

BULGARIA



Pro-Russia or anti-Russia: political dilemmas and dynamics in Bulgaria in the context of the war in Ukraine

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Abstract

The war in Ukraine has had a serious impact on Bulgaria, both politically and economically. Bulgaria shares historically strong ties with Russia, and at least a third, if not half, of Bulgarians harbour deeply rooted pro-Russian sentiments. Although Sofia eventually supported sanctions against Moscow, sent humanitarian and military aid to Kyiv, and accepted Ukrainian refugees, key political actors in Bulgaria have vehemently opposed such decisions. Particular opposition has come from the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), the successor to the communist party, Bulgaria's incumbent president, and at least one populist Radical Right party—Vazrazhdane or Revival—whose support has grown significantly since the start of the war. In the process, Revival and its leaders have managed to capitalize on the nationalist vote and pro-Russian attitudes in the country, almost entirely wiping out voter support for the more established Far Right parties.

Keywords: *populism; Radical Right; Russia–Ukraine war; Bulgarian politics; pro-Russian attitudes; Revival.*

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Introduction

The war in Ukraine has had a serious impact on Bulgaria, both politically and economically. In the past two years, the country has struggled with political uncertainty and turmoil, having undergone four parliamentary elections (a fifth is scheduled for April 2023) and having been governed for the most part by caretaker governments.

Against the backdrop of domestic political instability, the war in Ukraine has required Bulgarian politicians and the public to address several complex questions at once, including whether Bulgaria should join the EU sanctions and whether it ought to send aid to Ukraine, and if so, what type: humanitarian, financial or military? Bulgarians have also had to decide whether or not to accept Ukrainian refugees and, if so, what type of support it should provide and for how long. In addition, the issue of energy security—and specifically whether the country ought to continue to count predominantly on Gazprom deliveries or diversify its supply of gas—has been front and centre. Finally, the government has had to grapple with the issue of Russian propaganda and intelligence activity in the country.

Such questions pose serious dilemmas in a country where 58% of the population reported positive attitudes towards Russia and Putin before the start of the war (see table 4). Given such public attitudes and the country's seemingly endemic political instability, it is hardly surprising that public opinion and government policy on the war has been inconsistent and frequently changing or that political parties have been quick to exploit public sentiment to gain electoral advantage. Although Sofia eventually supported sanctions against Moscow, dispatched humanitarian and military aid to Ukraine, and accepted Ukrainian refugees fleeing the war, prominent political actors in Bulgaria have vehemently opposed these decisions and sought to leverage them for political gain. Particular opposition has come from the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), the successor to the communist party, which ruled the country from 1946 until 1989, Rumen Radev, Bulgaria's president, and the country's newest populist Radical Right party—Vazrazhdane or Revival—whose support has grown significantly since the start of the war (Lavchiev, 2022).

The remainder of the report proceeds as follows. Next, I offer a brief outline of the political context in which the current debate on Russia, Vladimir Putin, and the war in Ukraine has taken place in Bulgaria. I then detail the constellation of populist Radical Right parties in Bulgaria and their various reactions to the war.

Finally, I detail public attitudes towards the conflict and how such attitudes appear to have shifted since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

The Russian “brothers” and their defenders

Bulgaria has a long history of close ties with Russia, and Russians are generally seen and referred to as “brothers” and “liberators”. Following five centuries of Ottoman rule, in the late nineteenth century, a period of national renewal started, which led to a series of national uprisings against the Ottomans, culminating in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78. This paved the way to Bulgarian independence, which was finally achieved in 1908. During the war of 1877–78, Bulgarian and Russian soldiers fought side by side, and to this day, Bulgarians commemorate the Russian soldiers who fell as “liberators” in that conflict. In addition to Russia’s role in Bulgaria’s independence, ethnic Bulgarians and Russians share a common cultural heritage, including a Slavic language and origin and Orthodox Christian religion.

