

Overall, the compilation should be of significant interest to western scholars of gender unfamiliar with Polish culture. For scholars in Poland, Filipowicz's article calls attention to the weaknesses in their approach. The one caveat that I have is the uneven quality and depth of analysis in the articles—a problem that clearly stems from having to introduce relatively unknown figures in a small number of pages. Some authors present so much background material that there is little room for the actual analysis. However, I hope that the brief introductions to these extraordinary women will stimulate readers to look for more information both about them and about Second World feminism.

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Bulgaria's Democratic Institutions at Thirty: A Balance Sheet. Ed. Kjell Engelbrekt and Petia Kostadinova. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2020. x, 305 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Figures. Tables. \$115.00, hard cover.
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The volume consists of twelve chapters (including an introduction and conclusion) divided into three sections—"The National Electoral Process," "Civil Society," and "The European Context."

Petia Kostadinova produces a scorecard of Bulgarian democratic achievements by linking electoral institutions with the role played by civil society and the EU. She highlights the legislative elections during the period, recapitulates major electoral system changes, including summarizing presidential, local, European Parliament elections, and overviews all parties in Parliament. She outlines the crucial role of civil society for consolidating democracy as a vehicle for interest articulation and check on government accountability, followed by a synopsis of the major social mobilizations in Bulgaria. After recapping the Bulgarian pathway towards EU integration, the author demonstrates the dual positive impact of EU conditionality: preventing democratic backsliding and increasing the quality of democracy, the latter being tarnished after the rise of populist and nationalistic parties.

Tanya Bagashka presents the aspirations for direct democracy as exemplified in the three national referendums, none of which resulted in binding decisions due to low turnout. The institutional and procedural backgrounds of each are dissected by discussing the public debates, party rhetoric, and media coverage. One conclusion is that parties used referendums to steer public opinion, rather than to represent their supporters' standpoints. The author surmises that increased participation in subsequent referendums could be interpreted as increased civic responsibility, but it can also be attributed to coincidence with nation-wide elections, as long as similar public support in collecting signatures for all three was observed. The chapter ends with a perspicacious analysis of electoral systems in comparative perspective and their application in the post-communist context.

Using data from four national elections and observations on five major parties, Tatiana Kostadinova touches upon one aspect of the electoral reform: substitution of the closed-list with an open-list proportional representation system. Drawing on relevant comparative studies, she argues intra-party democracy increased the probability that supporters of such parties exercise their preference. She also posits that preferential voting was more active in cases of coalitions that were naturally less centralized. Finally, she observes that the open list PR system exerts pressure on parties

to change electoral strategies, forcing candidates elected by preference to withdraw and raising the re-ranking threshold.

Based on the mandate theory of representation, Petia Kostadinova examines thoroughly the electoral promises (pledges) of twenty-three legislative parties from 1990 to 2017. A pledge is considered to be any hard/soft and action/outcome statement in the party manifesto. While the total number of party pledges increases with democratic experience, longer individual party experience in elections is not associated with more pledges in order to counter voter volatility (observed in established democracies). Pledges of various parties across the ideological spectrum do not differ on economic issues, but social issues are constantly present in leftist parties' programs.

Stoycho P. Stoychev posits that the present day façade of democracy in Bulgaria is a consequence of clientelist networks developed during socialism. He suggests two ideal types of clientelist societies: one with dominant state and family-based corruption (Turkey) and the other with "absent" state, which creates a vacuum filled with corrupt, parallel regulatory order (Bulgaria). The author's hypothesis of a captured state is plausible, but needs more convincing arguments to prove that organized criminal networks permanently exercise ubiquitous control over all institutions. Typical tools of established criminal elites in securing positions in government are vote-buying and controlled voting among socially marginalized groups. Paradoxically, the antidote for this state seizure by particularistic interests are the same network tools and social media, as exemplified in the 2013–14 protests.

Elza Ibroscheva and Maria Stover offer a case study of the ultranationalist party Ataka and its leader Volen Siderov. Their astounding rise at the 2005 parliamentary and the 2006 presidential elections was due to party fragmentation and failure of economic reforms, coupled with apt use of populist techniques. After an overview of the prerequisites for creating a political and socio-cultural environment favorable for populist inflammatory rhetoric, the authors trace the spectacular path of a journalist and a TV talk show host who used media discourse to propel himself to national prominence as a politician. Frequently resorting to Orthodox Christianity as an marker of national identity and to hate speech against minorities and outsiders in his party's newspaper, TV channel, and website, Siderov succeeded in galvanizing nationalistic sentiments in disgruntled voters.

