

Reaffirming Stereotypes: *The Economist's* Construction of Bulgaria's Image

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Abstract

This paper attempts to carry out a critical discourse analysis of *The Economist's* narrative on Bulgaria and the Bulgarians in the period 2001-2015. The major aim is to expose how the high-quality global media outlet, admittedly a leader in shaping public opinion on the relevant international issues of our contemporary life, constructs the image of the country and its nationals. This paper holds the view that *The Economist* has a well-established discursive strategy whereby it creates the political myth about Bulgaria, reaffirming a deeply rooted stereotype about the country and its nationals. The findings suggest that this strategy involves thematic range, macrosyntax and multimodality and that deeply entrenched perceptions of Bulgaria in the western world are reaffirmed. Bulgaria's highly critical negative image as constructed by the media can be attributed to *The Economist's* identity as a global non-state actor in international relations and to the alleged differences between the Bulgarian national identity and Britishness.

Keywords: image, identity, Britishness, media discourse, critical discourse analysis

JEL: Z13, Z18

Introduction

In the era of post-truth politics, in which "objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief"¹, it is worth exploring how the political elite legitimizes in public discourse its behaviour, decisions, actions. The refugee crisis and global terrorism, Donald Trump's election, Brexit, two-speed Europe have prompted political analysts and researchers to assume that a new world order has been established. Today's information society and technology-driven economy have given rise to virtual communities and a netocracy. The digital forms of public communication and the traditional (now largely digitalized) media, among other newly emerged non-state players, contribute to setting patterns of thought and to promoting certain values and norms.

These developments have largely determined the choice of the **topic** of this piece of research - the discursive construction of Bulgaria's image by *The Economist*, the leading high-quality media, which shapes public opinion with regard to the topical events and issues in the contemporary world. Hence the **object** of analysis is *The Economist's* narrative on Bulgaria in the period between 2001 and 2015, when Bulgaria reaffirmed

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¹ <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/word-of-the-year/word-of-the-year-2016>

its geopolitical orientation and became a full-fledged member of the Euro-Atlantic structures, and the European Union itself weathered a number of crises.

This paper **aims** to apply the method of critical discourse analysis that incorporates the theoretical premises and categories of the branches of modern linguistics. To this effect, the major objective is to expose how *The Economist* constructs the image of Bulgaria and the Bulgarians. This paper holds the view that *The Economist* has a well-established discursive strategy whereby it creates the political myth about Bulgaria, reaffirming a deeply rooted stereotype about the country and its nationals. In order to provide a more nuanced and comprehensive analysis of the major research topic addressed in this study, the following sub-questions will be explored:

First, can the linguistic and textual mechanisms be identified that have been employed for the construction of images by *The Economist*?

Second, how is the image of Bulgaria and the Bulgarians constructed through the prism of the British identity and culture? Is this image sustainably stereotyped or does it evolve in the course of time?

Expectations are that the thus formulated questions can possibly be given the following answers:

First, *The Economist* makes an assessment of Bulgaria and the Bulgarians through a highly critical perspective. In its capacity of an influential non-state actor, the British media outlet plays a central role in communicating the image of the state and the nation, and in this image's maintenance or transformation that is deeply entrenched among the British public opinion.

Second, the image of Bulgaria and the Bulgarians as constructed in the British media discourse is consolidated and negatively stereotyped.

With regard to the **scope** of this piece of research, the following should be noted. Only the media articles devoted explicitly to Bulgaria are subject to investigation. The time frame is also limited to the 2001-2015 period, for reasons of Bulgaria's full integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures.

With regard to the **theoretical and methodological framework** and specific methods, adopted and applied in this paper, it should be noted that they draw on the research conducted by Teun Van Dijk (1997, 1999, 2006), Norman Fairclough (1989, 1992, 1995, 2001, 2005) and Van Leeuwen (2009).

The proposed method falls within a broader methodological framework of social cognition, and of the relation between discourse and politics, incorporating established analytical methods and tools in these areas of scientific enquiry. The method, defined as critical cognitive-pragmatic discourse analysis, selectively borrows some theoretical premises from framing in media studies (see Entman, 1993, 2003). Hence the method draws on framing theory in media studies and critical discourse analysis, involving two stages of analytical interpretation. The first stage pertains to grouping the represented events and actors into headings, whereby the thematic range of a narrative is exposed. Thus the suggested analytical method incorporates some elements of qualitative and quantitative content analysis. The second stage involves an examination of the discursive strategy of the discourse producer.