Following the war, a provisional administration was instituted under Russian control, whose aim was to assist Bulgaria in establishing state structures and institutions. While most Bulgarians saw Russia as a liberating force, not all political circles were happy with Russian control over the provisional administration. Consequently, ever since independence, a division has remained in Bulgarian society and among political elites between Russophiles and Russophobes. The latter have sought to distance Bulgaria from the Russian sphere of influence and orient the country toward Western Europe, including by soliciting two kings from European noble families to rule the country. In contrast, Russophiles have sought to nurture and preserve Bulgaria’s ties with Russia and defend Russian interests in the country.

The end of the Second World War brought a Soviet-imposed communist regime. In a few short years, Bulgaria instituted a Soviet-type regime of one-party rule, a fusion of party and state, a centrally planned economy, nationalization of property, collectivization of agriculture, control over cultural and social life, and repression (Zankina, 2022). Throughout nearly five decades of communist rule during the Cold War, Bulgaria was the most trusted Soviet ally. In fact, the country’s communist dictator, Todor Zhivkov, twice requested that Bulgaria be admitted as the sixteenth republic of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (Crampton, 2007). Communist rule and Zhivkov’s doctrine of “total integration” with the Soviet



Union (Kolrova & Dimitrov, 1996, p. 179) ensured that anti-Russian and anti-Soviet sentiments in the country were uprooted through whatever means necessary.

With the collapse of communism, Bulgaria once again faced the question of relations with Russia and whether it should remain close to Moscow or seek integration with the West. Although today Bulgaria is a member of both NATO and the European Union, such a trajectory was by no means assured when looking at political dynamics in the 1990s. As the successor of the vehemently pro-Soviet communist party, the BSP remained a bulwark of Russian interests in the country, strongly opposing a pro-Western geostrategic orientation and arguing for a dual foreign policy that would preserve close ties with Russia while also developing relations with the West. Leading four coalition governments since 1990 and being a junior coalition partner in one, the BSP has always sought to protect Russian interests in Bulgaria.

Although the BSP's support has significantly decreased in the past two years (see table 1), for a long time, the BSP attracted at least a third of the votes, representing many of those pro-Russian voters. While today the BSP has embraced EU and NATO membership, it opposes every decision that might hurt Russian interests in the country, from advocating Russian technology for a controversial nuclear power plant and opposing the purchase of American weapons to protesting the NATO bases in the country and protecting reliance on Russian gas. As part of the short-lived coalition government of Kiril Petkov (December 2021–August 2022), the BSP did not support the government's position and the vote in Parliament on joining the EU sanctions against Russia. It also refused to join the condemnation of the referenda in Donetsk and Lugansk and their illegal incorporation into the Russian Federation, and it has avidly opposed sending military aid to Ukraine. Instead, the BSP's leader Kornelia Ninova has been advocating for an end to the sanctions against Russia, as in her view, they hurt primarily Bulgarian and European households, and reinstating Gazprom gas deliveries (Veleva, 2022b).

In addition to the BSP, the Bulgarian president Roumen Radev – an independent candidate, general and former military pilot who was first elected to the post in 2016 with the BSP's backing – has frequently taken a pro-Russian position, including declaring that Crimea is legitimately a Russian territory (Lavchiev, 2022). Within the context of the war in Ukraine, Radev has vehemently argued that sending military aid to Ukraine would effectively involve Bulgaria in the war. He has sided with Hungary's Viktor Orbán in arguing that more weapons would only

prolong the conflict and that what is needed instead is negotiation and diplomacy. In the absence of a stable government for most of the past two years, Radev has already appointed several caretaker governments, thus exercising a lot more power than envisioned in the Bulgarian constitution and having significant influence and opportunity to push his pro-Russian views. BSP's leader Kornelia Ninova, President Radev, and the leader of the populist Radical Right party, Revival, Kostadin Kostadinov, have been the most vehement pro-Russian voices in Bulgaria and strong opposition to any actions against Russia (Lavchiev, 2022).

