

# Mismanagement, Mistrust and Missed Opportunities: a study of *The Economist's* coverage of Bulgaria's post-accession problems and place in international affairs

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## Summary:

The object of this study is *The Economist's* coverage of Bulgaria and its role in international affairs in a period following the country's accession to the EU (2007-2011). The discourse strategies applied in newspaper's commentaries are the subject of this paper, which holds the view *The Economist* has consciously sought for and purposefully selected certain strategies to construct Bulgaria's image of a country of mistrust and missed opportunities. The analysis employs the tools of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in an attempt to reveal the hidden mechanisms of manipulation or persuasion through which *The Economist* reinforces the country's image, which can be attributed to the newspaper's ideologies as well as those of its presumed readership.

**Key words:** print media market, critical discourse analysis,

**JEL:** L82, Z11

## 1. Relevance of the study

It is beyond any doubt that the construction of Bulgaria's image the EU and international affairs by a leading periodical in the Anglo-Saxon world is a highly topical issue for the public at large and for professionals in many fields. Furthermore the role of the print media in contemporary society has been subject to much public and academic debate. Media are vital to the existence of a modern democracy, since they not only keep people informed about the events of the world, but also help them form their opinion about these events. More importantly, they protect people from abuses of power in their role of a public watchdog, keeping an eye on the political elite and exposing any breaches of law and irregularities (Kuhn, 2007). The press in particular is one of the most frequently exploited means of diffusing ideology, as it generates a significant part of public discourse and sets the agenda in society (Zambova, 2000). Fowler (1991) attributes its influence to the scale of production and to the economic and political aspects of the

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newspaper industry (advertising as a major point). Conboy elaborates on this second factor, saying that "[t]he news media, owned as they are members of political and economic elites, unsurprisingly reproduce the views of these dominant classes" (Conboy 2007: 24). What is more, newspapers are believed to play a hegemonic role in society. Richardson describes hegemony as "the process in which a ruling class persuades all other classes to accept its rule and subordination" (Richardson 2007: 35). In his view the public assessment of the "meaning" of a text is affected by the judgment of who produced it, given that "we tend to believe the testimony of people (or institutions) we trust or believe those with practical knowledge" (Richardson, 2007: 41). Conboy in turn describes hegemony as a "jointly produced consensus", into which consumers (of newspapers) are drawn. (Conboy 2007: 115). According to McNair, the media are political actors who not only transmit political messages to the public, also but also transform the message by news-making and interpretation in the form of different commentaries, statements, editorials, and interview questions. (McNair, 2007). Stressing that "the media operate as a means for expression and reproduction of the dominant class and bloc", Fairclough claims that this power is hidden because "it is implicit in the practices of the media", and its effects "work through the particular ways of handling causality and agency, particular ways of positioning the reader" (Fairclough,1995). He believes that the journalist (the reporter) is as a figure of authority, someone who knows, and

someone who has the right to tell. Hence the authoritativeness of the language works together with the authoritativeness of the image. (Fairclough,1995: 4). The author also suggests that most journalists are unaware of the media's manipulative role, as they tend to believe that practices of production, generally viewed as preserving the established status quo and maintaining the power relations, are professional ones which ensure their success (Fairclough, 1989: 51-54).

Mass media can perform their function of the Fourth Estate, to quote Edmund Burke, in modern democracies only if they take into account of concepts such as objectivity, impartiality, newsworthiness, transparency and, at the other end of the spectrum, bias and discrimination. For this reason media discourse researchers have given due attention to the aforementioned notions. What is more, most contemporary democracies have adopted ethical codes of the journalistic profession, which highlight the reliability of the information in terms of accuracy and sources, collection and presentation, taking into consideration the possible risks of harassment, privacy, children, discrimination, crime and brutality, decency, and editorial independence.

According to Richardson, objectivity requires reference to "people other than journalists" and should not be confused with neutrality, as value judgment is always present during the stages of news selection and newsgathering, organization of the story and its presentation. (Richardson, 2007, p. 86-89) Kuhn, for his part, calls into question the notion of unbiased news, maintaining

that there is no reliable account of the real that is independent of interpretation. Therefore he claims impartiality and objectivity are notions that help media professionals legitimize their work and validate the status of their product for audiences, but in effect disguise a particular or partial version of reality (Kuhn, 2007, chapter 6). Kuhn further states that "[i]n reporting and commenting, the news media are sometimes said to act as a window on the political world. The metaphor, however, is flawed in that audiences are represented with a highly selected and filtered version of 'reality'" (Kuhn 2007: 23).

*The UK print media market  
and The Economist's position*

*The Economist's* position on the print media market in the United Kingdom, which has been studied in a historical perspective by many researchers, explains the choice of this weekly paper as an object of analysis in this paper. *The Economist* is a typical representative of the British press and shares some of its features and functions, which have been detailed by many researchers in the field of mass communication (Kuhn, McNair, Quail, Fowler, Hachen, McCombs and Shaw).