1. Overview of the literature on Bulgaria's image in English-language discourse

Studies of the image of Bulgaria are limited in number, and none have been so far carried out on the discursive construction of Bulgaria's image in a global media. This paper's analytical focus is directed not merely

at what Bulgaria's image is, but at the cognitive and linguistic mechanisms employed for its construction. We have the intuitive feeling that Bulgaria has had a negative image in the Anglo-Saxon political debate. The findings of the Bulgarian researchers in the field suggest that Bulgaria's negative image in terms of statehood and nationhood persists in the country's coverage in a wide range of English-language media. In her critical examination of the BBC's representation of Bulgaria, Elena Tarasheva suggests that the selection of topics is limited mostly to the country's achievements in sports and to the problems stemming from immigration in the United Kingdom, which distorts the country's public image (Tarasheva, 2014). In her monograph, Kristin Dimitrova makes a detailed content analysis of Bulgaria's coverage in British, American and Canadian newspapers. The researcher finds that, in the studied period between 1980 and 2000, Bulgaria's visibility in the English-language media has improved, but not its recognizability. The country's image is invariably based on stereotypes and bias (Dimitrova, 2015).

In her book, "Policing the Naughty Newbies" (2012), Rositsa Ishpekova analyzes the media debate on Bulgaria in *The Financial Times* in the 2007-2010 period, immediately after Bulgaria's EU accession. Carried out within a theoretical framework which presents a cross-fertilization of Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis, the monograph transposes G. Lakoff's THE NATION AS A FAMILY metaphor (2002) to the environment of the European Union. It has extended his STRICT FATHER and NURTURANT PARENT models to include Bulgaria (and Romania), which have been assigned the role of the naughty child(ren) in the EU family, the European Commission – that of the strict father and the older EU member states – that of the better performers.

The book reveals the elements of the British media's discourse strategies and the hidden mechanisms of persuasion and manipulation (R. Ishpekova, 2012).

History professor Petur Angelov critically examines the stereotyped image of the Bulgarians back in Medieval times. This image is sustainable, and is unlikely to undergo radical transformation, especially in the traditionally conservative medieval society. Interestingly, in medieval times the Bulgarian's outer appearance was deliberately caricatured, and the Bulgarians were typically depicted as wearing the hooded cloak and assigned the role of shepherd (Angelov, 2011: 63). The researcher finds that the Byzantines attempt to depict the Bulgarians as "the other", those "foreign" to the Byzantine intellectual mindset, as the "good disciples" that should be grateful to their spiritual teachers and guardians. (ibid: 129).

There are some important assumptions in Angelov's book particularly relevant to this piece of research. The first assumption pertains to social cognition: the construction of any stereotype is determined by a number of factors, such as the geopolitical, social, cultural and religious environment as well as the specific aspects of human psychology. Notably, a stereotyped image stems from the interaction (or possibly clash) between two cultures - the one that created the image and the one to which it belongs (ibid: 7). Another assumption is that Bulgaria's image is constructed in a variety of genres such as historical writings, legends and eulogies, letters, speeches, satirical dialogues, among many other genres. This requires that the structural properties of the specific text and its purpose should be considered in the analysis of the written documents related to Bulgaria, as they determine the choice of vocabulary, the stylistic devices and terminology employed (ibid: 8-9). It is the latter two assumptions

that the method suggested in this paper incorporates.

Taking account of the aforementioned, the next section of this paper is devoted to the *The Economist's* identity, which takes shape in institutional practices and editorial policy, target readership, language and style.

2. *The Economist* as a global non-state actor in international relations

The Economist is among the few financially independent, high-quality and high-circulation non-specialized newspapers. It would not be an overstatement to claim that it is the only print media - a source of analyses of international business and world politics - that has survived amid the ferocious competition of the digitalized media. This position can be attributed mostly to its high-value, objective and non-biased analysis. More importantly, *The Economist* is among the few editions that cover the topics pertaining to the development and problems of the European Union.

In terms of business model, *The Economist* is an example of a successful enterprise on the global media market. Core components of this model are ownership, investments and advertising revenues, which largely determine its commercial interests. Other factors are consumer preferences and stakeholders' expectations, which impact editorial policy.

2.1. Ownership

Understandably, for matters of commercial secret, there is no readily accessible information about subscribers. Some sources reveal the corporation's owners and ownership

transfer throughout its history. Pearson, the educational and publishing giant, owned *The Economist* in the period between 1928 and 2015, holding a fifty-percent share.² In 2015, Pearson sold its assets worth 469 million GBP to Agnelli, the family owner of the FIAT brand. Its partners are other corporate giants such as Cadbury, Layton, Rothschild and the Schroder family. Hence the tradition was adhered to whereby influential media owners tend to leave them under the control of other big business dynasties. Examples are Rupert Murdoch (News UK, publisher of *The Sun* and *The Times*), the Barclay brothers from *The Telegraph* and the Rothermere family from *The Daily Mail* (West, 2015).