The policy response to the war

At the time of the outbreak of the war, Bulgaria was administered by a coalition government that included four parties with different ideological orientations. Despite this ideological heterogeneity and the presence of the BSP in the governing coalition, the government of Kiril Petkov has taken a clear anti-Russian position and pushed several decisions in support of Ukraine through the Parliament. In March 2021, Bulgaria supported the EU sanctions on Russia, despite strong opposition from the BSP and Revival. In April, a Bulgarian delegation headed by Prime Minister Petkov visited Ukraine. In May, the Parliament voted for humanitarian, financial and military-technical assistance (including repair of military technology) to Ukraine but came short of approving the supply of weapons. This limited support reflected the BSP's strong opposition to sending military aid and its ability to exercise influence within the coalition. In the meantime, Petkov fired the defence minister, Stefan Yanev (who had served as prime minister in a previous caretaker government), for parroting the Kremlin line that the invasion was a "special operation", a move that was approved by a majority of the Bulgarian population (Alpha Research, 2022). In June, the Petkov government expelled 70 Russian diplomats from the country over espionage concerns. In contrast to the sacking of Yanev, this move drew strong public criticism.

One of the thorniest issues that Petkov has had to deal with is Russian gas supplies. Bulgaria has depended heavily on Russian gas, which supplied 77% of the country's needs at the outset of the war (Popov, 2022). The rhetoric of the BSP and Revival highlighting the dire consequences of stopping Russian gas supplies instils understandable anxiety in large portions of the population. Despite continuing to meet its contractual obligations towards Gazprom, the Russian gas giant suddenly



stopped deliveries to Bulgaria (and Poland) in April 2021. The EU decried this decision and labelled it blackmail. Consequently, Bulgaria was forced to rapidly diversify its gas supplies, and today receives gas from Azerbaijan through the Greek connector, Turkey, and other regional suppliers.

Despite fears of a change of direction, the current caretaker government of Galab Donev has renewed the commitment to bolster its humanitarian aid to Ukraine with new streams of assistance. In December, Parliament voted to provide Ukraine with weapons and other forms of lethal assistance, including military technology. The BSP and Revival requested a review of this decision before the Constitutional Court. As of December 2022, Bulgaria has provided €225 million in aid to Ukraine and has welcomed 150,000 Ukrainian refugees.

As Ivan Bedrov, head of the Bulgarian service of Radio Free Europe, has recently outlined, one year after the start of the war, we can identify three main consequences of the war for the country. First, the war has shed light on Russian interests and influence in Bulgaria and the political actors supporting them. Second, the conflict has become one of the two main dividing lines in Bulgarian society, splitting political actors and the public once again into pro-Russian and anti-Russian camps (the other division concerns attitudes towards corruption and the mainstream parties). Finally, the conflict has proven that Bulgaria is not by default dependent on Russia, including for the supply of energy (Bedrov, 2023).

Populist Radical Right parties in Bulgaria

Since the 2005 elections, populist Radical Right parties have gained parliamentary representation and established a more or less permanent political presence. Before 2005, nationalist discourse was almost entirely monopolized by the BSP, a feature of many former communist countries in which nationalism is driven from the Left. Bulgaria's sizeable ethnic Turkish and Roma minorities, as well as a string of migration crises in Europe, have provided fertile ground for nationalist rhetoric and mobilization. Some of those actors are clearly anti-elite, anti-West, and even anti-democracy, while others claim to represent small business, portraying ethnic minorities as a threat to these interests, but are not explicitly anti-EU or even anti-NATO. Kristen Ghodsee explains Bulgarian nationalism best when she describes it as "left wing, right wing, everything" (Ghodsee, 2008, p. 26). Like many other nationalist parties in Europe, some Bulgarian Radical Right parties are explicitly pro-Russian—a position that became even more evident with the war in Ukraine—

and have relied on Russian support.