Kuhn (2007: pp 3, 4) outlines the recent trends in the development of the British press. One such trend is that "national newspapers, rather than local, regional or city titles" dominate this market, which "stands in marked contrast to the situation in the United States and many continental European countries, where local, regional or city newspapers dominate supply", providing

"the primary print-based source of political information on national and international issues and events". Quoting Deacon (2004: p 10), the authors states that "[t]he UK thus has 'by far the largest national newspaper press in Europe.'" As another major trend the author singles out "the stratified national market with 'quality' newspapers at one end," and "popular tabloids at the other", though there is "some evidence of the blurring of the boundaries between these different strata in recent years, in terms of both content and format." (ibid, p 2) Also, despite their slowly declining circulation since the 1950s, the national newspapers face strong competition in their respective market segments. Furthermore, they enjoy "a minimal level of state-imposed regulation compared to the broadcasting sector" and "a significant extent of ownership concentration." (ibid, pp 2, 3) Another trend is that news magazines and periodicals are not as important in the United Kingdom as in some other democracies." (Kuhn 2007: pp. 3, 5). As Kuhn suggests, "because of the market presence of broadsheet Sunday newspapers, there is a lack of highly-selling news magazines in Britain along the lines of *Newsweek* and *Time* in the United States, *Der Spiegel* in Germany and *L'Express* and *Le Nouvel* in France." (ibid.) Another interesting feature of the British press is that, as Mc Nair argues, "in the UK, the US and other liberal democratic societies news tends to be about conflict and negativity. The negative ... is more newsworthy than the positive" (McNair 2003: 39), unlike the Soviet Union where the media's social role was to educate the masses, without having

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to compete for audiences. He arrives at the logical conclusion that "news values can and do vary across cultures, and, within a single culture, across media" (McNair 2003: 40). Furthermore McNair highlights the importance of professional ethic objectivity and claims that public expectations in the United Kingdom differ with regard to broadcasting and the press. In his view broadcasters operate according to the principle of impartiality, whereas the press in Britain is supposed to express opinions and attitudes related to political issues, that is, to state their political stance: "The democratic principle was preserved in so far as the newspapers and periodicals expressed a plurality of opinions, corresponding to the variety of opinions circulating in the public sphere". Hence he concedes that newspaper perform their democratic role in society by observing two different principles: "objectivity and impartiality for broadcasting, partisanship and advocacy for the press". However, he expresses the opinion that "[t]he media not only provide cognitive knowledge, informing us about what is happening, but they also order and structure political reality, allotting events greater or lesser significance according to their presence or absence on the media agenda" (McNair 2003: 47).

*The Economist* belongs to the category of weeklies that cover political issues for either elites or small sections of the mass readership. It is a broadsheet newspaper which has traditionally offered quality commentaries on a wide range of economic and political issues, though it has never boasted of a high circulation.

In terms of ideology, the newspaper has never abandoned its commitment to 19<sup>th</sup> C liberal ideas, shared by its founder in 1843 James Wilson, a hat maker from the small Scottish town of Hawick, who said: "It is to the Radicals that *The Economist* still likes to think of itself as belonging. The extreme centre is the paper's historical position." (see prospectus, appendix 2). Rupert Pennant-Rea, one of its recent editors, claims that *The Economist* is "a Friday newspaper, 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." (prospectus, appendix 2). Furthermore, *The Economist* has enjoyed a strong reputation among many statesmen. Former British Foreign Secretary Lord Granville admits that "whenever he felt uncertain, he liked to wait to see what the next issue of *The Economist* had to say". Among the many other admirers of the newspaper was US President Woodrow Wilson (1913 to 1921) and German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt. Also the reputed Soviet spy Kim Philby contributed to the newspaper.

Interestingly, *The Economist* is anonymous, speaking in a collective voice, a policy which is strictly adhered to: journalists cooperate in writing an article and most articles are heavily edited. The major reason is the "belief that what is written is more important than who writes it. As Geoffrey Crowther, editor from 1938 to 1956, put it, 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." Thus anonmity seems to be in line with its claim of being "an enemy of privilege, pomposity and predictability". Allegedly the paper "has backed conservatives such as Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher" and "has supported the Americans in Vietnam" and "has also endorsed Harold Wilson and Bill Clinton, and espoused a variety of liberal causes: opposing capital punishment from its earliest days, while favouring penal reform and decolonisation, as well as—more recently—gun control and gay marriage."

It is a worthwhile effort to analyze how *The Economist* sees Bulgaria's place in international affairs.

## 2. Theoretical premises

Media discourse has been the object of investigation of many contemporary researchers in a wide range of fields such as mass communication. Many linguists like A. Bell, B. McNair, N. Fairclough, Teun Van Dijk, Ruth Wodak, Meyer, Paul Chilton have applied CDA to the study of political and media discourse. Their analytical approach to the examination of the rhetoric and ideology of institutions, such as the media, government, politicians, and regulatory bodies, is based on Halliday's systemic-functional linguistics (1985). Therefore much of the media research has a linguistic orientation.

For obvious reasons, a detailed study of the concept of **discourse** is beyond the scope of this paper. Most researchers have

made a distinction between two meanings of the term: instances of **language** use (modes of semiosis), and **different kinds of language, conventions or perspectives** related to certain spheres of life or human experience that influence and shape the use of language. Discourse analysts are primarily interested in meaning, what a specific text or talk is about and what implications it has for language users. In other words, they study the **semantics, pragmatics and stylistics** of a piece of discourse.

