**THE MIGRATION WAVES
AND THE PUBLIC OPINION IN BULGARIA**

Petya Stoyanova Pachkova

Department of Philosophical and Political Sciences,

South-West University “Neofit Rilski",

Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria

pepun@abv.bg

**Abstract:** The article analyzes the attitude of the Bulgarian population against immigrants, which is expressed in its protest activities, in the media, scientific and other public appearances of celebrities. Furthermore, analyzes attitudes towards the problems with immigrants of the main Bulgarian political parties.

**Key words:** protest, immigrant, public opinion.

In the article will be analyzed several aspects of the problem.

The first problem concerns the attitude of the Bulgarian population against the immigrants, which is expressed in his protest activities, in the media, scientific and other public appearances of celebrities.

Real problems arise caused by the swelling of many immigrants. Therefore the increasing tension of large masses of Bulgarian population is not accidental. One of the peculiarities of the protests against immigrants is rapid organization of their opponents in different villages. Such speed is specific of less than protests on other occasions. Another feature is the successful unification of people with different professional, political, ethnic and other characteristics. In protest activities on other occasions this rally proved much more difficult to achieve, but against immigrants locals are tend to forget quickly their other differences. Their common fears unite them.

The protests against the immigrants fierce even in villages where there are no Muslims, no risk of manifestation of Islamic fundamentalism, but instead there is unemployment, economic fears and hence a high degree of intolerance towards people who walk into the role of competitors for job, for resources from social systems. A similar pattern occurs in western countries. For example, in Germany anti-migrant sentiments are strongest not necessarily where there are many Muslims, but where there are the biggest problems with finding jobs and providing income. "The strong negativity to the new wave of migration came from Eastern European countries in European unit because they had to occupy unknown place. They began to build fences - Bulgaria and then Hungary. Moreover, they see the newcomers as natural competitors for the jobs for their own nationals as countries in Eastern Europe can’t provide them workplaces"[[1]](#footnote-1).

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In protests against immigrants include most energetic people brought to the frenzy and panic from the availability of high unemployment, poverty and petty crime. And on all lines the refugees and the economic migrants are a threat to their already severe life. That was enough as a driver for their quick mobilization and organization in recent years. The strong negativity develops in the following directions - economic fears, fears of diseases and infections, fears of distortion of the Christian identity of most Bulgarians and the public order.

 The civic activism against immigrants is characterized by certain requirements of the citizens to a government policy. These requirements are not in the direction of more radical solving the problems of the population in countries that broadcast immigrants to decrease naturally the amount of those willing to emigrate from those countries. But this would require policy by the Bulgarian authorities for more equitable international relations, non-interference of Western countries in the life of other countries and nations, reduction of the greed of the transnational corporations, of the foreign investors. This would require a left internal and external government policy, less aggressive policy of the Golden billion.

The demands of the Bulgarian protesters are largely selfish and superficial, with a high degree of inhumanity. But the worst is that it is characterized by hopelessness. The Bulgarian protesters against immigrants stand behind proposals for a temporary, partial and palliative salvation of the problems - by building enclosures, by limiting the rights of immigrants outside the camps, by request of the European Union for their care and the like. Usually the fight is to transfer the burden of people in one village or region to people from other villages and regions. But there aren’t protests in which protesters put the fundamental question about the reasons for the migration of these people and the responsibility of Bulgaria for this phenomenon. There aren’t a hint of self-criticism by the protesters that they probably have supported the relevant Bulgarian governments in Bulgaria's involvement in aggressive wars and policies, that send their sons to the ranger missions around the world, that contribute to complicating the life of troubled regions.

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In their desire to motivate better and to justify their aggressive attitude and behavior towards the immigrants, the protesters usually succumb to manipulation to treat these people like coming to erode foundations of our "Christian" civilization. They do not realize that it is impossible for anyone to get so many people, including pregnant women and families with little children to move on as risky ways in space only to sow the plague of Islam in Europe. These people do not give up that Islam itself contains aggressive and peaceful elements also. Which of them will come to the fore depends on the particular social situation of particular Muslims, on the specific economic and social situation.

According to a nationally representative survey of the sociological agency "Alpha Research"[[2]](#footnote-2) for between 5th and 7th September 2015 many Bulgarians /63%/ believe that the refugee wave is danger for our country. The vast majority of the respondents /89%/ think that Bulgarian state have to fight with the human traffickers, and 82 percent - to strengthen the border fence. The results indicate that there is strong support for restrictive measures.

The study reported in the same time a greater acceptance of social measures to improve the work of social institutions to better conditions for refugees - 75 percent. 44.5 percent of respondents are announced the need for coordination between our and European refugee policy. 11% are demanding for a complete closure of borders. Back option - to accept refugees without restrictions approved 3.7 per cent of the respondents.

Absolutely not supported is the release of additional money from the state budget for refugees. According to survey results, 63 percent of the respondents support quotas to distributions of the migrants and 34 percent are opposed.