Thus, geopolitical issues have been intertwined with attacks on domestic minorities, welfare chauvinism, and patriotic appeals. Migration has remained secondary in this rhetoric and is discussed through the prism of national ethnic minorities (i.e., Muslim migrants radicalizing domestic Muslim minorities) (Rashkova & Zankina, 2017). Populist Radical Right parties in Bulgaria attract more than just the disenfranchised, with an average of 10% of the vote (see table 1 and figure 1) and appeal to left- as well as right-wing voters, a phenomenon typical of former communist countries that has been referred to as the “red-brown” electorate (Ishiyama, 2009). In the last decade, we have witnessed overpopulation and crowding of the political space with parties from the national populist milieu (Krasteva, 2016, p. 170), resulting in the fragmentation of the nationalist vote.

Table 1: Parliamentary election results in Bulgaria, 2017-2022

Type	Party	Mar-17			Apr-21			Jul-21			Nov-21			Oct-22		
		Votes	%	MPs	Votes	%	MPs	Votes	%	MPs	Votes	%	MPs	Votes	%	MPs
Established/ Mainstream	GERBgvb	1,147,292	33.5	95	837,707	26.18	75	642,165	23.51	63	596,456	22.7	59	634,575	25.3	67
	BSP	955,490	27.9	80	480,146	15.01	43	365,695	13.39	36	267,817	10.2	26	232,942	9.3	25
	DPS	315,976	9.24	26	336,306	10.51	30	292,514	10.71	29	341,000	13	34	344,621	13.8	36
Other/hybrid	Volia	145,637	4.25	17	75,926*	2.13*	0	85,795*	3.14*	0	7,067	0.27	0			
	RB+/DB	107,407	3.14	0	302280	9.45	27	345331	12.64	34	166968	6.37	16	186493	7.44	20
	DaBG/DG	101,177	2.96	0												
New parties/ protest parties	ITN				565,014	17.66	51	657,829	24.08	65	249,743	9.52	25	96,071	3.83	0
	ISMV				150,940	4.72	14	136,885	5.01	13	60,055	2.29	0	25,207	1.01	0
	PP										673,170	25.7	67	505,985	20.2	53
	BV													115,858	4.63	12
Nationalist/PRR	VMRO				116,434	3.64	0				28,322	1.08	0	20,177	0.81	0
	NFSB	318,513	9.7	27	75,926*	2.13*	0	85,795*	3.14*	0	8,584	0.33	0	3,520	0.14	0
	Ataka				15,659	0.49	0	12,585	0.46	0	12,153	0.46	0	7,593	0.3	0
	Revival	37,896	1.11	0	78,414	2.45	0	82,147	3.01	0	127,586	4.86	13	254,808	10.2	27
Voter turnout		3,682,151	54.1		3,334,283	50.61		2,775,410	42.19		2,669,260	40.2		2,601,963	39.4	

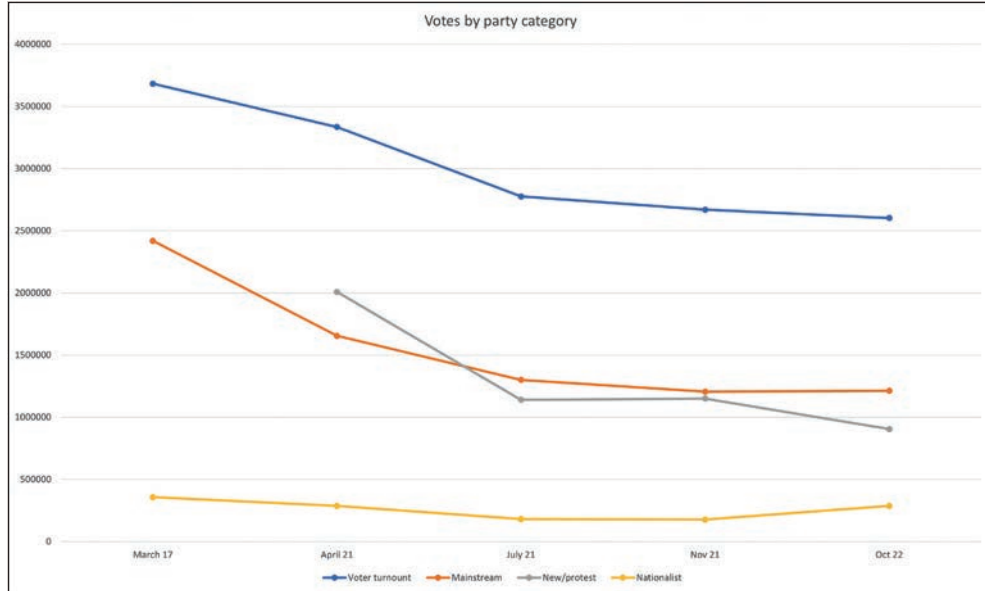
Source: Compiled by the author with data from the National Electoral Commission (<https://www.cik.bg>). Note: Asterisk (*) indicates parties campaigning as part of an electoral coalition.

