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Original article

Albena Nakova 

The Refugee Challenge: State Policy and Social Attitudes in Bulgaria

Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
1000, 13A Moskovska St., Sofia, Bulgaria
albena_nakova.manolova@abv.bg

Abstract. The article examines one of the greatest challenges of our times: the migration of large masses of people fleeing wars, political persecution and terrorism; these refugees have become one of the most serious challenges to European countries and governments in the last decade. Specifically, the article analyzes the contemporary national policy of Bulgaria with regard to asylum and refugees, its stages of development since the start of democratic changes in Bulgaria in the early 1990s, through the country's accession to the EU in 2007, that required the alignment of the national laws with European legislation, and on to the growing influx of refugees along the Bulgarian borders after 2011 (as a result of the war in Syria) and then, almost ten years later, when negative attitudes towards refugees have grown, even though refugees in Bulgaria are not at all numerous. The questions as to the acceptance and integration of refugees into Bulgarian society are examined as an area of intersection between purposeful state policies and social attitudes determining the possibility for a successful implementation of those policies and impacting on the nature and specific features of the refugees' integration into Bulgarian society. The analysis is based on the results of a national representative survey of the Bulgarian population, conducted in 2020 by a team of scholars from the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at BAS, under the project "Refugees in the Representations of Bulgarians: Fears, Understanding, Empathy", funded by the National Research Fund of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Bulgaria.

Keywords: refugees; national policy on asylum and refugees; acceptance of refugees; integration of refugees; attitudes towards refugees

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Накова А. 

**Проблема беженцев – государственная политика
и общественное мнение в Болгарии**

Болгарская академия наук, Институт философии и социологии,
1000, Болгария, София, ул. Московска 13А
albena_nakova.manolova@abv.bg

Аннотация: Статья анализирует одну из самых тяжелых проблем современности – миграция больших масс людей, спасающихся от войны, политических преследований и терроризма, иными словами – беженцы, которые в последнее десятилетие оказались серьезным вызовом для европейских стран и их правительств. В частности, анализу подвергается текущая национальная политика Болгарии в области предоставления убежища и беженцев - этапы развития, через которые она проходит от демократических изменений в Болгарии в начале 90-х годов 20 века, через присоединение страны к ЕС в 2007 году и необходимость гармонизации национального законодательства с европейским и последующее увеличение притока беженцев на болгарских границах после 2011 года в результате войны в Сирии и почти 10 лет спустя, когда беженцев в Болгарии уже не много, но тем не менее растет негативное отношение к ним местного населения. Вопросы приема и интеграции беженцев в болгарское общество рассматриваются как результат пересечения целенаправленной государственной политики с общественными установками, которые определяют возможность успешной реализации государственной политики и влияют на характер и особенности интеграции беженцев в болгарское общество. Анализ основан на результатах национального репрезентативного опроса населения Болгарии, проведенного в 2020 году Институтом философии и социологии при Болгарской академии наук в рамках проекта «Беженцы в представлениях болгарских граждан – страхи, понимание, сочувствие», который был реализован при финансовой поддержке Национального научного фонда при Министерстве образования и науки Республики Болгарии.

Ключевые слова: беженцы; национальная политика в отношении убежища и беженцев; прием беженцев; интеграция беженцев; отношение к беженцам

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Introduction. In recent years, an increasing number of people from outside the boundaries of Europe are arriving and settling here. Some of them are looking for a better future. Others are escaping from wars, persecution, terrorism and hunger. Thus, the “refugee” problem has become a leading issue in the agenda of many European countries, in-

cluding Bulgaria. At first Europe viewed the refugees as a good economic investment and a source of cheap labor; Angela Merkel publicly declared they were welcome in Germany, and that her country would help every refugee; but after the events of New Year’s night in Cologne, 2016, and the appeal of that city’s mayor, Henriette Reker, that refugees should

keep “at arm’s length”, attitudes towards them changed seriously in Germany and throughout Europe. Understanding and compassion were increasingly replaced by fear. Europe and the world are taking an increasingly negative attitude (Nakova, 2018). The Visegrad Four called for closing the Balkan route of refugees and building walls along the borders.