2.2. Advertising and advertisers

Advertising ensures financing, but it also provides grounds to make assumptions about its target readership. Almost all periodicals have strict criteria, such as advertising space, place, colour, among other features. Information about the latter are clearly described and can be accessed either online or through the media outlet's advertising department. However, *The Economist* seems to be an exception in this respect, considering that its volume in terms of pages has not changed throughout the years. A cursory look at the newspaper stalls nowadays shows that nearly all print editions comprise mainly advertising, and many are sold at a symbolic price, or are even given out free of charge. Throughout the years, *The Economist* has not changed seriously in terms of the relative share of its advertising pages. Neither have its advertisers - traditionally they have

² The company was founded in 1844 by Samuel Pearson as a construction and engineering concern. In 1921 it acquired a number of regional daily papers and weeklies in the United Kingdom, and in 1957 it purchased *The Financial Times*, thereby gaining a 50-percent share in *The Economist*. In the 1990s, the corporation acquired assets in the television industry as well. In September 2000, it entered the US educational sector, and in November 2015 it announced its rebranding, coming up with a new logo and the business focus on education. Now Pearson has three basic business divisions: Pearson School, Pearson Higher Education and Pearson Professional (including Pearson English).

included expensive brands such as Rolex and Louis Vuitton, prestigious airline companies and high-tech companies, which are of no great interest for the mass consumer. What is more, advertisements for high managerial positions and for the academic programs of leading universities are not only invariably part of *The Economist's* advertising but also outnumber the commercial ads published on its pages.

2.3. Circulation and price

Evidence to a media's global impact and reputation is its circulation and price. No matter what political, economic and financial support a media might enjoy, amid today's fierce competition and free editions, it is not so easy to make such a huge number of readers to buy its print version for a relatively high price. After it was set up in 1843, *The Economist* did not enjoy a high circulation: in 1887, it stood at a mere 3 700 copies, and reached 6 000 in 1920. After World War II, its circulation soared to 55 000 in 1956, and in 1970, it reached 70 000. Today, despite the heavy blow the print industry was dealt by the Internet, the prestigious edition has a sustainable circulation exceeding 1.5 million copies. In 2015, the holding, including its research division, the Economist Intelligence Unit, have a net profit of 59 million GBP, and revenues worth 328 million GBP (West, 2015). As many other British achievements, *The Economist* gains more recognition abroad than at home. Today its circulation in Great Britain is a fifth of its world circulation, while in the United States it is 50 percent of its global circulation. It is distributed on almost all continents and enjoys a weekly circulation of almost 1.6 million copies. Among its consumers are former, current and future decision makers on a global scale.

2.4. Editorial policy and philosophy

This philosophy explains why and how the prestigious media was transformed from an atypical player on the British print media market into a powerful non-state actor with global clout. Its editorial philosophy is based on three key words: independence, objectivity and topicality.³ **Independence** is determined by the newspaper's specific institutional practices: the editor-in-chief is appointed by trustees, who are independent of commercial, political and proprietorial influences, which has not always been the case, as becomes clear from the overview of its development since it was established in 1843. Other significant evidence to its presumed independence is its popularity among world leaders that embrace various ideological and political views. In the late 1930s, together with *The Times*, *The Economist* is among the most cited British editions by the US newspapers. Every week the US embassy would send to the State Department a 1,000-word summary of the current issue. Many heads of state at the time are regular readers of *The Economist*: Spain's Prime Minister Manuel Azana (1931-33), German Chancellor Heinrich Brüning (1930-32), and Benito Mussolini, who described himself, when Layton interviewed him in 1932, as the paper's "most constant reader". Another regular reader was Franklin D. Roosevelt. Sir Walter Layton, editor-in-chief in 1922-1938, interviewed Hitler (whom he found rather unimpressive), as well as Joseph Goebbels (Evans, 1994: 636 -646). A telling case is the gratitude expressed by Ivan Maisky, Soviet ambassador to London in 1932, for the fact that, at a time when *The Times*, *Daily Telegraph* and most of the other serious newspapers simply avoided any contact with Soviet embassy officials, *The Economist* maintained a friendly attitude to

³ See *The Economist's* website at: <http://www.economist.com/help/about-us>; last accessed on 13 October 2020

the USSR "and more than once did valuable work in helping to bring the two countries closer together" (ibid: 647-655). Earlier on, Lord Granville, British ambassador to Russia (1804-1805) and France (1824-1828), said that whenever he felt uncertain, he liked to wait to see what the next issue of *The Economist* had to say. A later admirer of the prestigious newspaper was US President Woodrow Wilson.

Objectivity is another core value in the paper's identity. Evidence to this is the established practice, whereby the articles are never signed. *The Economist* «speaks» in a collective voice, which suggests that collective identity matters more than the journalist's personality. This ensures a consistency and continuity of political views and positions. According to Crowther, "anonymity keeps the editor not the master but the servant of something far greater than himself. You can call that ancestor-worship if you wish, but it gives to the paper an astonishing momentum of thought and principle".⁴ As Loe Starchey is said to have claimed 70 years ago, journalists who write "in the name of their paper and not of themselves, are much less likely to yield to the foolish vanity of self-assertion: they can sink their individuality and speak for their paper". Furthermore, the *Times* editor Sir William Haley (1952-1966) noted that "signed writing invites exhibitionism" (Evans, 1994: 854).