The survey registered growth of the fears, extreme sensitivity to political speeches and solutions, radicalization of public opinion, but within the institutional alternatives. The refugees continue to be perceived as "mass". A study for 2012 and 2013 years indicate the refugees were rather unknown, misunderstood, with a negative image in Bulgarian public opinion. The main fears then to refugees have been associated with rising crime, disease and infections.

The people with higher education, from the middle generation, are more likely to support European solutions. Less educated, most adults, but also of the teenagers have more pronounced negative attitudes. This is probably under the influence of their greatest fears for the present and the future. They do not have clear ideas about the reasons for unemployment. Or they can’t focus their negative energy to those that cause real unemployment. It is therefore easy to direct their emotions and their actions to others, false causes of unemployment and poverty. Bright negative attitude towards immigrants is more obvious when we are talking about people with no direct contact, no experience in relationships with people of different nationality, ethnicity, religion, race[[3]](#footnote-3). More tolerant towards the immigrants are the people who live in settlements there is no refugee camps and are not directly affected or threatened by their presence.

The protesters don’t distinguish well enough economic migrants from the people fleeing wars. Or rather they don’t distinguish them properly. In fact the economic migrants are also driven mostly by unemployment and poverty in their countries, or because of the civil war, or of the external aggression against them, or because of the trends connected with the behavior of transnational corporations. And these are all reasons that largely stem from the behavior of the western world.

The protesters are usually more likely to place under one denominator immigrants and terrorists who use migration waves. They forget that the terrorists even without these waves can find ways to enter in the countries they are interested in. Ascribing proximity to terrorist organizations of people fleeing wars or economic impasse at least is unfair.

In the media and in scientific publications there are some statements of people who advocate for welfare of immigrants. They are against putting all immigrants under a common denominator, against declaring them terrorists and people who have come up with the vile aim to break the identity of Western civilization, to undermine its economic, cultural, religious, etc. foundations.

 At least are the honest supporters of the idea that the countries of the Golden Billion take enormous responsibility for the problems of the populations in the countries that are sources of immigrants. So now these countries have to rethink basic points in this policy to minimize their problems and to be reduced the immigration from them. These are mostly people from the scientific intelligentsia and mostly with left ideological orientation.

According to Ivan Angelov[[4]](#footnote-4) main guideline, which should work to minimize the flow of immigrants is ceasing of inspiring civil wars, mostly from the US, but with the help of some European countries. Another direction is the realization of large-scale programs to support the poorest countries in the Middle East and Africa, because the poverty is the more important, deep and lasting reason for the mass exodus of these people. Only the improvement of living conditions in their countries could keep there the millions who want to emigrate. If it doesn’t happen, all enclosures in Europe will not be able to protect it from the rising waves of hungry and desperate people. No law enforcements will be able to stop human trafficking also.

Valeri Naidenov advises those who have inflamed wars in troubled countries, who have thrown most bombs - to accept the most refugees[[5]](#footnote-5). The same author recommends to be restored the statehood in troubled countries and to be destroyed the Islamic state[[6]](#footnote-6). Andrey Raychev suggested Bulgaria and its allies not to finance the Islamic State by buying his oil for example. "On the one hand Islamic State fund itself through the oil that finally we buy. On the other hand, it is financed by countries that claim to be our allies, especially the Saudi Arabia. If this is not stopped it means we fight with ourselves. Overall the immigrant problem in Europe is not created by immigrants but from Europe... It's about a lasting trend Europe to import its proletariat. Almost all people of physical labor in Western Europe are foreigners, and not from the Eastern Europe, just from the Arab countries and Turkey"[[7]](#footnote-7).

In the network there are views of people who recommend new forms of involvement of the immigrants in normal activity in the European countries. For example, it’s possible through the establishment of the settlements in refugee camps. "On the Old continent there are enough depopulated areas because of the relocation of the people in the big cities, but also because of the difficult climatic conditions"[[8]](#footnote-8). There are a number of places that could recover economically with the help of the migrants. The situation already has provoked architects and designers to begun to appear migrant housing projects that go well beyond traditional wagon. Economic adjustment of immigrants means new ideas, ambition for work and proving of part of them. It means work for construction business and other kinds of economic activity, new buyers, etc.

Some experts recommend to be considered the influences of the immigrants furthermore on the economic development but also the demographic crisis. Already there are voices in favor of the potential benefits of taking part of immigrants[[9]](#footnote-9). It is recommended selection of the admitted immigrants.

Slowly increase the number of public figures - journalists, intellectuals, who raise their voice for understanding and responding to the causes of migration flows. "The sooner Europe understands that we need rapid intervention to solve the problems in the Middle East and Africa, the smaller will be the damages"[[10]](#footnote-10). But in most cases their calls remain on fairly abstract level, without stating the specific grounds, states and entities with the greatest responsibility for their action.