This fragmentation has been coupled with the diversification of Radical Right actors and discourses (Krasteva, 2016, p. 176). While Radical Right parties have established a continuous presence in Bulgaria’s Parliament and beyond, no individual party has been impervious to threats from across the political spectrum, especially new parties. A range of populist Radical Right parties have been represented in Parliament and—between 2017 and 2021, even in government—including Ataka (“Attack”), the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (Vatreshna Makedonska Revolyuzionna Organizaciya, VMRO), the National Front for Salvation of Bulgaria (Nazionalen Front za Spasenie na Bulgaria, NSFB), and



the aforementioned Revival. Revival is thus only the newest and currently the most preminent of these populist outfits.

Figure 1: Votes by party category in Bulgarian parliamentary elections, 2017-2022



Source: Source: Compiled by the author based on data from the National Electoral Commission (<https://www.cik.bg>).

Ataka entered Parliament in 2005, the first populist Radical Right party to do so. Its eccentric leader, Volen Siderov, appealed to disenfranchised voters from across the political spectrum, but most importantly to those disillusioned with the transition to democracy and the elites who dominated politics in this period. Drawing on both neo-nationalist and neo-totalitarian elements, Ataka mixes welfare chauvinism and nostalgia for the communist past (Ghodsee, 2008) with clericalism and irredentism (Pirro, 2015). Ataka's rhetoric is explicitly pro-Russian and xenophobic, openly attacking Bulgaria's relations with its transatlantic partners and Turkey, in particular, while promoting close ties with Russia. At one point, Ataka was the fourth-largest party in Parliament, and its electoral support peaked in the 2007 European Parliament elections when it took 14.2% of the vote. However, the party has lost ground electorally in recent years (see table 1). Siderov's pro-Russian interpretation of the war in Ukraine has not gained much attention, as another eccentric populist leader, Kostadin Kostadinov, has managed to steal the limelight.

One of the oldest political organizations in Bulgarian history, the VMRO traces its origins back to 1893 and the struggle for Macedonian liberation from Ottoman rule. The organization has gone through numerous phases since then, including terrorist activities in the interwar period (Crampton, 2007), championing cultural preservation during communist rule, and electoral competition as a political party

since the transition to democracy in 1989. In the 1990s, the VMRO supported the broad anti-communist coalition and sent representatives to Parliament. In the 2000s, its rhetoric became increasingly nationalistic, especially after Ataka burst onto the political stage. With each election, the VMRO has shifted its political alliances, and its coalition policies have been highly opportunistic and chaotic, while its political identity has remained ambiguous. Although claiming to be patriotic, it has allied itself with political actors with diverse views on nationalism, from those eschewing nationalist rhetoric altogether to moderate nationalists to those on the extreme nationalist end of the spectrum (Krasteva, 2016, p. 176).