Topicality is the third defining aspect of *The Economist's* editorial philosophy. Although the global media is published weekly in a magazine format, it is called a newspaper because it covers both news and opinion, and works to a newspaper deadline. What is more, much of its editorial is rewritten up to the moment of going to press late on Thursdays.

To the aforementioned features of its editorial philosophy, we should add its

partisan non-affiliation, which distinguishes the paper from its British rivals. At election times in the United Kingdom, *The Economist* has supported both the Labour Party (in 2005) and the Conservative Party (in 2010 and 2015). Furthermore, during presidential elections in the United States, it has backed both Republicans and Democrats (evident in the latest elections in 2016). The history of the paper exposes some ideological leanings, yet it has embraced editorial independence as a major principle in business.

2.5. Thematic scope: evolution from domestic economic policy to global issues

Throughout its 174-year history, *The Economist* has invariably adhered to its neoliberal views. According to former editor Bill Emmott (1993-2006), "*The Economist's* philosophy has always been liberal, not conservative" (Emmott, 2000: 1). James Wilson launched the newspaper with a specific task: to ensure a rostrum for criticism of the protectionist Corn Laws. In 1846 they were repealed, and ever since the newspaper has never abandoned its commitment to the classical 19th-century Liberal ideas. In his attempt to favor free trade and reject the Corn Laws, Wilson wrote in his prospectus for *The Economist*: "If we look abroad, we see within the range of our commercial intercourse whole islands and continents, on which the light of civilisation has scarce yet dawned; and we seriously believe that free trade, free intercourse, will do more than any other visible agent to extend civilisation and morality throughout the world - yes, to extinguish slavery itself" (Evans, 1994: 97-99). It was Bagehot who broadened the range of the paper into politics and strengthened the interest in America. Over four years, Bagehot published political and military comments on

⁴ <http://www.economist.com/help/about-us>; last accessed on 13 October 2020

the American Civil War. It was *The Economist* and *The Times* that offered information or sound prediction on the ongoing military action. Bagehot was also fascinated with the American Constitution, which inspired 10 articles published between 1861 and 1863, following on from his criticism of the American political system in his 1859 pamphlet on parliamentary reform (ibid: 300-311). During the first half of the 1880s, the paper was fortunate to have current political preoccupations scrutinised by Herbert Henry Asquith, its chief leader writer, who was to be a Liberal Prime Minister (1908-1916). His biographers mention only free trade as his forte and between 1881 and 1885, and Asquith published a number of well-organized pieces attacking protectionism (ibid: pp 343-349). It is worth noting the contribution of another two editors of *The Economist*: Geoffrey Crowther (1938-1956) and Alaister Burnet (1970-1974). Crowther developed and improved the coverage of foreign affairs, especially American ones, and of business. Crowther launched a section devoted to American affairs, just after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour. *American Survey* (renamed *United States* in 1997) was aimed not at Americans but at British readers who, in Crowther's words, needed to know more about their new allies (ibid: 811). Furthermore, during the 17 years of his editorship, he had established the magazine's basic format - its division into political and business sections and the distinction between the leading articles and the pages devoted to news and analysis. As he once put it, he realised that „the great difficulty for *The Economist* is always to be sensible without being heavy, to be lively without being silly, to be original without being eccentric“ (Faith, 2012: 1). From the outset, *The Economist* was firmly

against a resort to force. “The Suez Canal has become the Achilles heel of Britain and of Europe”, Crowther pointed out back in 1956. He was not driven by anti-communism but by the desire for some kind of world order that would give maximum stability and liberty to the maximum number of people (Evans, 1994: 838). In 1970, Andrew Knight was appointed an assistant editor tasked with reporting from the London and European perspectives on the culmination of Britain's negotiations to join the European Economic Community. When Britain joined the European Community, Knight set up *The Economist's* European section and established an office in Brussels. Knight's pursuit of excellence was recognized in 1981 by *The World Press Review*, which chose him as International Editor of the Year. Perhaps his finest achievement as editor was the introduction of the science and technology pages (ibid: 936-940).

2.6. Target readership

Rupert Pennant-Rea, editor-in-chief in 1986-1993, describes *The Economist* as “a Friday viewspaper, where the readers, with higher than average incomes, better than average minds but with less than average time, can test their opinions against ours. We try to tell the world about the world, to persuade the expert and reach the amateur, with an injection of opinion and argument”.⁵ The number of readers has remained steady for many reasons, important among which is *The Economist's* global reach - its traditional columns on Europe, Asia and Latin America, as well as those devoted to financial markets, science and technology, books and arts.

The core feature of its target audience is not so much its geographical or demographic characteristics, but its psychological make-up and identity - values and norms. In the

⁵ <http://www.economist.com/help/about-us>; last accessed on 13 October 2020

research carried out by Ipsos⁶ the following core features of *The Economist's* readership have been identified: it unites the people with ideas, aspiring to understand the new, the unexpected and the unusual. *The Economist's* readers are people enjoying financial well-being and a high educational degree, admittedly having a good career development. They are united in their hunger for knowledge and ambition to face difficulties and challenges.