The unfolding of events has shown that no border fences are able to stop the current migration of peoples, of individuals willing to travel across half the world to reach Europe in search of a better life. Nevertheless, it has turned out there is a barrier that refugees are not able to pass – the barrier raised by public opinion in the host countries, the barrier of public consciousness.

Methodology and methods. *Contemporary national policy on asylum and refugees in the Republic of Bulgaria.* The national policy pursued with respect to the stream of refugees passing through Bulgaria after 2013, and to those relatively few who are settling here (coming primarily from Middle Eastern countries such as Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, and Iran), is marked by its specificity and inconsistency, determined by two trends that have become particularly distinct after 2015. On the one hand, this policy mirrors concepts based on the 1951 UN Geneva Convention on Refugees and on the democratic European understanding of the protection of human rights (Jileva, Guiraudon, 2006). On the other hand, part of the governing political elite of Bulgaria has been influenced by current nationalist-populist views, especially widespread in EU member states that were formerly part of the Socialist block – such as Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic and Slovakia – and in some other countries; these views aim at *restricting the openness of the national border* and at *closure* with regard to the acceptance of foreigners seeking international protection.

In contemporary Bulgarian policy on granting asylum to refugees, two interconnected priorities are evident: *regulated acceptance and integration* of the persons seeking and receiving international protection

(since 1993) and *management of migration processes* (since 2014).

After 1989, the political order in the Bulgarian state changed in a way that led to the reformulation of asylum and refugee policy in accordance with the new democratic course of government and geopolitical orientation of the country (Парева, 2007). In the conducted asylum and refugee policy, three basic sub-stages can be broadly distinguished: 1990-2007, 2007-2013, and since 2014 until now.

The 1990s saw the transformation of Bulgaria into a “safe state”, in which basic human rights are guaranteed. In the international context, since 1993, Bulgaria is considered a recipient country for refugees rather than a sender country. During the first period, the Bulgarian parliament ratified a number of international and European legal documents ensuring human and civic rights and liberties and regulating, directly or partially, the conditions for granting asylum and providing the rights of refugees. These documents include: the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Liberties (1950)¹; the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)²; the Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951) and the New York Protocol (1967)³; the European Convention on Extradition (1957)⁴; the European Convention for the Prevention of Tor-

¹Published in SG, issue 80, 1992, available at: http://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Convention_BUL.pdf (Accessed 4 January 2021).

²SG, issue 32, 1991, available at: <http://www.asp.government.bg/documents/20181/49590/konventsia-na-oon-za-pravata-na-deteto.pdf/c203c32d-f23f-4e50-8d3c-97ed982fc0e7> (Accessed 4 January 2021).

³ SG, issue 36, 1992 and SG issue 30, 1993, available at: http://abm-bg.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/1951_Refugee_Convention_BUL.pdf; <http://refugees.farbg.eu/sbornik-po-bejansko-pravo/normativni-dokumenti/protokol-za-statuta-na-bezhantsite> (Accessed 4 January 2021).

⁴SG, issue 8, 19, available at: http://www.esteri.it/mae/normative/normativa_consolare/serviziconsolari/estradizioni/conestradizione.pdf (Accessed 4 January 2021).

ture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1987)⁵; the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination⁶; the 1958 ILO Convention № 111 Regarding Discrimination in Respect of Employment and Occupation⁷, etc.

The Geneva Convention and the New York Protocol played a key role for establishing the international and national *policy of acceptance and integration of asylum-seekers*. The accession of Bulgarian legislation to these important international acts entailed: the reformulation of the concept of “refugee” in accordance with the formulation of the Geneva convention regarding the status of refugees, the setting of requirements for granting refugee status to people who are persecuted in the country of their usual place of residence, including people without citizenship, the adoption of provisions on the rights and obligations of refugees in the country that has granted them asylum. The adoption of these rules has entailed the acceptance of certain requirements, specially emphasized by the Geneva Convention, related to effective protection of asylum-seekers. This refers to the so-called principle of *non-refoulement*. Art. 32 и Art. 33 of the Geneva Convention engage the contracting parties not to return any refugee to the state in which his/her life may be endangered. The text does not stipulate any exceptions to this rule based on defense of national security or public order.