Richardson determines the two major approaches to the definition of discourse: the **formalist** or structuralist one, which treats discourse as a unit of language 'above' the sentence and focuses on how this unit becomes unified and meaningful and the **functionalist** approach which takes into account the social ideas that largely determine the way we use and interpret language. (Richardson, 2007, p.22). As Richardson further argues, "to properly interpret, for example, a press release, or a newspaper report or an advert, we need to work out what the speaker or writer is doing through discourse and how this 'doing' is linked to wider inter-personal, institutional, socio-cultural and material contexts." (ibid., p. 24). The second approach implies a dialectical relationship: the discursive event is shaped by situations, institutions and social structures, but it also shapes them (ibid., p. 28). Many of the aforementioned researchers have adopted the functionalist approach to the study of media discourse by relating **linguistic structure to contextual factors** (Roger Fowler, Norman Fairclough,

Teun Van Dijk). Such an approach reveals "the patterns of belief and value which are encoded in the language – and which are beyond the threshold of notice for anyone who accepts the discourse as 'natural'" (R.Fowler, *Language in the news*, 1991, p 14). Fairclough says discourse analysis should encompass two types of discourse practices: text production by media institutions and their reception by audiences, on the one hand, and sociocultural practices, as the latter comprise 3 levels: situational (*the specific social goings-on the discourse is part of*); institutional (*the institutional frameworks within which the discourse occurs*) and societal (*the wider societal matrix of discourse*). (Fairclough, 1995:12). In a similar vein Kress defines the term as the "systematically organized sets of statements and traditions which give expression to the meanings and values of an institution." (Kress 1985: 6). Van Dijk also stresses that discourse production and interpretation is a function of socially shared attitudes and ideologies, norms and values, and possibly other forms of social cognition, which has serious implications with regard to power relations and social inequality. He points out in order to see how underlying meanings are related to a text, an analysis of the cognitive, social, political, and cultural context should be made. (van Dijk, 1988a; van Dijk and Kintsch, 1983). Hence he examines the discourse, cognition and society triangle, which is intended to bridge the gap between the two orders in the macro/micro dichotomy, that is "language use, discourse, verbal interaction and communication belong to the micro-level of

the social order", and "power, dominance and inequality between social groups are typically terms that belong to a macro-level of analysis" [ibid]. The major conceptual categories belonging to the two orders are power as control, access and discourse control, context control, the control of text and talk, mind control and the discourse strategies of mind control. It is through them that the researcher arrives at the specific discourse structures, which are "deployed in the reproduction of social dominance, whether they are part of a conversation or a news report or other genres and contexts."

The quoted researchers formulate a number of **analytical semantic categories** that are essential to the study of the hidden mechanisms of persuasion and manipulation in the media. Such a category is **transitivity**, which Richardson describes as "the very heart of representation, describing the relationships between participants and the roles they play in the processes described in reporting" (Richardson 2007:54). In text production newspapers choose how to express content with regard to three major ingredients: the participants in the process, the process itself and the circumstances in which the process has taken place (Simpson 1993: 88). Fowler, in turn, describes transitivity as "an essential tool in the analysis of representation" (Fowler 1991:70) as "it makes options available... so the choice we make... indicates our point of view, is ideologically significant (Fowler 1991:71).

Another discursive strategy often employed in the media is syntactic transformations, "radical syntactic transformation of a clause



..... which offers substantial ideological opportunities” (Fowler 1991:80). The author gives prominence to **passive transformations**, “the main effect of which is to switch the positions of the left-hand and right-hand noun phrases, so that the patient occupies the syntactic (subject) left-hand position, which is usually associated with the agent” (ibid: 77). By switching the focus to the affected participants in the event, agency deletion is a powerful manipulation tool as it leaves responsibility unspecified, while attaching prominence to the action itself. (ibid: p 77). Agent deletion “removes a sense of specificity and precision from the clause.” (Richardson, 2007, p 55). As Hodge and Kress (1993) maintain, the link between actors and the affected is weaker, and causality is no longer the focus of the readers’ attention.

**Inanimate agency**, or representing decisions, documents, polls as the source of action, is yet another discursive strategy that newspapers often resort to. The agency is obscured and the real actors are removed from the textual surface, which lends more credibility to the newspaper’s statements. The responsibility of specific authorities and institutions is veiled in mist, while certain information is represented as objective. Hence inanimate agents represent the processes as happening by themselves and are not attributable to any person or authority.

**Nominalizations** (whereby predicates (verbs and adjectives) are syntactically realized as nouns, called ‘derived nominals’ that designate actions and processes, not objects) are yet another powerful manipulative tool according to the quoted

researchers. As Fowler claims, syntactic transformations leave unexpressed a lot of information which is aimed at mystification (concealment), or reification “processes and qualities assume the status of things: impersonal, inanimate, capable of being amassed and counted like capital, paraded like possessions” (Fowler 1991: p. 80). He goes on to conclude that English is a ‘nominalizing’ language which abounds in nouns that describe actions, not objects. They are “endemic, especially in official, bureaucratic and formal modes of discourse (Fowler, 1991: p 79). Conboy, in turn, attributes the high frequency of nouns in news discourse to limited space, as well as to the pressure of time. “Much is deleted in the transformation involved in nominalization – history, participants, modality.” Thus, he argues, nominalizations “can hide the agents of decisions because events appear to be spontaneous and self-explanatory.” (Conboy, 2007, p 65).

