the principles of these parties and it becomes a strategic symbol during the election campaigns. History represents a way to enhance and legitimate their role in the society celebrating particular periods or events which set the two ethnicities against each other. For instance on June 17, 2009 MRF organized

in Kardzhali a Commemoration meeting on the Revival Process where the mayor Lyutvi Mestan and MRF leader Dogan declared: "MRF will fight a second Revival process. We cannot retreat, because behind us there is something very dangerous - the past, to not want to go back. […] We say no to extreme nationalism! We say no to restore the recurrence of the totalitarian past! We say no to new ideas of softer revival process in terms of financial and economic crisis."[31] On the other side, members of nationalist Ataka on the 19th February 2009 protested in front of the Turkish Embassy to commemorate the 136th anniversary of the hanging of Bulgaria's national hero Vasil Levski. The leader Siderov demanded that Turkey officially apologize for the genocide of Bulgarians during the Ottoman yoke and repayment of the USD 10 Billion debt they claim Turkey owes for land taken by force from Bulgarian owners in 1913.[32] Moreover, on the same date, the nationalist party sent a public declaration to the Embassy of the Republic of Turkey, the President of the Republic of Turkey and the Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey reprimanding some historical and symbolical events such as the *Devshirme Blood Tax* during which the Ottoman Empire had harshly recruited around 3,5 million Bulgarian children for the Janissary corps, had murdered Vasil Levski and, finally, in 1913 had broken of the "London Peace Treaty" when Turkish troops passed the

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30   See http://www.Ataka.bg/en/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=14&Itemid=27 [Retrieved 10th December, 2010];

31   See www.euinside.eu 19/06/2009 [Retrieved 10th December, 2010];

32   See http://www.Ataka.bg/en/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogcategory&id=1&Itemid=26 [Retrieved 10th December, 2010];

Enos-Midia boundary and invaded Bulgaria's territory.[33]

Besides these historical commemorations, historical and ethnic symbols were used by both parties in order to win their election campaign. Some of these slogans are: "I will be to continue the battle to defend the Orthodoxy!", "…set the national treason… Prosecution of the national traitors!", "No to Turkey in EU" by Ataka, and "Bulgaria: Switzerland of the Balkans", "Bulgaria: a bunch of ethnic communities" by MRF.

5. ATAKA AND MRF CAMPAIGNS AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE SOCIETY IN KARDJALI

In 2009, in order to analyze the actual reaction to the campaign among the citizens living in Kardjali, we drew up a questionnaire focusing on the social and political perception of the 120 people interviewed. The questionnaire included 60 questions in total on the Ataka and MRF parties during the two elections that were hold in Bulgaria in 2009, for the European Parliament (7 June 2009) and for the National Parliament (5 July 2009). In particular, each question had closed, structured answers with possible answers: *very little*, *little*, *so and so*, *much* and *very much* and they were related to the declarations, the programs and the elite's behavior of Ataka and MRF parties. The people who participated in the survey, were aged from 18 to 88 and had different social and educational backgrounds. The analysis of the data is based on the ethnical self-identification of each person. As outlined above, the analysis was aimed

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[33]   Ibidem;

only at Bulgarians and Turks of Bulgaria, the two major ethnicities of the country and of the city Kardjali, which were both represented in the parliament by MRF and Ataka, respectively the third and fourth most relevant parties in Bulgaria.

The final aim was to grasp if the political arena with the different electoral campaigns could bring to a deep polarization of the ethnic positions in society and consequently lead to dangerous extremist centrifugal dynamics. The data analysed for this research is outlined below:

- 56 men and 63 women;
- 48 people in range *a)* between 18-35 years old, 52 in range *b)* 36-60 years old and 20 in range *c)* more of 60 years old;
- 57 Bulgarian, 57 Turks of Bulgaria and 6 no answer to the ethnicity request;
- 51 Christians, 60 Muslims, 3 other and 6 no answer;
- 14 with a elementary educational level, 68 with a middle class level, 25 who have attended high school and 5 with a university diploma.

Analyzing the ethnical data, we discovered that out of almost half of the Bulgarian interviewed, 49.12%, have a middle educational level, 8.77% have the elementary level, 31.58% have attended high school and 5.26% university. Turkish educational level among the interviewed results lower because it is represented by 64.91% with middle class, 14.04% with elementary, 10.53% with high school and only 3.51%% attended university. Considering both

ethnicities we have a similar percentage of men and women, but different answers concerning the faith: all the Turkish people stated to be Muslim even if they are non-practicing, while 51 Bulgarians stated to be Christian and 2 affirmed to be atheist. Moreover, by observing the interviewees, we noticed that in the questionnaires there are two Bulgarians who declared to be Muslim, so probably they represent the Pomak minority which is quite numerous in this region. As already underlined, in this research I will point out the repercussion of the election among the people starting from their self-identification, so I will count these 2 people as Bulgarian, even because there is not a proof of their Pomak identity.