Until 1999, the national policy on granting asylum was not regulated by any legal act. Instead, the instruments used were decrees

⁵SG, issue 71, 1994, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/16806dbb34> (Accessed 4 January 2021).

⁶SG, issue 51, 1966; published in SG, issue 56 of 10.07.1992, in effect from January 4, 1969, available at: <http://diversity.europe.bg/page.php?category=319&id=1711> (Accessed 4 January 2021).

⁷SG, issue 35, 1997, available at: <http://www.trudipravo.bg/component/content/article?id=871:convention-111-on-discrimination-in-employment-and-occupation-1958> (Accessed 4 January 2021).

and resolutions, issued in fulfillment of adopted international conventions and under cooperation with the UN and the European organizations. These acts set the foundation of the contemporary normative-institutional framework of Bulgarian policy on acceptance of refugees.

Since 1995, when Bulgaria began negotiations for accession to the European Union, the country continued to follow the international, and especially European, lines of asylum and refugee policy, as well harmonize the national laws with international normative instruments. Until 2007, when the number of foreigners seeking asylum in our country was small, the efforts of the Bulgarian parliament were aimed at ensuring the “European” normative conditions of acceptance of refugees (Manfred Woerner Foundation, 2003) and, respectively, at institutional strengthening or creation of state organs responsible for acceptance and integration of refugees in our country – in particular, the State Agency for Refugees at the Council of Ministers. For the more adequate regulation of refugee acceptance in accordance with the international norms, the parliament adopted in 1999 the *Law on Refugees*⁸, which was repealed in 2002 and substituted by the *Law on Asylum and Refugees (LAR)*⁹, which is still in effect today but has passed through a number of amendments over the years. During this period, Bulgaria undertook concrete actions towards elaborating a *policy of integration* of refugees into Bulgarian society. A *National Program for Integration of Refugees in the Republic of Bulgaria 2005-2007* was elaborated and adopted; the program laid down the basic principles and goals of integration of refugees in Bulgaria. It was complemented by an *Action Plan for Integration of Refugees in*

⁸SG, issue 53, 1999, available at: <https://www.ciela.net/svobodna-zona-darjaven-vestnik/issue/267/unofficial> (Accessed 4 January 2021).

⁹SG, issue 54, 2002, available at: <https://www.ciela.net/svobodna-zona-darjaven-vestnik/document/2134666240/issue/269/zakon-za-bezhantsite> (Accessed 4 January 2021).

Bulgaria, containing concrete measures for integration in several main fields: integration of newly recognized refugees; legislative measures; accommodation; employment; education, social assistance; healthcare, refugees with special needs; protection against discrimination.

With Bulgaria's accession to the European Union in 2007, the Bulgarian state became a party to the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), established in 1999, which is a key element of the common European management of migration processes. The aim of this system is to elaborate and adopt common standards for treatment of persons seeking asylum within the European space of freedom, security and justice. CEAS was embodied in the Dublin Regulation (currently in effect is the so-called DUBLIN III, Regulation (EU) 604/2013), the EURODAC system (Regulation (EU) № 2725/2000 and Regulation (EU) № 407/2002), DubliNet (Regulation (EU) № 1560/2003), EUROSUR (Regulation (EU) № 1052/2013), the Lisbon Treaty (signed in 2007, in effect since 2009) and the European Pact on Migration and Asylum (adopted by the European Commission on October 15 and 16, 2008). Importantly, at this stage Bulgaria was committed to the obligatory force of EU law on the basis of the main European treaties, the Treaty of the European Union (TEU) and the Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), as well as of provisions of the national Constitution (Art. 5, p. 4), which give greater force to international treaties ratified, published and in effect, over internal legislation. At the start of this period, Bulgaria ratified two very important treaties, which were crucial for the construction of the common European policy on asylum. The first was the *Lisbon Treaty* for amendment of the TEU and the Treaty Establishing the European Community. The Lisbon Treaty was signed on December 13, 2007, publicized on December 17, 2007, and came into effect on December 1,

2009¹⁰. This legal act was an important step toward building a common European policy on asylum, as it abolished inter-governmental cooperation and introduced an entirely community-based method into EU policy, transforming the measures for asylum into a unified policy of the member-states. Its purpose was not simply to establish minimal standards for asylum-provision but also to create a common system involving unified statutes and procedures for providing asylum in all member-states.