The researchers also stress the importance of **style and vocabulary management**. Fowler highlights the significance of lexical structure (reference, sense, vocabulary) as the representation of the world as perceived according to the ideological needs of a culture. Modality (the use of modal verbs, adverbs or modal disjuncts, modal adjectives), the researcher claims, is the ‘comment’ or ‘attitude’, *obviously by definition ascribable to the source of the text, and explicit or implicit in the linguistic stance taken by the speaker/writer*. (Fowler 1991: p 86) Elaborating upon opinion discourse, Teun Van Dijk claims the latter are not so much expressed by *what* is

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being said, but rather *how* it is being said, concluding that style signals contextual constraints such as group membership, social distance, formality, or friendliness, or positive or negative opinions about others. (van Dijk, 1991).

He also singles out **implication** (what is not explicitly expressed, but left implicit or what concepts or propositions may be inferred on the basis of background knowledge) as one of the most powerful semantic notions in Critical Discourse Analysis. Emphasizing the ideological dimensions of implication, Dijk distinguishes between several types such **entailments**, **presuppositions**, which can be defined only in terms of knowledge that is assumed to be shared with recipients, and **suggestion and association** as weaker forms.

The analysis encompasses the study of the discourse content in terms of **topics** and **headlines** with regard to the types of inferences that the potential readership is invited to make. It also examines the discursive strategies such **as transitivity patterns, nominalizations and passive transformations**, as well as matters pertaining to **style** and traditional **rhetorical devices** (lexical register of illness, dirt, underdevelopment, as well as rhetorical devices such as alliteration, rhymes, comparisons and metaphors) which may signal relevance or irrelevance of semantic information or the contextual conditions of power discourse, and restate the perspective in which social events are presented.

The analysis of the **discourse 'content'** (**topics** and local meanings) exposes that

when addressing domestic policy or foreign policy issues *The Economist* typically connects Bulgaria with mismanagement, mistrust and missed opportunities. Even though a possible explanation is that these problems are consistent with the news values of negativity and conflict, it implies the overall contrast between **US** (the editorial voice) and **THEM**, or a clash of underlying values and attitudes.

In print media **headlines** function as attention grabbers and readers presumably browse them before they decide to read the item itself. This is why they should be given due attention, given that, as Van Dijk notes, headlines typically express the top propositions of the semantic macrostructure or the set of topics to be addressed. Hence headlines at once define and evaluate the situation. Certain entailments with ideological implications get additional emphasis by prominent position and size in the headlines. (van Dijk, 1994). Traditionally headlines have been characterized as short, telegram-like summaries of their news items, which may be true with respect to news headlines (Van Dijk, 1996). However, this is not often the case with in quality newspapers in which even the most prototypical headlines do not provide a summary of their stories, but highlight a single detail extracted out of it. Bell (1991) distinguishes between headlines which "abstract the main event of the story" and headlines which "focus on a secondary event or a detail" and goes on to claim that headlines are a "part of news rhetoric whose function is to attract the reader" (ibid: 189). Brown and Yule (1983) claim that "titles, chapter headings, sub-divisions



and sub-headings all indicate to the reader how the author intends his argument to be chunked" (Brown and Yule, 1983:7).

Hence this paper aims to reveal the broader societal processes involved in the institutional construction of Bulgaria's image and discursive strategies through which *the Economist* attempts to legitimate the power of the dominant group (EU, NATO).

### 3. Analysis

It comes as no surprise that what *The Economist* considers to be newsworthy with regard to Bulgaria is its accession to the EU and its struggle to meet the high standards of EU membership. The very headlines in the articles evoke a mental image of an economically backward and underdeveloped child yet unprepared for full-fledged membership. Moreover, the argumentative structure suggests a negative attitude ranging from strong warning to considerable skepticism. The earliest two commentaries following Bulgaria's accession to the European family expose the attitude of suspicion and doubt as to its preparedness mostly in the light of its failed attempts to cope with corruption and organized crime.