The Ipsos survey established that these people share a common mindset - they tend to accept change, and implement their ideas, and persuade others in the feasibility of these ideas. Ipsos identified three core features of *The Economist's* readership: they are pioneers (create ideas), developers (realize their ideas), catalysts (improve their ideas).

As a major objective is to study the *The Economist's* discourse as a media frame in which Bulgaria's image is construed by the

selection of events and the participants in them and the thematic scope and choice of vocabulary, which has much in common with content analysis, we proceed with the analysis per se. Furthermore, as stated above, the newspaper's specific discourse characterized by genre-specific elements of formal and recurrent linguistic structures in terms of semantics, pragmatics, stylistics will be examined.

The next section of this paper proceeds with findings established upon applying the quantitative and qualitative content analysis of *The Economist's* narrative on Bulgaria.

3. Findings

3.1. Newsworthy events and thematic range

As was mentioned above, the method is applied only to the articles explicitly envisaging Bulgaria. They are 37 in number in the studied time limit.

Table 1. *The Economist's* articles on Bulgaria (2001-2015)

article	HEADLINE AND SUBHEADING
E1	The wrong job? It may not have been wise of ex-King Simeon to become prime minister, 19 Jul 2001
E2	Up to a point, King Simeon The voters were warm for the former king in June, cool in November, 22 Nov 2001
E3	The richer they are... ...the harder they fall. And bodyguards are not enough to prevent it, 13 Mar 2003
E4	In the waiting room Problems for two applicants hoping to join the European Union, 30 Oct 2003
E5	Brussels beckons Despite its misgivings, the European Union is preparing to admit Romania, 4 Nov 2004
E6	Can Simeon depart in peace? The search is on for a plausible coalition government to tackle judicial reform, 30 June 2005
E7	A dim green light A mumbled invitation to join the European Union in 2007, 18 May 2006
E8	We're off on a European odyssey Two poor countries celebrate joining the European Union. But the mood among existing members is glum, 28 Sep 2006

⁶ The company was set up in France in 1975 and acquired Synovate in 2011. As a result, Ipsos is the third-ranking company for market research in the world. Ipsos boasts staff having expertise in six specialized research areas: advertising, customer loyalty, marketing, mass media, PR and management assessment.

article	HEADLINE AND SUBHEADING
E9	The new kids on the block The European Union's two newest members, Bulgaria and Romania, are both economically and politically backward, 7 Jan 2007
E10	EUphoria, for now Much harder work is needed to tackle organised crime and corruption, 9 Aug 2007
E11	Dirty politics One resignation is not enough to clean up Bulgaria, 8 Apr 2008
E12	Brussels busts Bulgaria More EU sanctions, at last, to tackle corruption in Bulgaria, 17 Jul 2008
E13	Balkan blushes The European Union softens its criticisms of Bulgaria and Romania, 24 Jul 2008
E14	Borisov's turn Bulgarians have elected a popular but unpredictable new leader, 9 Jul 2009
E15	Bulgarian rhapsody Why the European Commission imposed sanctions on its poorest Balkan member, 14 May 2009
E16	Under scrutiny The European Parliament may kick out one or two nominated commission, 14 Jan 2010
E17	Foot in mouth A new prime minister enchants Bulgarians with his forceful ways, 7 Jan 2010
E18	Guarding the guardians A welcome onslaught on corruption raises some fears of a police state, 27 May 2010
E19	Out in the streets Anti-Roma rioting spreads across the EU's poorest country, 8 Oct 2011
E20	A lighter shade of grey EU membership has been good for the two countries, but is testing Eurocrats' patience, 17 Mar 2012
E21	In a rough region Once Bulgaria hoped to be like Greece; now it just hopes to survive, 7 Jul 2012
E22	Poverty protests Desperate demonstrations against an ephemeral government, 23 Mar 2013
E23	An unhappy election And an inconclusive result, 18 May 2013
E24	Yet another early election?, 26 Jun 2013
E25	Noressharski! Noligarchy! The new government looks unlikely to last long, 6 Jul 2013
E26	A president in the trenches, 28 Aug 2013
E27	Birth of a civil society Will Bulgarians' daily protests have a lasting impact?, 21 Sep 2013
E28	A nightmare for all Bulgaria is struggling to cope with Syrian refugees, 30 Nov 2013
E29	The gates are open The EU countries fret about social-benefits tourism after the lifting of restrictions on the free movement of workers from Romania and Bulgaria on January 1st 2014, 4 Jan 2014
E30	A controversial newcomer could be kingmaker, 4 Mar 2014
E31	Screams and streams A row over a Russian-backed pipeline topples the government, 21 Jun 2014
E32	Why the run on banks?, 1 Jul 2014

article	HEADLINE AND SUBHEADING
E33	Digital rumours What caused the run on two of Bulgaria's largest banks?, 5 Jul 2014
E34	Bulgaria goes to the polls (again), 25 Sep 2014
E35	More instability, 6 Oct 2014
E36	Borisov is back Bulgaria looks likely to get another unstable, fractious government, 11 Oct 2014
E37	Left behind Life is not improving for one of Europe's biggest and most ostracised minorities, 6 Jun 2015

Throughout this period, prominence is given to various events, seen as newsworthy. The very notion of newsworthiness presumably relates to the diversions from the norm, to sensations and shocks. According to Peter John, both journalists and politicians are trying to present policy making as a well-ordered and stage-by-stage process, because of the clarity this representation brings. The media try to categorize policies as events because they give priority to tangible phenomena, stories that have a beginning and an end (John, 2012). Some aspects of an event are highlighted, others are downplayed, given both journalists' and readership's limited

capacity to present or process the information (Gochev, 2015: 44).