The second important act for a common European policy on asylum was the *European Pact on Migration and Asylum*, adopted by the European Commission on October 15 and 16, 2008¹¹, which emphasizes the fact that significant differences continue to exist between the member states with regard to the granting, and forms, of asylum; the pact appeals for new initiatives to be taken to build a common European system of asylum, initiatives that would provide a higher level of protection.

As a member-state of the EU, the Bulgarian state continues to develop its legislation towards a stricter alignment with the strategic goals set by the European directives. Bulgaria acceded to, and implements, the regulations related to: the unified refugee status; the unified status of subsidiary protection; the common system of temporary protection; the common procedures for granting or revoking refugee status or of subsidiary protection; the common criteria and mechanisms for determining which member-state is competent to examine a request submitted by a citizen of a third country in one of the member-states; the common standards related to the conditions of acceptance; the common standards and proce-

¹⁰ Renewed OJ C 306, 17.12.2007, p. 1-271, available at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/BG/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A12007L%2FTXT> (Accessed 4 January 2021).

¹¹ Not published in the Official Journal of the EU, available at: <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/doc/srv?l=BG&f=S T%2013440%202008%20INIT> (Accessed 4 January 2021).

dures applicable in the member states for returning illegally residing citizens of third countries; partnership and cooperation with third countries and countries of origin, etc. After 2007, based on international and national legal acts, the Bulgarian governments elaborated various strategies, plans and programs related to asylum and refugees. These are the *National Program for Integration of Refugees in the Republic of Bulgaria (2008-2010)*, the *National Program for Integration of Refugees in the Republic of Bulgaria (2011-2013)*. Refugees in Bulgaria, who are treated in the same group as other categories of migrants, are the subject of the *National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria on Migration and Integration (2008-2015)*, substituted three years later by the new *National Strategy in the Field of Migration, Asylum and Integration (2011-2020)*.

Regarding national strategies, programs, and plans related to asylum and refugees, adopted in the period 2007-2013, and the national policy on asylum and refugees applied in this period, it may be generally said they reflect the alignment of national legislation with European law, as required for a country that is part of the European community. Formally, all the normative conditions, required by European legislation and policy, for the acceptance and integration of refugees are in place (Krasteva, 2010). They are guaranteed both by the provisions of the Law on Asylum and Refugees and by the stipulated measures in government strategies, programs and plans. But the lack of a clear conception of the nature, specificity and mechanisms of integration of refugees as a specific category of immigrants results in failures in the implementation of those national programs for integration. The unjustified treatment of refugees in one category with all other immigrants is restricting the possibility for their adequate and real integration.

After 2013, in the context of the sharp increase of refugee streams towards EU countries, the general European, and the Bulgarian national, policy on asylum and refugees started facing a number of challenges resulting

from the different understanding of shared collective and national responsibility. In order to meet the national requirements and needs for fair distribution of the refugee streams without violating the collective interest, the European institutions reformulated their approach to acceptance and integration of refugees in a way that came to influence the national policies of the member-states, including Bulgaria. Under a common governance of the migration processes, the emphasis has been placed on three key elements: *movement/resettlement; return/reverse acceptance/reintegration; cooperation with countries of origin and countries of transit*. With the growth of the migration stream to Europe in 2014, Bulgaria adopted a new governmental strategy: the *National Strategy for the Integration of Persons Granted International Protection in the Republic of Bulgaria (2014-2020)*. Two very important problems treated in the Strategy are the unpreparedness of state institutions to respond to the increased migration streams and the negative public attitudes towards foreigners, growing due to the migration pressure. In unity with European trends during this period, the Strategy views migrants as a factor of economic growth and of improvement of the country's demographic situation. The strategy envisages concrete measures for the integration of foreigners granted international protection; the basic instrument for this is the *agreement for integration* concluded with local authorities. This new element in the understanding of integration of persons under international protection is actually an indicator of a change in the general approach and policy on integration, whereby institutional responsibility for integration is shifted from the central government organs to the local ones, i.e., to the municipalities. One year later, the government adopted a new *National Strategy for Migration, Asylum and Integration (2015-2020)*. Just like the previous strategies, it emphasized that the Bulgarian state provides for foreign asylum-seekers a fair procedure for granting refugee status, the right to social and health insurance, free access to education, conditions