The headline 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 homonymous to the political 'bloc'. The

commentary starts with "WILL it work again?", thus questioning at the very onset of the analysis the pair's readiness to join the EU and opposing it to the eight previously admitted ex-communist states in the 2004 enlargement wave. All paragraphs in the argumentation explain Bulgaria's adverse situation. The commentary provides a wealth of figures and statistics to suggest that Bulgaria is lagging behind: low GDP per head, "[i]nfrastructure and public services are worse than in the rest of Eastern Europe; corruption is more entrenched, and the political culture more fragile." The Balkan pair is "united by weak institutions and their poverty". The article stresses a difference in national psychology, namely that "[b]oth countries are on the edge of the EU, but whereas Bulgarians feel out of the mainstream, Romanians do not." Factors that are seen as relevant in the countries' (Romania and Bulgaria) positions are the attitudes to ethnic minorities and to Russia. However, the biggest part of the analysis is devoted to corruption and organized crime. That article is adamant that "[t]he biggest worry is lawlessness", motivating its firm stance yet again with citations and figures. The macroeconomic problems that the two countries face, mostly the huge current account deficits, problems with migration and "leaky" borders, serve as solid evidence for the commentary to end on strong doubts, which find its syntactic expression in a quasi-question: "But given the political chaos that has taken hold in other eastern European countries, most of them much richer and stronger than the two newcomers, it is clear that the Balkan pair's

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road to EU prosperity and stability will be harder. The only question is how much."

In the studied commentaries Bulgaria and the Bulgarian government are represented as the weak spot in the EU. They are never actors in the texts, but rather figure as the affected of the EU's actions, as the passive receiver of their actions. They are either criticized by the EU or supported or criticized by the people. They rarely take any action, and if they do, this action brings no results. This generally implies their overall impotence to cope with the serious problems they face, as the following examples clearly show:

"Bulgaria is largely passive in foreign policy, though it has good relations with Russia."

"Joining the EU has meant intense pressure to meet Brussels standards, which neither country yet does."

"Bulgaria has moved more slowly. Some politicians still seem untouchable, as do some organised-crime groups."

"Although the two governments try to restrict the issue of passports to ethnic kinsfolk in these neighbours, they cannot stop them coming".

However, the **European Commission** is seen as the actor in all processes, as becomes evident in the next passage:

"Joining the EU has meant intense pressure to meet Brussels standards, which neither country yet does."

*The Economist* consistently employs the **impersonal or agentless passive** construction as a means to state their opinion by presenting it as other people's observation, as becomes evident in the following instances:

"It is hard to be confident that it will be well spent"

and

"It is clear that the Balkan pair's road to EU prosperity and stability will be harder."

These discursive strategies are clearly seen in the other commentaries devoted to Bulgaria's role in the EU. Addressing the country's political problems "in the honeymoon stage of EU membership", **EUPHORIA, FOR NOW**, voices concerns over the government's underperformance in fighting organized crime. The very headline suggests "an extremely strong feeling of happiness and excitement which usually lasts only for a short time" (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English), which is further reinforced by 'for now', while the concluding sentence repeats the entire message communicated in the subtitle, saying that "Voters fret that the politicians' inertia may be letting criminals take over". Furthermore, citing the EU's report on Bulgaria's progress in justice and home affairs, the third paragraph clearly states:

"Contract killings persist in Sofia, as does corruption among prosecutors and judges. Despite efforts to clean up the prosecution service, not a single suspect in a contract killing has been convicted. Worse, the government has stopped trying. It is months since the commission against corruption set up by Mr Stanishev held a meeting. Rumen Ovcharov, who resigned as energy minister two months ago amid corruption allegations, still wields influence behind the scenes, say EU officials."

This paragraph yet again shows that Bulgaria has been assigned the role of the

victim of the EU's actions. It is hardly by accident that the commentaries represent as actor in various processes some cabinet members such as the ethnic Turkish Movement for Rights and Freedoms leader Ahmed Dogan, who has repeatedly been charged with the misuse of EU aid:

"Yet some are still waiting for their EU benefits. The Socialists put a junior coalition partner, the Movement for Rights and Freedoms, in charge of the agriculture ministry. Its leader, Ahmed Dogan, a wily politician from Bulgaria's Turkish minority, is good at finding jobs for supporters, less so at getting EU money flowing. Eight months after accession, most Bulgarian farmers are still waiting for their first cheques from Brussels."

The European Commission in turn plays the role of an active participant in all events:

"In June the European Commission, under pressure from its Bulgarian and Romanian members, softened a report chastising both governments for doing too little to tackle corruption and organised crime. But if more progress is not made in a year's time, the pair may face sanctions."

The very first paragraph of another article published a year later, BRUSSELS BUSTS BULGARIA singles out the European Commission as the active participant in all political processes:

"First fingers were wagged, then wrists were slapped. Now the pocket money is being stopped. The European Union had already frozen some €1 billion in funds overseen by Bulgarian politicians whom it no longer trusts. Now, in a report to be published on Wednesday July 23rd, the EU says that Bulgaria may have to forfeit large

chunks of that money altogether. At issue are hundreds of millions of euros allocated to programmes predating Bulgaria's accession to the EU in January 2007. These were designed to get the country ready for the rigours of life within the EU."

*The Economist* does not note any progress in Bulgaria's fight with corruption. Hence the concluding paragraph sounds as a warning, reiterating Brussels' position:

"Nobody in Bulgaria can claim to be surprised. Before the country joined the EU its wholesale failure to tackle high-level corruption was the subject of repeated public warnings. Having gained membership, those efforts became even feeble."