Bulgarian transition from communism has profoundly changed the notion of modern citizenship, located between normative principles and historical contingency. Socio-cultural anthropologist Maria Stoilkova corroborates this conclusion by presenting four narratives through the lenses of the "otherness." After tracing the evolution of the concept of citizenship since the beginning of the modern state, she explains the strong drive of young Bulgarians to emigrate due to ambition, curiosity, and desire to transform their own lives. Turkish Bulgarians holding dual citizenship evoked rising nationalism and populism, since they do not reside in Bulgaria, but can influence domestic politics. Citizens of another country who can prove Bulgarian origin—external (co-ethnic) citizens—usually make a strategic choice to use the newly-issued Bulgarian passport in order to settle and work in richer parts of Europe. Fresh influxes of refugees and asylum-seekers have ignited xenophobic and homophobic views expressed in media and "patriotic" party activities, thus raising the thorny issues of social inclusion and participation.

By conducting representative nationwide poll and interviews with representatives of prominent civil society organizations, Maria Bakardjieva and Kjell Engelbrekt draw attention to the salience of digital media for civic engagement. The distinction of active citizens—young, educated, employed urban dwellers—from occasional

participants and the general population is rooted in their preponderant use of all kind of media, particularly social networks, and a higher degree of trust in institutions and CSOs (Civil Society Organizations). The digitally skilled or “savvy few” sociopolitical entrepreneurs as an emanation of the most active participants are either professional or free-style. However, the authors point to one caveat: that social media visibility may also cause their *disempowerment*. Frequent frictions appear with government and corporate actors who resort to various tools for direct and indirect pressure: harassment and stigmatization via media silence, media walls, media-batons, and black PR.

A vibrant civil society mobilizes citizens’ participation and accountable government holds regular consultation with informal organizations in consolidated democracies. Although postcommunist Bulgaria fares comparatively low in both areas, its level of EU policy implementation is surprisingly high. Asya Zhelyazkova and Reini Schrama unravel the puzzle by applying a network analysis of the practice of an NGO (BWL) to monitor gender-related EU directives by bypassing a government with weak bureaucratic capacities and directly contacting supranational institutions. Another venue is establishing ties with other stakeholders in a given policy.

Dragomir Stoyanov and Plamen Ralchev present populist, anti-establishment parties that found place in parliament due to their rhetoric addressing the grievances of ordinary Bulgarians. An apt classification based on the relevant literature distinguishes between six hard populists and two soft ones. Common for all of them is that after passing the electoral threshold or coming to power, they softened their rhetoric, as reflected in their media appearances and political documents. This consequently led to disappointment and the waning of their electorate. The hard populist parties exhibited soft or strong Eurosceptical attitudes that, with time, became nationalist and even racist, taking them to the far right of the political spectrum and alienating supporters. The soft populist parties, being moderate, centrist, and inclined to compromise, wielded stronger influence in politics. Only one, however, which developed a network of local structures, became well integrated into political life. The puzzle of the rising trend of Euroscepticism still remains unsolved.

Maria Popova meticulously recapitulates the results from thirty years of reforms in the Bulgarian judicial system that have not fully succeeded in producing a respected and trusted institution. The five main building blocks of the Bulgarian judiciary are succinctly presented. The reason for the underperformance is twofold—low trust as a result of perceived collusion between political and judicial elites, as well as corruption and a high rate of human rights violations. The positive balance stems from the above average EU accessibility and the efficiency of the judiciary. While unreformed prosecution is a major drawback, the civic engagement of judges brings the third branch of government closer to EU standards.

In the Concluding Remarks, Kjell Engelbrekt recapitulates the main findings of the volume in a balance sheet statement of assets, liabilities, and equity used to assess Bulgaria’s creditworthiness after thirty years of transition. Assets (robust political and judicial institutions, vibrant social engagement, strict compliance with EU *acquis communautaire*) ostensibly surpass liabilities (belated economic reforms, instances of corruption and insufficient accountability, rise of populism and Euroscepticism), thus providing significant owners’ equity (consolidated democracy).

The book can be a valuable source for students of post-communism and east European politics, as well as for all those who do research in elections, civil society, and EU politics.

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