for retraining and labor realization aimed at better integration into society. But there is no clear vision of the mechanisms of integration. There were adopted two consecutive *Decrees for the Conditions and Order of Concluding, Implementing, and Discontinuing Agreements for Integration of Foreigners Granted Asylum or International Protection* (of August 12, 2016¹² and July 19, 2017¹³). Both decrees, however, have not resulted in any concluded agreements at all; this shows that the basic instrument of integration established by the on-going government programs is not functioning. Which raises a number of questions both as to the financial provision of the activities envisaged by the decree and the access to information and the attitudes of foreigners granted asylum or international protection, and as to the capacity of the local municipal administrations.

At this stage, based on an analysis of the national policies on asylum and refugees, it may be said that, despite the great degree of alignment of the national legislation with international and European law in the field of international protection, and although the status of refugees and of persons granted humanitarian protection is close to that of legal immigrants (granted the right of temporary or permanent residence in the country), in government strategies, programs, plans after 2015 we observe a lack of clearly and concretely formulated conceptions regarding the integration of people seeking or granted international protection in Bulgarian society. Hence, they are often placed in the same category as illegal immigrants, immigrants in general, and foreigners; their integration is equated with the integration of Bulgarian citizens who are second and third generation migrants; and in the sphere of educational integration, their integration is even equated with the integration of ethnic minorities in our

country (Costello, 2016). Increasingly, in political narratives in the public sphere, the term „refugee“ is being replaced by the terms „migrant“ or „immigrant“, which are considered synonymous, without taking into account that the other two terms are significantly more general and broader and include another type of third-country nationals. This substitution of terms does not correspond to the scientific definitions; also, it may be taken as an indication that the people seeking international protection are not being treated as the legal regulations on international protection require.

Public attitudes towards refugees in Bulgaria. Mass migration is not a new phenomenon. As Zygmunt Bauman has noted, it has accompanied the modern age from the very start, as our ‘modern way of life’ produces ‘redundant’ people”, people who are ‘useless’ at the local level under conditions of economic progress as they are too numerous and cannot find employment or at the local level are unaccepted, rejected as a result of disorder, conflicts or rivalry engendered by social or political changes and the ensuing struggle for power (Bauman, 2016: 9). Thus, if the causes of today’s mass migration can be described as ambiguous, according to Bauman, the same may be said of the attitude of host societies towards migrants. In the developed Western countries that are the final target of economic migrants and refugees alike, the government and business has a positive attitude towards them when they are seen as a source of cheap labor (which was the reason for the “open door” policy at first declared in Western Europe). However, for most local residents, their presence would imply even greater competition on the labor market and even greater insecurity, an aspect that often leads to negative attitudes towards migrants, including refugees (Huysmans, 2006).

The acceptance and integration of refugees in Bulgarian society has become one of the topical issues, an issue provoking contradictory public responses (Pamporov, 2010; Nakova, 2017). The possibility of finding an adequate solution to this problem is linked to

¹² Available at:
<http://dv.parliament.bg/DVWeb/showMaterialDV.jsp?idMat=106769> (Accessed 4 January 2021).