The Radical Right formula has proved the most successful for the VMRO. In 2014, the party registered big successes, both in the European Parliament and national elections, sending one MEP to Brussels and 8 MPs to the national Parliament. In the 2017 governing coalition, VMRO leader Krasimir Karakachanov was appointed deputy prime minister and minister of defence. While the VMRO's MEP, Angel Dzambaski, has been criticized more than once for outrageous behaviour, including giving a Nazi salute in the European Parliament (Gotev, 2022), Karakachanov has maintained a moderate tone. He has publicly condemned Putin and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, supported Bulgaria acquiring F-16 fighter jets from the United States and criticized Europe for not doing enough to help Ukraine. Despite adopting such mainstream positions, the VMRO has been so far unable to claw back voter support.

The National Front for Salvation of Bulgaria (NFSB) split from Ataka in 2011. The NFSB adopts patriotic and exclusionary rhetoric, defending Bulgarian culture, traditions, language, and sovereignty, but it is less populist and leader-centred than Ataka. During the 2014 parliamentary elections, the NFSB and the VMRO campaigned together in the so-called Patriotic Front (PF). Due to its more constructive and less populist stance, the largest party, Citizens for European Development (GERB), reached out to the PF for a supply-and-confidence arrangement that gave the PF no ministerial posts but nonetheless significant parliamentary influence.

For the 2017 elections, the NFSB and the VMRO joined Ataka in the United Patriots (UP) electoral coalition. The UP took 9.3% of the vote (more or less the same as in 2014), which was a considerable disappointment, given their much higher expectations. However, the configuration of seats in the new Parliament meant the GERB had to appeal to the alliance in order to form a government.



Consequently, for the first time in Bulgaria's post-communist history, the government formally included a party of the Radical Right. The UP alliance were given five portfolios in the Council of Ministers, and VMRO and the NFSB were awarded deputy premierships.

By the April 2021 parliamentary elections, the former partners each thought they could do better on their own, and they ran individually, with none passing the 4% threshold. None of the parties has since recovered, and all have ceded their votes to Revival and other new parties. As the war has unfolded, NFSB's leader Valeri Simeonov has focused on protecting the right of ethnic Bulgarians in Ukraine, advocating for self-governance and exemption from military service.

As the newest populist Radical Right party in Bulgaria, Revival has managed to attract a sizeable share of votes. Founded in 2017, the party and its controversial leader, Kostadin Kostadinov, have only adopted a nationalist, anti-EU, anti-NATO and pro-Russian discourse since 2022. Kostadinov is hardly new to politics. Indeed, he is something of a "serial party switcher" in Bulgaria, having sought a home wherever the opportunity has arisen. He has appeared on candidate lists or served in the party executive of all the major Radical Right parties – Ataka, the NFSB, and the VMRO. He has also appeared on the candidate lists of centre-right and centre-left parties. His rhetoric has similarly shifted in the same opportunistic manner.

The COVID-19 pandemic provided a great opportunity for Kostadinov and his party to capitalize on widespread frustration and discontent. In this context, Revival took an anti-vaccine stand, denying the existence of the pandemic and mobilizing numerous protests (Veleva, 2022a). Government subsidies, as well as anti-vax, anti-NATO and anti-EU rhetoric, have helped the party gain momentum so that by the third parliamentary election in 2021, it passed the threshold and sent 11 MPs to Parliament (see table 1). Some of the factors outlined for this success include the political turmoil in 2021 and the inability of parliamentary parties to form a government, the incumbent government's poor management of the COVID-19 pandemic (exacerbated by strong anti-vax and anti-restriction sentiment in the population), and the pronounced pro-Russian attitudes in Bulgaria that translate into anti-NATO and anti-EU positions (Cholakov, 2021).