Bulgaria's representation in the global media makes no exception - the country and its people are revealed through the negative and the sensational. Several headings can be formed on the basis of the selected events: general, presidential and local elections (E1, E2, E3, E6, E14, E17, E18, E22, E23, E24, E25, E26, E27, E30, E34, E35, E36); accession to the European Union (E7, E8, E9, E10), post-accession period and EU fund management (E7, E8, E9, E10, E11, E12, E13, E15); economy and energy (E29, E31, E32, E33) representatives of the political class and state institutions.

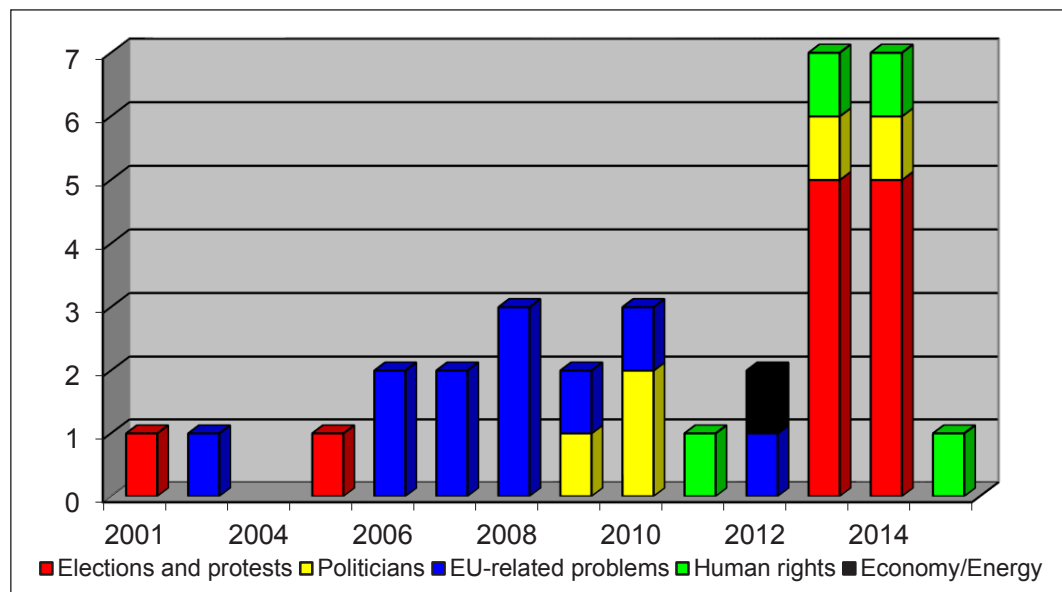


Figure 1. *Thematic range of articles*

Two major findings have been established with regard to the thematic range. The latter has been narrowed, which gives a largely distorted picture of Bulgaria, considering that:

- ✓ The focus is on domestic policy issues or the personality of the relevant prime minister, given that 18 out of 37 articles are on this topic. A mere two commentaries are devoted to the Bulgarian economy and energy. There is not a single commentary that examines, or at least makes mention of Bulgaria's achievements in the sphere of culture and science.
- ✓ Corruption and organized crime have been singled out as a major factor in Bulgaria's economic and political life, and are invariably represented as a legacy from the communist rule. For instance, Bulgaria's EU membership is debated through the prism of the stalling judicial reform and the mismanagement of EU aid. The monitoring mechanism imposed by the European Commission is justified by the management culture of impunity and rampant corruption.
- ✓ All elections are analyzed against the background of the different values of statehood and public mistrust in the state institutions.
- ✓ Some events have been selected and given prominence: the murder of Iliya Pavlov, for instance. In 2010 three articles were published all of which examine the danger of establishing a police state, and one - Rumyana Zheleva's failure during the hearing of European Parliament for EU commissioner. Furthermore, the only newsworthy event in 2011 is the protests held in Katunitsa against Tzar Kiro, the Roma bigwig.

What was also established was a shift in some accents: in the period between 2001 and 2005, organized crime and criminal rings are identified as the crucial negative factor

in domestic policy, whereas corruption at all levels of power is in the limelight later on.

The second finding pertains to the fact that *The Economist* outlines several dichotomies (clashes of opinions and different views).