¹³ Available at:
<http://www.aref.government.bg/index.php/bg/normativni-dokumenti/naredbi> (Accessed 4 January 2021).

awareness of the fact that acceptance and integration of people seeking international protection in our country are a point of intersection between purposeful state policies, legal measures, and the attitudes of the local population. Public attitudes determine the possibility for successful implementation of state policies on international protection and influence the nature and specific features of the integration of foreigners in our country (Nakova, Erolova, 2019). The failure to take into account the public attitudes is the main cause of a number of social protests against the settlement of refugees in various towns and villages in Bulgaria. Contrary to the government's decisions, the local residents refuse to accept refugees in their settlements; the mayors declare themselves against the housing of refugee families on the territory of the respective towns or villages, volunteer groups guard the state borders, etc. These moods are exploited, and in many cases purposely instigated, by nationalists in Bulgaria so as to create a public image of the refugees as illiterate and poor people who would drain the already depleted social welfare system, who would represent a threat to the national security (Nakova, 2020). Thus, even stronger negative attitudes are provoked amongst the local population. In such a situation, it is important to develop an empirically verified understanding of the representations and attitudes of Bulgarian citizens regarding the refugees; such knowledge would serve as a foundation for relevant policies and would suggest possible directions for conducting a successful state policy for the integration of these people into Bulgarian society. Here, we have made an attempt to conceptualize the empirical findings accumulated under the project *Refugees in the Representations of Bulgarians: Fears, Understanding, and Empathy*, funded by the National Research Fund at the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Bulgaria, under contract ДН 15/3 of 11.12.2017.

On the methodology of the empirical social survey. In August 2020, a research team of scholars from the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at BAS (of which the

present author was a member) conducted a national representative social survey aimed at registering the public attitudes and representations regarding refugees; this information was meant to serve in elaborating adequate policies on their integration into Bulgarian society.

In the course of the survey, 1,000 persons ages 18+ were interviewed; in terms of socio-demographic characteristics, this sample corresponds to the actual proportions of the national population with regard to gender, age, education, place of residence, ethnic and religious affiliation, employment status and family status. The volume of the sample is representative for Bulgaria, the statistical error being $\pm 3\%$. Statistical information was gathered using the face-to-face interview method, based on a standardized questionnaire. The survey results illustrate the basic representations of the Bulgarian population with regard to refugees.

Research Results and Discussion. *Attitudes of Bulgarian citizens towards the acceptance and integration of refugees.* Here is how Bulgarian citizens view the reasons why refugees are leaving their native countries: “they are fleeing war, escaping from persecution” (indicated by 75,2% of the respondents); “they are looking for better living conditions” (65,2% of the respondents); “looking for work and better income” (46,3%); “due to political, religious, ethnic, gender, or other, discrimination” (36,0%); “so that their children may live in a better organized state” (28,4%); “in order to join their friends/relatives, who are living outside their country of origin” (21,2%); “so that their children can go to better schools” (14,1%)¹⁴. We see two types of causes emerging: those related to escape from war, persecution, and discrimination, and those related to the search for better living conditions, higher income and better opportunities for work. This actually defines two kinds of foreigners that, according to the surveyed per-

¹⁴ Here and further in this article, wherever the sums of percentages exceed 100 percent, the respondents have been allowed to indicate more than one answer.

sons, have been arriving in Bulgaria in recent years: refugees and economic migrants. The distinction made in the social consciousness between the two types of foreigners crossing the Bulgarian border under the title of “refugees” determines the ambivalent attitude of Bulgarian citizens towards them: “neither positive nor negative” is how 51,5% of Bulgarian citizens describe their attitude towards refugees; the attitude is “negative” for 28,2%, and “positive” for 16,0%; 4,3% have not expressed an opinion. More concretely, Bulgarian citizens described their attitude thus: *mistrust* (indicated by 38,1% of respondents); *empathy, compassion* (31,7%); *like towards any other person* (28,7%); *understanding* (26,6%); *fear* (18,3%); *indifference* (13,9%); *concern, willingness to help* (11,4%); *respect* (6,1%); *hatred* (5,3%); *trust* (4,4%). The contradictory nature of attitudes towards refugees becomes clear, ranging from empathy, compassion, understanding, care and willingness to afford assistance, through indifference, and to mistrust, fear, hatred.