The war in Ukraine has provided an unprecedented opportunity for Kostadinov to broadcast his pro-Russian views and stage eccentric performances. Shortly after the start of the war, Revival supporters staged an ugly protest action at the 2022

celebrations of Bulgaria's independence, throwing snowballs in the face of the Bulgarian prime minister and waving Russian flags. In fact, Russian flags are an indispensable attribute to the frequent protests staged by Revival in the past couple of years. While older nationalist parties have all but lost parliamentary support, Revival and its controversial leader Kostadin Kostadinov grew its support from just over 1% in 2017 to over 10% in the most recent October 2022 election.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine and Russia's energy politics have heightened divisions in Bulgarian society, given the strong historical ties between Bulgaria and Russia, and have fuelled support for Revival. Kostadinov has been repeatedly accused of links to Russia, which he has not denied. A brief overview of his public appearances and statements shows clear allegiance to Russian interests. Before him, Volen Siderov played such a role, defending Russia in many of his public statements. Social networks have further amplified Russian propaganda in Bulgaria, which has been taken at heart by supporters of Radical Right parties, as well as by many BSP voters. According to a report from the Human and Social Studies Foundation in Sofia (HSSF), Russian online propaganda has increased ten-fold since the start of the war (Gigov, 2022).

Radical Right parties have established a strong presence in Bulgarian politics, with continuous representation in Parliament and frequent access to government positions both at the local and national levels. At the same time, there has not been a growth in the nationalist vote. On the contrary, in 2021, Radical Right parties lost a big chunk of their vote to various new parties of different ideological identification, and the latest success of Revival is a result of capitalizing on the votes of other Radical Right parties (see table 1 and figure 2). This development makes us pause and think about the stability of the nationalist vote in Bulgaria. This vote looks pretty volatile and not nationalist at its core, but rather anti-establishment and directed against mainstream parties. In the past couple of years, the Radical Right discovered that new political players could easily hijack its territory and discourse and that their support was based more on the mood of the day than on lasting nationalist attitudes.

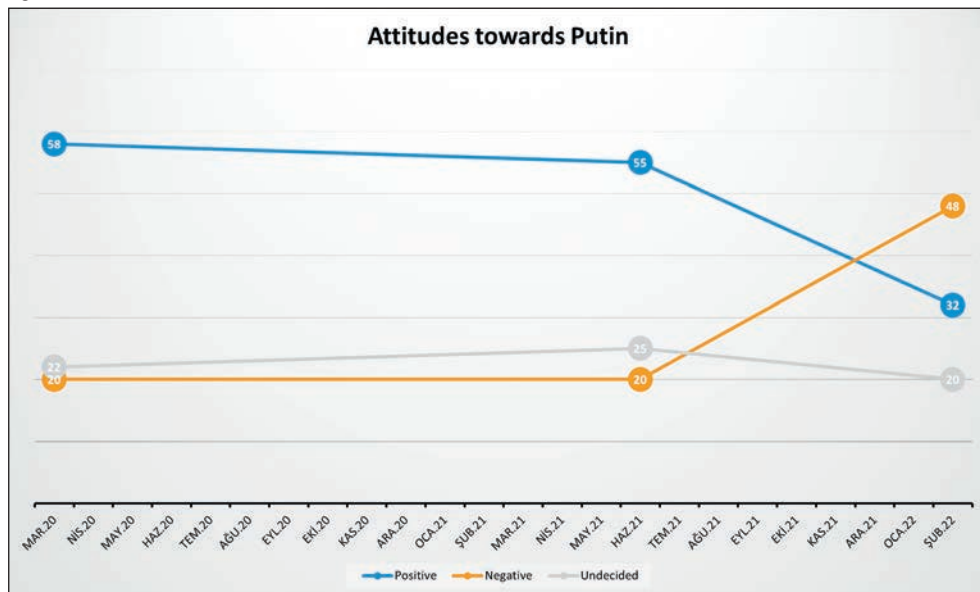
Public attitudes towards the war in Ukraine

The war in Ukraine has led to an immediate and radical change in public attitudes towards Russia and Putin. A study conducted by Alpha Research in late February 2022 concluded that the Russian invasion of Ukraine resulted in a drop in support



for Putin and an increase in solidarity with European countries. The report indicates that Putin lost half of his popularity among Bulgarian citizens in the first four days of the war alone. Furthermore, 63% of respondents reported approval of EU-wide sanctions against Ukraine, 61% found the invasion unjustified, only 16% saw it as justified, 68% agreed that Bulgaria must accept Ukrainian refugees, and only 16% were against it (Alpha Research, 2022). Another study by Research Center Trend (2022) indicates that 40% of respondents report an adverse change in attitudes towards Russia. However, the same study finds a slight increase in support for Revival.