Another interesting aspect which emerges from the information gathered from the survey concerns the language spoken by the people interviewed: among the Turkish people 9 (15.79%) declared only Bulgarian as their mother tongue, 32 (56.14%) declared to be bilingual, speaking both Bulgarian and Turkish, while 14 people (24.56%) declared to speak only Turkish. The majority of Bulgarians interviewed, instead, declared to have only Bulgarian as their mother tongue, 2 people declared to be bilingual and 1 to speak only Turkish. The data shows how language in this area, where the educational level is not so high, could still correspond to a social and political obstacle. In fact, considering the educational level, replying to the political/cultural question "How well do you know the programs of the Ataka party?" 51 citizens, when referring to the European election and 44 to National election, said "very little". The same result was recorded for MRF programs which are known "very little" by 37 and 32 people in relation to the European and national campaign. Among both the ethnicities considered in the research, MRF's political program, the dominant party of the region which won with 68% of votes, is more well-known than Ataka 's program. So, even if Bulgarians constitute a minority enclave in this Region, the extreme nationalist positions of Ataka are not ingrained.

This attitude is confirmed by Bulgarians in the question referring to the potential positive role of Ataka in the future of democracy in Bulgaria, where we can observe a separate not polarized view, with 10 "very little", 11 "little", 8 "so and so", 21 "much" and 7 "very much". In other words 17.54% said "very little", 19.30% "little", but 36.84% declared "much", so the view of Bulgarians is balanced; the result is very similar for the Turkish people, as a matter of fact, 60.71% said "very little" while 17.86% "much".

Looking at one more question, on the democracy role of MRF, we notice that this balance among the opinions is confirmed: Bulgarians, 22 "very little", 13 "little", 10 "so and so", 9 "much"; Turks of Bulgaria, 6 "very little", 6 "little", 6 "so and so", 26 "much" and 13 "very much".

We combined the general perception data of the two ethnicities and the two religions, on Ataka and MRF "religion mission", we came to a similar conclusion. The results of the interviews are also fragmented, the groups are not polarized and the political views are distributed and balanced. Thus, although both campaigns involved relevant

ethnic historical facts as we previously underlined[34], citizens of Kardjali do not reflect their religion and ethnic roots in the corresponding party.

A self-critical aspect of Kardjali society is clear in the question on political corruption of the parties; for example, there are 16 Turkish people considered MRF to be extremely corrupted.

Finally it is relevant after a campaign to analyze the questions concerning the votes as a real monitoring tool of the variety of opinions among each ethnicity. The most interesting data show that 2 Turks, around 3.51% of the all ethnic group analyzed, have voted Ataka in the European election, while 5 Bulgarians MRF (8.77% of Bulgarians). In the national elections none of the Turks chose Ataka, but 4 Bulgarians voted MRF (7.02%). Both parties received votes from both ethnicities.

Although this bipolar view among the two communities, the Turks are more unified in their political position. This is clear in the percentage of MRF where we notice that 68.42% of Turks chose MRF in European Parliament election and 71.43% in the national vote. The Bulgarian group has declared a lower level, around 20%, of support towards its own potential ethnic party Ataka. It is significant to point out that this percentage is higher compared to the official results which estimate Ataka in Kardjali under 5% in both elections, but this can be explained as a result of the interview which studies the two major ethnicities, but does not respect completely the population distribution and it

does not include Pomaks and Roma. Examining the votes, both ethnic groups are a bit more distinct in the national election, and this can be seen as the result of their approach in referring to events that belong to the historical memory of the country.

This role is perceived as well in two other questions where 25 Turks and 25 Bulgarians noticed a high use of historical memories in the campaign of MRF while 37 Turks and 26 Bulgarians noticed the same behavior for Ataka.

Generally, in the vote analysis the fragmentation of the choice is quite evident, in particular among Bulgarians, where the groups do not vote as a monolithic corpus. Thus, the votes of Bulgarians are not going to be polarized looking at the last two European and National elections in 2007 and 2009. Ataka, in fact, comparing the local election results of Kardjali with the national ones, reached a low percentage, around 5 % in the European election and 2% in the national election. Moreover, considering the last results, at the European level Ataka lost 1.19%, by 5.12 in 2007 to 4.12 in 2009, while at the national level it maintained the same percentage, from 2.36 in 2005 to 2.33 in 2009. MRF instead gained 1.28% in the national election, but it lost 6.14% in the European election. These results confirm that the vote is not going to be involved in a centrifugal dynamic whirl because it is still fragmented; there is mutual respect among the people towards both parties, without any extremist view on the political level.

4. CONCLUSION

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34   Cfr. paragraph 4.

This analysis leads to a common result on European and National election campaigns in Kardjali in 2009. Even though scholars define the political environment as being precarious in a large interethnic context, the real situation of Kardjali shows a stable tendency and not a dangerous extremist outbidding of party systems.