Furthermore, discussing the possible suspension of EU aid in agriculture and infrastructure and the EU's successive report, the article makes the claim that corruption is rampant, placing once again Bulgaria as a victim of EU sanctions, as the following passages suggest:

"At issue are hundreds of millions of euros allocated to programmes predating Bulgaria's accession to the EU in January 2007. These were designed to get the country ready for the rigours of life within the EU."

and

"But the total amount of forfeited funds could be as high as €782m, according to a Bulgarian diplomat. That may be enough to muster some reaction even in a Bulgarian administration that has so far missed no opportunity to disappoint EU officials and European neighbours who want the country to catch up on 50 years of missed development under communist rule."

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The commentary goes on to highlight organized crime as the other evil, saying that "[n]ot one of dozens of gangland killings since 2001 has been solved; nor has any senior official been successfully prosecuted." Quoting EU officials, the article claims that "the most noticeable Bulgarian response to its dreadful public image has been to hire an expensive international PR company, rather than to change things at home", dismissing the resignation of former Interior Minister Petkov, who "remains responsible for his party's funding, and is an important string-puller in the ruling coalition" as an insufficient measure, and the newly established national security agency "criticised this for a lack of accountability". What is more, in the above quotes *The Economist* uses the **inanimate agency** strategy, since the source of action are documents, while the commission's responsibility is obscured.

Downright skepticism is what emerges from the overall message of *BALKAN BLUSHES*. Being another instance of alliteration, this headline is a conventional implicature and a nominalization alluding to embarrassment. Subtitled "The European Union softens its criticisms of Bulgaria and Romania", the article holds that "Even so, the reports hit home, complaining of a 'striking' absence of convincing results in Bulgaria's anti-corruption fight, and of a 'grave problem' over the 'lack of accountability and transparency in public procurement' when spending EU funds." The skeptical attitude is directly brought home to the readers in the final paragraph:

"Outsiders treat all promises of improvement, along with such flourishes as the appointment of a well-regarded ex-ambassador, Meglena Plugchieva, to oversee the use of EU funds, with justified scepticism. Despite much shuffling of departments and expensively publicised initiatives, and what on paper look like the right laws and procedures, the glaring fact remains that Bulgaria's efforts have shown almost no results in terms of convicting fraudsters or corrupt officials."

Bulgaria is yet again assigned the role of victim:

"Despite much shuffling of departments and expensively publicised initiatives, and what on paper look like the right laws and procedures, the glaring fact remains that Bulgaria's efforts have shown almost no results in terms of convicting fraudsters or corrupt officials."

The European Commission, on the other hand, is invariably seen as the actor in all major events in the EU, which is directly suggested in the very first paragraph:

"By the polite standards of Brussels, it was quite tough. On July 23rd the European Commission issued critical reports on Bulgaria's and Romania's progress (or lack of it) in fighting corruption and spending European Union money. Yet after intense lobbying, the language was weaker than in the scalding drafts leaked earlier. And the commission dropped an explicit warning that Bulgaria was endangering its chances of joining the euro and the Schengen passport-free travel area."

A year later *BULGARIAN RHAPSODY* relates the story of a Bulgarian farmer

facing bankruptcy in six months due to Brussels suspension of the payment of EU agricultural aid "amid complaints about fraud, contract-padding and conflicts of interest". This farmer is seen as one of the many who "does not quarrel with the logic of the decision to freeze Bulgaria's aid" and expresses widely held public attitudes in Bulgaria. The headline itself alludes to the most famous piece of classical music written by Pancho Vladigerov, the musical form itself being non-standard. Thus this headline suggests that Bulgaria is assigned the role in the club of being the bad example, the recalcitrant member which does not submit to discipline and control. The major point at issue is summarized in the paragraph, which justifies the European Commission's decision to freeze funds "not just a technical measure" but a "deeply political experiment - nothing less than an attempt to claw back leverage over governments after they entered the union." This decision is believed to have serious political implications as,

"[t]he next countries hoping to join the EU mostly come from the Balkans, and many will display the same problems as Bulgaria and Romania in even more extreme form. If the EU can use the tough love of frozen funds in Bulgaria and yet still maintain voter support, that will be a boost not only to reformers in that country, but also to the whole cause of future enlargement. If, on the other hand, EU sanctions trigger a backlash against Europe in Bulgaria, the commission's experiment could turn out less well."

The final conclusion once again sounds like a warning:

"But if Bulgarian corruption forces Brussels to freeze even bigger sums, plausible political consequences could range from a reformist revolution to a slide into nationalism. EU enlargement was always something of an experiment: it may be poised to enter uncharted territory."

Bulgaria is undoubtedly the victim, as becomes clear in the next two paragraphs:

"Plenty of diplomats and politicians in Brussels say that Romania and Bulgaria were admitted too soon, arguing that once such countries get into the club, the EU loses most of its leverage over them."

and

"But if Bulgarian corruption forces Brussels to freeze even bigger sums, plausible political consequences could range from a reformist revolution to a slide into nationalism".

What is more this article offers instances of the aforementioned inanimate agency strategy.

The catchy headlines and all analyzed discursive strategies are easily spotted in the commentaries which address domestic policy issues, discussing the performance of the Socialist-led three-party coalition in 2005-2009 and GERB's cabinet formed after the 2009 general elections. Two of the headlines directly refer to the semantic field of dirt in DIRTY POLITICS and FOOT IN MOUTH.