In the textual world, there is a clash between civil society and the ruling elite, on the one hand, and between the institutions, on the other. The other group of clashes pertains to the EU and Bulgaria: the Bulgarians feel an enthusiasm with the prospects of EU integration, whereas the EU feels skeptical about Bulgaria's accession. Furthermore, the European Commission's views of EU aid management widely differ from Bulgaria's policy in this regard. Perhaps the biggest difference suggested is connected with widespread public attitudes to Syrian refugees and to the Roma minority in Bulgaria and the deeply rooted in the European civilization values and norms regulating human rights protection (E28, E37).

Furthermore, the Balkan tandem is opposed to the central and eastern-European countries that were admitted to the club during the first enlargement wave in 2004 (E1, E9). What is also worth noting is the dynamics in the representation of Bulgaria and Romania: the latter has taken over Bulgaria in the fight against corruption and organized crime, so Bulgaria gradually becomes the one lagging behind (E2, E7, E13, E37).

Third, *The Economist* highlights identity-related differences with Bulgaria that become evident in the newspaper assessment of certain events, such as the significance of the mandate of the Union of Democratic Forces, which the Bulgarians failed to realize. Also, the Bulgarians welcome the rise of Borisov's Citizens for Bulgaria's European Development, despite his admittedly authoritarian management style.

3.2. Discourse strategies: formal features of the text

The recurrent genre-specific features that were identified in the analysis are macrosyntax and multimodality (for a detailed interpretation of the concepts see Van Dijk, 1997, 1999, 2006).

3.2.1. Macrosyntax pertains to the interplay of headlines and subheadings. It is expedient that headlines and subheadings should be analyzed separately, given that they are a basic slot in the cognitive model of a commentary of this type. According to some contemporary researchers in media discourse, headlines are independent texts that offer the explicit and implicit forms of persuasion and legitimizing a position.

The headlines are a separate text which is strongly metaphorical, since they lend themselves to dual interpretation. Speech acts and stylistic devices have a powerful expressive potential for both rational and emotional impact, as they require some effort on the part of the reader to interpret the message, and force the reader to accept the expressed opinion. Furthermore, various speech acts are voiced, unlike the subheadings where assertive speech acts prevail, which can be accounted for by their summarizing function.

The majority of headlines in the examined narrative are assertive speech acts through which the addressor presents his position in the form of categorical statement, and finer distinctions can be made with regard to the degree of assertion of this position. The political implications of this analysis pertains to revealing some manipulative techniques pertaining to who calls for action (performative speech acts), who warns of possible threats (commissive speech acts) or

makes their judgment (verdictive speech acts). In the articles it is *The Economist* that, from the position of the moral arbiter, speaks on behalf of the Bulgarians and takes the liberty to condemn or exonerate them. Furthermore, the stylistic devices, such as the alliteration in E5, E12, E13, E22, E31, E36 strengthens the emotiveness.

The Economist resorts to the use of other stylistic devices to catch the readers' attention. There is a paraphrase of an idiom in E7 (Dim Green Light), or a graphic pun in E10 (Euphoria, For Now).

Allusions are another powerful stylistic means of suggesting attitudes. Some headlines suggest biblical allusions, others allude to contemporary culture-related phenomena, such as musical forms. The headline of E15 (Bulgarian Rhapsody) makes reference to the most famous piece of classical music written by Pancho Vladigerov, the musical form itself being non-standard. Hence Bulgaria is associated with a recalcitrant EU member state that does not submit to discipline and control. The headline of E9 (The New Kids On the Block) lends itself to an ambiguous interpretation, directly referring to the rock band and to children, whom some contemporary researchers see as a major conceptual metaphor in the coverage of Bulgarian organized crime- and corruption-related events by *The Financial Times* (Ishpekova, 2012). The dual interpretation is further enhanced by 'block' which is homonymous to the political 'bloc'.

The neologism headline of E8 (We're Off On a European Odyssey) makes reference to a long wandering voyage marked by many changes of fortune, while E18 (Guarding the Guardians) refers to the Latin phrase "*Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?*"⁷

⁷ Traditionally attributed to the Roman poet Juvenal from his *Satires* (Satire VI, lines 347–8), its translation is "*Who will guard the guards themselves?*" In modern usage, it is frequently associated with the political philosophy of Plato and the problem of political corruption, though the original source has no known connection to Plato or political theory.

Subheadings have also focused research interest as the sum up the commentary's content. More importantly, they expand the immediate co-text, thus narrowing the possible interpretation of the highly metaphorical headlines. All subheadings suggest that Bulgaria is the poorest EU member state, lagging behind in its economic development and that the official authorities lack both the will and ability to fight corruption and organized crime. More importantly, by applying an analytical tool typical of content analysis, interesting findings have been arrived at. The word 'corruption' (or its synonyms such as bribery or graft) has been used more than once in 26 of the studied articles, regardless of the specific event that the commentary or report addresses. The dominant presuppositions with regard to Bulgaria's political elite are as follows: Bulgaria is unstable, poor and economically falls behind the other former socialist countries, its authorities pursue a non-transparent policy and lack the political will to counteract corruption, for which it is sanctioned by the European Commission. Furthermore, it shows disrespect for basic human rights. The Bulgarian people have been personified and are overwhelmed by feelings of anxiety, outrage and despair with regard to statehood and the state, hope with regard to EU accession.