In this study we came to the conclusion that the differences claimed by the two most relevant ethnic political representations of the country do not correspond to a high polarization of the society. Our research showed that: the replies to the questionnaires are layered; there is contrast between the positions inside each ethnic group; the votes declared are interwoven. The two biggest ethnic groups of the area are quite integrated. However, examining the data show that the Turks of Bulgaria are more united and politically they share a common identity, whereas the Bulgarians demonstrate a variety of votes and visions. Bulgarians' political vision is more weighted and less correlated to the ethnic affiliation.

Despite the fact Ataka and MRF used a historical and sometimes hard language relating to ethnic heritage, the Kardjali political scheme is not reaching a polarized position among its communities, even if there is no real political initiative which radically modifies the situation, as argued by Paul Mitchell, Geoffrey Evans and Brendan O'Leary. It seems that the stable situation is preserved more as a condition of the Bulgarian social cohesion than as a positive impulse or behavior of the political elites.

Democracy in Bulgaria, despite its short life, appears strong enough to be able to consolidate a good political and social environment in the near future. The research carried out in the city of Kardjali, where one of the largest minorities of Turkish in Bulgaria resides, confirms this firm social and political panorama. This article demonstrates, as said by Rabushka and Shepsle, that a large variety of communities can coexist if there is moderation and the ethnic issue is not salient. The Bulgarian democratic political model has put into place a consolidated system, despite the recent past of the "Revival Process" and the long turbulent historical background between the Turks and the Bulgarians that have left unresolved tensions and bad memories.

However this positive view has been spoilt in 2011, by some critical episodes that could determine a negative change in ethnic relations in Bulgaria. In May some supporters of Ataka, during a demonstration, started a brawl in downtown Sofia and assaulted some Muslims during their Friday prayer[35]; in September, in Katuniza, riots and violence created tension between the Bulgarian and the Roma community.

This analysis is not everlasting; a new research on the elections of the new National President and the local administrations could show a different tendency in Kardjali and in Bulgaria. Moreover, the possible events in the near future could determine a change in context if we consider, on

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35   http://www.euractiv.com/en/elections/extremist-party-fuels-ethnic-tensions-ahead-bulgariapoll-news-505049;   http://www.sofianewsagency.com/view_news.php?id=128474

the one hand, the economic crisis which might deteriorate the social cohesion of the country-the poorest among the 27 members of the European Union in terms of gross domestic product per capita-, and on the other hand, the potential entrance of Turkey in the European Union which could modify the social balance of the country. Indeed, Bulgaria – due to its geostrategic location and as a member of the European Union- will represent more and more the gateway between East–West and North–South, even more so today after the recent collapse of the North African dictatorships. The consequent increase of further migrants to Bulgaria could alter the cohesion among the people in the future years.

ANNEX 1

Question	target group	very little	little	so and so	much	very much
Positive political role of Ataka	no answer	3	2	1	0	0
	Bulgarians	10	11	8	21	7
	Turks of Bulgaria	34	3	5	10	4
Positive political role of MRF	no answer	1	1	2	1	1
	Bulgarians	22	13	10	9	0
	Turks of Bulgaria	6	6	6	26	13
Relevance of religion in the campaign of Ataka	no answer	1	1	2	2	0
	Bulgarians	31	4	10	5	7
	Turks of Bulgaria	9	3	13	6	24
	no answer	2		2	1	1
	Christians	30	2	8	4	7
	Mulslims	8	4	15	8	23
Relevance of religion in the campaign of MRF	no answer	1	2	1	2	0
	Bulgarians	7	5	8	26	11
	Turks of Bulgaria	37	8	6	4	1
	no answer	3			3	
	Christians	6	5	6	23	11
	Mulslims	35	9	8	6	1
Is Ataka corrupted?	no answer	2	0	2	2	0
	Bulgarians	23	10	10	9	1
	Turks of Bulgaria	6	6	14	21	7
Is MRF corrupted?	no answer	0	3	0	3	0
	Bulgarians	1	3	4	26	22
	Turks of Bulgaria	15	12	7	16	6
Relevance of the historical memory in the campaign of Ataka	no answer	0	2	1	3	0
	Bulgarians	5	9	10	26	6
	Turks of Bulgaria	5	2	3	37	10
Relevance of the historical memory in the campaign of MRF	no answer	0	1	1	4	0
	Bulgarians	2	10	11	25	6
	Turks of Bulgaria	4	4	5	25	18

ANNEX 2

Question	target group	I thought about	YES	NO	I will never do it
vote for Ataka (EP election)	no answer	1	2	3	0
	Bulgarians	5	12	38	1
	Turks of Bulgaria	2	2	43	10
vote for Ataka (National election)	no answer	0	3	3	0
	Bulgarians	7	11	35	3
	Turks of Bulgaria	2	0	43	11
vote for MRF (EP election)	no answer	0	3	2	1
	Bulgarians	2	5	42	8
	Turks of Bulgaria	6	39	12	0
vote for MRF (National election)	no answer	0	3	2	1
	Bulgarians	2	4	43	8
	Turks of Bulgaria	5	40	11	0

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