Published in April 2008 DIRTY POLITICS discusses the motives behind Petkov's resignation, touching yet again upon the serious issue of Bulgaria's failed attempts to tackle corruption and organized crime.

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The article ends on a pessimistic note, as if posing a direct warning:

"Criticism from Brussels and elsewhere about Bulgaria's murk has continued. One more resignation is unlikely to make a difference."

Backing the EU's stance, *The Economist* says that "Bulgaria's woes with crime and corruption needed more than a temporary ceasefire. Gangland shootings, never resolved, have resumed". Furthermore this single resignation has raised EU officials' worries "that anything they shared with Bulgarian counterparts would be leaked to gangsters", who "objected to Mr Petkov's bullying attitude; an EU source says he enjoyed "rubbing our nose into the fact that Bulgaria is now a member state".

Dogan, the leader of the ethnic Turkish Movement for Rights and Freedoms, is again the only active participant in the events:

"A coalition party that represents the Turkish ethnic minority controls the agriculture and environment ministries, the main conduits for EU money. It has been heavily criticised for land deals, arbitrary treatment of mining licences and vote-buying."

FOOT IN MOUTH refers not just to the disease, but its idiomatic use suggests that a person has "the tendency to say the wrong thing at the wrong time" (McGraw-Hill's Dictionary of American Idioms and Phrasal Verbs). This headline sets the tone of the article which examines the newly elected prime minister's style of governance. Borisov is described as a "square-jawed ex-wrestler has enlivened the country's politics", of whose "forceful ways" and

"plain-spoken style" the EU colleagues "got a whiff of", ending yet again in a pessimistic conclusion:

"People fret over energy insecurity; a crackdown on crime has put kidnapers behind bars but not stopped gangland shootings".

Another two articles provide an analysis of the management style of the previous cabinet of BSP leader Stanishev and the incumbents. They yet again reveal the hidden mechanisms of manipulation of transitivity and passive patterns and nominalizations.

A NEW COLONIALISM was written on a specific occasion: Stanishev's "extraordinary new plan" to give the EU "more power to intervene where 'weaknesses may be qualified as structural and persistent and...cannot be resolved by the Bulgarian government alone". The article goes on to describe the plan:

"The plan proposes that European officials and diplomats should be involved in monitoring implementation of laws, managing EU funds and supervising courts, prosecutors and investigators. They would follow cases of political corruption and organised crime that the judicial system has been slow to tackle."

Even though this time the conclusion is not an explicit warning, it is highly skeptical, claiming that "[a] mechanism for joint government of a country" is not new for Bulgaria and "[a] bigger European presence in the government may play well with Bulgarians, even if it makes less difference than they would like."

The very first paragraph exposes an instance of the nominalizing strategy:



"Bulgaria's entry into the European Union was delayed by worries over corruption, organised crime and slow judicial reform."

BORISOV'S TURN is one of the three commentaries written in the wake of the 2009 general election, which brought GERB to power, that are quite revealing in terms of *The Economist's* attitude to the new cabinet. The headline invokes the prime minister's strong personality, warning of the possible establishment of a police state. The opening sentence claims to describe in a nutshell the election outcome:

"Exasperated voters boot out a bad government and install an unknown one."

The recurrent topic of Bulgaria's poor performance in the EU is again brought to the limelight:

"Bulgaria's leaders have been the subject of humiliating criticism by the European Commission, worried about endemic corruption and links between organised crime and some bits of government."

In this context, "Mr Borisov won support from change-hungry voters, even if they felt queasy about his headstrong personality and spotty past." Skepticism is the overwhelming sentiment in:

"Denouncing corruption is one thing. Extirpating it is quite another. Mr Borisov says he wants to investigate and jail his predecessors. But few expect quick results. Bulgaria's rich and powerful have shown remarkable agility in dodging the lethargic courts." What follows is a brief account of the previous governments' efforts, which ends in a pessimistic assertion that "Bulgarian politicians may not yet be able to govern cleanly. But voters have certainly shown that they want it."

This article exposes the nominalizations used to conceal the responsibility for specific actions:

"Such displays of arrogance dented the Socialists' image, as did worries about the pervasive hold of the communist-era secret services and rising Russian influence, notably in energy."

The Bulgarian government is again the victim "subject of humiliating criticism by the European Commission". Hence the commission, "worried about endemic corruption and links between organised crime and some bits of government", is allegedly assigned the role as the strict father (Ishpekova, 2012). Furthermore Ahmed Dogan and Yane Yanev emerge as one of the few actors engaged in decision making on the political arena:

"In its place came a new party campaigning against corruption, Order, Law and Justice. Its leader, Yane Yanev, has a habit of producing classified information to back up his claims. That has prompted accusations, which he denies, that he is a front for the secret services."

and

"The party's unabashed influence-peddling has increasingly scandalised Bulgarians. Its leader, Ahmed Dogan, has publicly boasted of his ability to channel state funds and wield political power."