This general attitude determines the *attitude of the local population to the acceptance of refugees* in Bulgaria: 59,0% do not agree that Bulgarian should accept refugees: those who do agree are twice fewer, 23,7%; and those who cannot give an opinion are 17,3%. What specific kinds of foreigners are the Bulgarian respondents willing to accept in the country? Refugees from countries undergoing military conflict, such as Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, etc. – 35,6% of the respondents; refugees from counties where there is political persecution and violation of human rights – 26,3%; refugees from countries and regions where there are natural and climatic disasters – 24,8%; those seeking jobs demanding higher professional qualification – 15,4%; seeking jobs that require low skills or no skills – 6,1%. Here again, we see the ambiguous attitude towards foreigners: the attitudes to acceptance of refugees fleeing from wars, terror and political persecution are multiple times more positive than the attitudes towards acceptance of economic migrants seeking work; overall, the share of respon-

ents supporting the acceptance of refugees in Bulgaria is not high.

What are the important factors on which depends the support of Bulgarian citizens for acceptance of refugees in Bulgaria? In descending order, they are the following: *that they [the refugees] are willing to learn to speak Bulgarian* (indicated by 84,7% of the respondents); *that they accept the way of life in Bulgaria* (83,7%); *they should have professional skills* (79,7%); *they should be able to support themselves* (76,7%); *they should be able to speak Bulgarian* (61,4%); *they should have a good education* (58,7%); *they should be Christians* (39,2%); *they should be a family of refugees with children* (26,4%); *they should be Unaccompanied Refugee Minors* (24,0%); *a single mother with children* (21,1%); *they should be white* (19,5%); *they should be people with disabilities* (13,4%); *they should be single young men* (7,3%); *they should be single young women* (6,3%); *they should be Muslims* (4,5%). Evidently, the social skills and qualities, such as speaking the local language, professional skills, a good education, the ability to support themselves, acceptance of the local way of life – all of which are factors that determine one’s ability to successfully fit into Bulgarian society – prove much more important for Bulgarian citizens, while features such as religion, race/skin color are far less significant. In other words, the leading characteristics connected with acceptance or non-acceptance of refugees are not ethnic and religious but the social qualities and skills of individuals; when these people are rejected by Bulgarian citizens, it is not because they belong to a certain ethnic group or religion but because they lack certain social qualities, which entails their inability to successfully integrate into Bulgarian society.

In this connection, in the survey, the *social distances* expressed by Bulgarian citizens towards refugees have been measured based on several indicators: willingness of respondents to live together with refugees in the same city/village; in the same neighborhood; in the same building/neighborhood; willing-

ness to accept refugees as co-workers at the workplace; as store sales clerks; as close friends; acceptance of refugee children as classmates of one's children/grandchildren; as close friends of one's children/grandchildren; acceptance of marriage with a refugee. The results show that, as the degree of closeness of contact decreases, the acceptance of contact grows, but generally remains not very high. For instance, only 17.0% of the respondents were willing to live together with refugees in the same residential building/neighborhood (as against 55.9% unwilling); 22.2% were willing to live in the same neighborhood (as against 50.3% unwilling) and 26.6% were willing to live in the same city/village (as against 41.3% unwilling). Also, 21.4% were willing to be friends with refugees (as against 44.1% unwilling); 26.0% were willing to have refugee co-workers (as against 39.0% unwilling); and 26.5% were willing to have refugees working as sales clerks at the store the respondents usually shop at (as against 34.6% unwilling). We see that, as the degree of closeness of contact decreases, the distances also decrease, while remaining rather high. This pattern is confirmed with regard to the relation between the respondents' children and the children of refugees: 21.2% of the surveyed persons would accept that refugee children be close friends of their own children (42.9% would not), whereas 29.4% would accept that their children be in the same class as refugee children (as against 35.7% who would not). The greatest social distance is observable with regard to the question as to marriage with refugees, which implies the greatest closeness of contact: only 6.6% of the surveyed persons were willing to accept that they or their children, grandchildren, close relatives marry a refugee (as against 65.0% unwilling).

The large social distances are determined by people's fears and their perception of the *risks involved in accepting refugees* into Bulgaria. The Bulgarian citizens see the greatest risk involved in acceptance of refugees as related to the following: increased crime (indicated by 59.7% of respondents);

conflicts in everyday life based on the difference in the culture of behavior and in mentality (56.3%); the formation of refugee "ghettos" (55.7%); ethnic and religious conflict (52.3%); high state expenditure for the support of refugees (47.5%); acts/threats of terrorism (45.4%); contagious diseases and epidemics (32.2%); increased unemployment among Bulgarians (22.6%); labor market conflicts (18.4%).