3.2.2. Multimodality

The visual aids in the form of pictures, caricatures and charts are an integral part of *The Economist's* discourse strategy, and they enhance the expressiveness in conveying the message. The photo in E8 shows a deserted rural settlement, where sheep are foregrounded. The herd and the shepherd as the major protagonists are depicted against the background of the misery of a hoovertime. The caricature in E15 is a sketch. The EURO symbol bears resemblance to an animal's voracious mouth (maw) that has been stylized

in the form of a magnet with a closed pipeline, with some frozen milk dripping despite the spring time suggested by the idyllic greenery and the pastoral blue skies. What symbolizes the Bulgarian people is the peasant, dressed in the traditional in the eyes of westerners clothing - full-bottomed breeches, girdle, shirt, a vest made of homespun frieze fabric and gumshoes. While the cowman has a desperate look on his face, the cow seems to be magnetically drawn in to the euro sign as if engaged in yearning.

Conclusions

The genre of commentary is typically multimodal in character, and visualisation and imagery, among other things, are taken to be of paramount importance to holding a strong sway over a highly-educated readership worldwide for quite some time. *The Economist* achieves relevance optimisation (effective persuasion in terms of maximum contextual effects at the lowest possible processing effort on the part of the audience) by a complex *interplay of headline, lead-in, and pictures*. The discourse analysis of the pragmatics, semantics and semiotics of headlines, lead-ins, pictures and captions raises the audience's awareness of the subtle mechanisms of persuasion. My personal teaching experience has shown that using *The Economist* has advantages both in terms of its language (figurative language and style) and content. Its thematic scope covers topical international issues. Furthermore, despite the contemporary trends of infotainment, *The Economist* has managed to preserve its character of a serious, quality-guarding edition. Its materials are based on checked facts and statistics, on the one hand, and offer a pluralism of opinions and different viewpoints in the assessment of a concrete event or issue, on the other.

The discourses that prevail in the narrative and that lend it coherence is that Bulgaria

is weak, helpless and dysfunctional, which comes to show the stereotypes about Bulgaria and the Bulgarians have been reaffirmed and strengthened.

The discursive mechanisms legitimate an ideological stance through the creation of a political myth. *The Economist's* overall discursive and language strategy comprises a deliberately sought set of linguistic devices and varied conceptualizations through which the newspaper constructs the myth about Bulgaria of the poor and corrupted country. Furthermore, the analysis exposes the differences between Bulgaria and Great Britain in terms of values and identity.

Traditionally the values of England and Great Britain, of the British Empire and the United Kingdom have been related to the ideas of freedom and democracy, economic prosperity and free trade, sovereignty and good governance, tolerance, commitment, grandeur and uniqueness. The international norms that the country has firmly defended throughout its history pertain to the rule of law and the protection of human rights, effective, impartial and responsible state institutions, the defense of the international order and security. These values and norms are at the heart of Britishness and form the image that Great Britain has sustainably upheld in international relations. It is my conviction that the British identity in terms of values and norms have been best summarized by two prominent politicians. One of them is former Prime Minister John Major, who during the election campaign for the European Parliament in 1994, said:

"This British nation has a monarchy founded by the kings of Wessex over 1,100 years ago, a Parliament and universities formed over 700 years ago, language with its roots in the mists of time, and the richest

vocabulary in the world" (*The Times*, 24 May 1994, as cited in Cannadine, 1995: 12).

It was Gordon Brown who as Finance Minister introduced Britishness and defined the basic idea in British history, namely:

"Britain has a unique history - and what has emerged from the long tidal flows of British history - from the 2,000 years of successive waves of invasion, immigration, assimilation and trading partnerships, from the uniquely rich, open and outward looking culture - is I believe a distinctive set of British values which influence British institutions. Indeed a multinational state, with England, Scotland, Wales and now Northern Ireland we are a country united not so much by race or ethnicity but by shared values that have shaped shared institutions. Indeed, when people are asked what they think is important about being British many say our institutions: from the monarchy and the national anthem to the Church of England, the BBC and our sports teams".⁸

This piece of research confirmed the assumptions held that *The Economist* frames the debate on Bulgaria and the Bulgarians in a negative light. The influential global media outlet communicates Bulgaria's image as a country characterized by poverty, crime and corruption. Furthermore, it is a state that does not enjoy the trust of the EU and other international institutions. Admittedly, the negatively stereotyped image of the country and its nationals is the result of the differences between Bulgaria and the United Kingdom with regard to important values and norms adhered to the contemporary democratic states across the world such as the transparency in governance, the activity of civil society, the ideas of sustainable development and environmental protection, to mention but a few.

⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2007/feb/27/immigrationpolicy.race>

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