GUARDING THE GUARDIANS reinforces the message that the "burly former police chief"'s governance style "is certainly going down well with ordinary Bulgarians", again voicing concerns that "the price of the crackdown may be bad government of a different kind: a still weaker rule

of law, and even a shift towards what might look like a police state" and that the crackdown "has also brought paralysis in public administration." The headline is a direct reference to the Latin phrase "*Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?*", traditionally attributed to the Roman poet Juvenal from his *Satires* (Satire VI, lines 347–8), which is literally translated as "*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. Among the many facts that suggest Borisov's strong-arm fashion is his fondness of publicity, so the article ends in the sad conclusion:

"The television news may look like the trailer for a gangster movie. But justice and showbiz are different."

This image of Bulgaria's new prime minister emerges once again in OUT IN THE STREETS, occasioned by the Bulgarian-Roma clashes that took place in the village of Katunitsa in September 2009:

"Tackling corruption and organised crime was Mr Borisov's main promise when he took office in 2009. At first the former policeman, who likes to cultivate a strongman image, oversaw swift progress."

and

"At a time of economic insecurity, patience in the EU's poorest country is wearing thin".

#### 4. Conclusions

The data from this research confirms the hypothesis that *The Economist* tends

to use recurrent linguistics means as part of an overall discursive strategy in the representation of people and events aimed at forming public opinions about Bulgaria and constructing the country's image of generally failing to handle the challenges of EU membership. According to the findings in the study, *The Economist* most often resorts to some manipulative discursive devices, thus representing the country as unworthy of playing an essential part in international affairs because its government has neither the capabilities nor the will to combat corruption and organized crime or successfully tackle any domestic policy issue.

In the first place transitivity patterns assign Bulgaria the role of the victim of the sanctions of Brussels, which exposes the newspaper's position where by the country is seen as weak and lacking the initiative to take over the steering wheel. The EU institutions in turn are regarded as the powerful ones, presumably entitled to take action and impose sanctions.

Nominalization, passivization and inanimate agency are used to favor a certain perspective on events and actors, to obscure the agent and thereby the responsibility for certain actions and suggest an objective assessment of facts and figures which would support the newspaper's position on and attitude to Bulgaria.

As was explicitly stated at the beginning of this analysis, the studied articles are part of a far more comprehensive set of commentaries, published by *The Economist* in the period 2007-2011, where Bulgaria appears to be either a player of minor

importance or else is assigned a more central role in international affairs, though invariably an example of mismanagement, mistrust and missed opportunities.

### 5. Follow-up research

The studied articles are part of another set of commentaries, published by *The Economist* in the period 2007-2011, where Bulgaria appears to be a player of minor importance or enjoys greater prominence as a central political subject.

They can be grouped under the following headings:

A. The commentaries are dedicated only to Bulgaria, occasioned by EU-imposed sanctions for the mismanagement of the agricultural and infrastructural aid and its 2009 general elections, the Roma clashes in the village of Katunitsa, and euro zone problems.

B. Bulgaria is a major actor in four articles which discuss EU ENLARGEMENT (fatigue).

C. Bulgaria is a minor actor in a large number of commentaries related to EU ENLARGEMENT (fatigue) (10), the European constitution (2), immigration (7), minorities' integration (7), the euro zone crisis (11), energy problems (EU-Russia relations (14) and other foreign policy affairs, mainly concerning NATO.

A further examination could be made of how leading periodicals on the Bulgarian print media market present Bulgaria's role in international policy in the context of the research hitherto carried out. Such a study will compare Bulgarian newspapers and *The Economist* in terms of the characteristics

of their presumed readership and the manipulative strategies employed.

Some Bulgarian researchers have studied the economic and political factors that determine the current situation in the print media (Tsankova, Todorov). The Bulgarian press has been influenced by some global trends of market commercialization and concentration and declining readership and circulation. (Tsankova 2010). The latter is attributed to domestic factors, among others, such as the Bulgarians' decreasing purchasing power and the deteriorating literacy and media culture among the readership, as well as the lack of a single government policy in the field (Tsankova 2010: 8). Furthermore the concentration of media ownership is believed to have a negative impact on media pluralism and the readership's overall culture and values, as well as on editorial content and independence. (Tsankova 2010: 12). In his analysis of the factors for crisis in the media sphere P. Todorov (Todorov 2012) attaches priority to politicians' attitude to the media as the government's voice in support of the status quo, the underdeveloped civil society and the inadequate mechanisms for public control, as well as the economic stagnation and slumping investments.

Other researchers have explored journalese and linguistic developments. Zambova, for instance, has analyzed the wide use of verbs rather than nominal phrases (Zambova 2000: 101-102). Still other argue that Bulgarian journalese generally rejects the linguistic standard norm, drawing a parallel with the readers' rejection of the established political power (Znepolski 1997,

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Stoyanov 1999, Zambova 2000, Getzov 2009). Furthermore, the widely employed colloquial vocabulary and the preference of words of Turkish and English origin and slang could also be interpreted as an attempt to dismiss Bulgarian statehood (Nitzolova 1994, Nikolova 1995).

It is therefore a worthwhile effort to carry out a comparative analysis of public perceptions of Bulgaria's role in international affairs as reflected in the Bulgarian press and the public opinion as voiced by leading Anglo-Saxon periodicals.

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