The possible *benefits* that Bulgarian respondents perceived as deriving from the acceptance of refugees are few; they can be reduced to the following: "they might work at places where the local population does not want to work" (45.3%); "they might transmit elements of their culture and contribute to cultural diversity" (17.1%); "they might be a cheap labor force" (10.9%) and "they might be a resource for overcoming the demographic problems of Bulgaria" (8.2%).

Consequently, the major part of the surveyed persons has not supported the *integration* of refugees into Bulgarian society: this was the opinion of 47.1% of the respondents, while 35.5% did support integration; the remaining 17.4% had no opinion on the matter. The majority of respondents (72.8%) did not believe in the successful integration of refugees into Bulgarian society, for various reasons: the leading one being that the refugees themselves do not wish to remain in our country (indicated by 33.2% of respondents), followed by the consideration that cultural differences divide them from the local communities (18.4%), that there are religious differences between them and the local communities (13.0%) and their lack of knowledge of Bulgarian (8.2%). The share of those who believed refugees had a chance of integrating into Bulgarian society was twice smaller (34.9%), and was divided into two subgroups: those who believed refugees could integrate into society without the help of the state and the local people (a very small share, only 5.3%) and those who believed refugees could integrate only with the help of the Bulgarian state and the local people (29.6%). Despite this opinion, however, the *personal in-*

clination to give assistance to refugees for their integration into Bulgarian society is not high: only 28,6% of the surveyed persons were inclined to help refugees, while 39,8% were not, and 13,0% were prepared to help under certain conditions, such as “if I personally know them”, “if they are well-intentioned”; “if they are genuinely in need”; “if they are really fleeing from the war”; “if they are not economic migrants”; “if they are educated and looking for a job”; “if they have no criminal record”; etc. As for the concrete forms of help the respondents are willing to provide, they are: supplying food and clothes (27,9%), helping them to learn Bulgarian (22,6%), helping them to become acquainted with the Bulgarian culture and way of life (21,4%), support in finding a job (15,4%), support in finding a home (8,6%), financial support (4,0%), help in obtaining documents (3,8%).

The conducted survey shows that the inclination of the Bulgarian population to accept refugees in Bulgaria and to assist their integration into Bulgarian society is not at all strong. For one thing, this is due to mistrust of any strange person, anyone who is different from us; for another, however, it is a result of the induced fear (especially by the media); thirdly, it is a response to the unwillingness of the refugees themselves to remain in Bulgaria, a country they look upon most often merely as a transit stage on their way to Western Europe.

Conclusion. We may make draw the general conclusion that, after 1990, the Bulgarian state, following the democratic international and European principles, and taking into account the national laws, has conducted a policy for acceptance of refugees in keeping with the “obligatory” European normative instruments; however, the actually achieved results in this respect testify to a merely formalistic attitude to acceptance and integration of persons seeking asylum in our country. Because of this formalism, and due to the social-economic conditions and the country’s limited capacity to integrate refugees, Bulgaria has categorically established its position as a

transit destination for the refugee streams. Despite the fact that the management of migration within the EU should be in harmony with and derive from the general processes of globalization, the national policies on migration are increasingly argued based on the social-economic and demographic conditions in the specific countries and based on the growing negative public attitudes, which contrast with European and democratic values. On the other hand, the EU member states from the former Socialist bloc, including Bulgaria, are increasingly displaying a preference for accepting and integrating immigrants from third countries like Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Belarus, Macedonia, etc. (Okolski, M. et al., 2010), which are close in culture, history, way of life, to the host society; and are increasingly taking a stand against the acceptance of migrants from the Middle East and Africa, who seem too “foreign”, different, and unacceptable.

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Albena Nakova, PhD, Associate Professor, Deputy Director, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia, Bulgaria.

Накова Албена, PhD, доцент, заместитель директора Института философии и социологии Болгарской академии наук, София, Болгария.