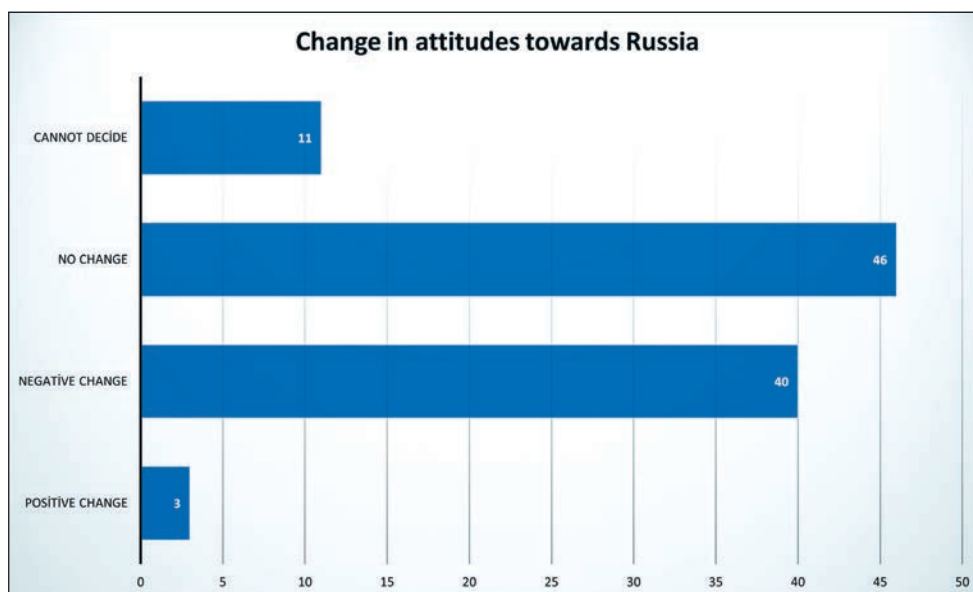
Figure 2: Attitudes towards Putin over time



Source: Compiled by the author based on data from Alpha Research (2022)

The protraction of the war conflict combined with worsening economic conditions led to a change in public attitudes by November 2022. A survey by Estat in November 2022 found 20.7% of Bulgarians sympathize with Russia (a decline from 23.6% in April 2022) and 23.1% with Ukraine (a decline from 32.4% in April) (Estat Research and Consultancy, 2022). Furthermore, 67.5% of respondents think Bulgarian should have a neutral position in the conflict, and 19% have a negative attitude towards Ukrainian refugees, whereas those with a positive view have decreased from 38% in April 2022 to 25.8% in October 2022 (ibid.).

Figure 3: Change in attitudes towards Russia after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine



Source: Compiled by the author based on data from Research Center Trend (2022)

At the same time, there are signs of hope. Despite the rise in nationalist sentiments and pro-Russian attitudes, nationalist and anti-EU parties have but marginal support. If anything became evident in the numerous recent elections, it is that Bulgarians are mostly pro-European. While voters are divided on the party of their particular choice, the majority harbour pro-EU attitudes and support Ukraine in the war conflict. Even the divided 48th Parliament (October 2022–February 2023), which could not agree on a government, has taken several important, clearly pro-European decisions, voting to send arms to Ukraine, purchase F-16 fighter jets, and confirm Bulgaria’s entry into the Eurozone in January 2024.

Similarly, Bulgarians came in large numbers to commemorate one year since the start of the war and to express their support for Ukraine. While the war has strengthened the ever-present divide between Russophiles and Russophobes, it has also helped reaffirm democratic values and support for the Euro-Atlantic alliance. If anything, the reactions and the effects of the war are diverse and not unidirectional.



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