But in the most people remain dominant negative attitudes, fear of immigrants and the tendency to look at them like a competitor, a threat, a hostile. Right thinking dominates, whereby victims are to blame for that are the victims. This is very fertile ground for the emergence and spread of all kinds and variations of xenophobic, nationalist, racist, neo-Nazi beliefs, political ideologies and practices.

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The elite is largely interested in maintaining these sentiments of hatred and suspicion toward immigrants because it allows him to solve important for him domestic and foreign political problems, to control to their advantage the behavior of the masses. Through the attitude of the main political parties towards immigrants - their actual policies and their main media messages, the elite attempts to form appropriate for their policy public opinion.

Among the main Bulgarian political parties not ones stands behind the position that should be serious reconsidered the foreign policy of Bulgaria, its commitments to NATO, the support of Bulgaria to the policy of the United States and Western European countries in the North African countries and in a number of countries of the Muslim east. The focus of their policy and suggestions is on a proper distribution of refugees, their possible directing to other countries, our material support from the European Union for their care and other similar measures. Actually the Bulgarian government supports the US, the most active countries in the European Union and NATO in their aggressive policy in many of troubled countries. It is hard to say that the government does something substantial in the most important question - to influence to change the policy of developed countries that inspire civil wars in countries in the Middle East and North Africa and contribute to the increase of their economic and social problems. On the contrary, at least for now they stay on the side of this selfish policy, of illegitimate opposition groups in the troubled countries, who with the help of external forces want to overthrow legitimate governments in their respective countries and create chaos, economic crisis and migration waves.

The main parties don’t do what is necessary for reflection and public discussion about the possible economic use of immigrants, don’t think seriously about more innovative inclusion of them in economic activity. A nationalist parties defined and increasingly stand behind suggestions and practices against immigrants. They actively include in initiation, organization and conduct protests against them in different regions of the country. They stimulate the people’s suspicion and even hatred toward immigrants. This was the behavior in recent years of IMRO, Attack and NFSB. The last local election candidates for mayors and municipal councilors of IMRO, especially in Sofia, placed as the center of his campaign problems that immigrants create for the life of the local population in respective villages or neighborhoods.

In fact there are not serious contradictions between Bulgarian politics and the influence of the European Union as a factor in forming the public opinion. Generally the Bulgarian policy is so shortsighted as European.

The Bulgarian government somewhat trying to defend the Bulgarian national interests in this regard, to require the EU understanding and support to cope with the stresses posed by the invasion of many people in the country. But the government does it with more moderate policy than as a policy of Hungary. Furthermore, the protection of national interests is through struggle for making palliative, ineffective measures to deal with migratory pressure, rather than struggle to cope with the serious reasons for this pressure. The Bulgarian policy was in line with the dominant pan-European policy in this regard.

There are two main directions of the government policy. The first direction is to reduce the flow of migrants to Bulgaria as a quantity. The second direction is to increase the aid by the European Union for its care. The main objective of the government is to contribute to the support of Turkey and Greece as the external borders of Europe by the European Union institutions. The aim is these countries to take on a greater burden in caring for migrants, to be admitted fewer of them to enter the borders of Bulgaria. The aim is to be distributed the burden more fairly between the different States of the European Union and to be helped poorer states /including Bulgaria/.

More and more is planned involvement of armed forces in the fight against illegal migrants. Border fences rise along the borders with Turkey to prevent illegal crossing them. But in fact, very little work is being done against traffickers who get rich on the back of refugees. In other words, the ruling parties contribute to the prosperity of this branch of the informal economy in the country. So work load of ordinary taxpayers, whose taxes these people have to care for, and at the same time for the benefit of one class of people who are involved in this illegal business. Increasingly large parts of the Bulgarian population make a living from this business. Even recently have formed a scandal about alleged attempts by a voluntary groups of citizens to the role of the police to repress refugees, in fact to robbery them.

Slowly and among the political elite began to hear voices that criticize this policy, causing migratory waves. But they are on abstract, ineffective level. VP of Bulgaria Margarita Popova argues that "require on the negotiating table, the talks on diplomatic solutions to sit the big countries, as we, bear part of the blame for what is happening in North Africa and the Middle East. Because of this exodus will not stop. Rather wait us millions more. We dare to say today, but yesterday it is not thought as a consequence of the fuel conflicts and wars. That's the problem” [[11]](#footnote-11). President Plevneliev says that marginalization, poverty, social exclusion cause terrorism and radicalism. But do not give reasons for the existence of poverty and marginalization. With some approximation to the correct position - unlike the Bulgarian president, Serbian President Tomislav Nikolic recommends that the Western countries to build factories for refugees in their own countries.

It can hardly expect a significant turnaround in perceptions and policies of Bulgarian ruling elite in this respect, because paying attention to the real causes of the situation of those nations would require self-criticism and criticism of the behavior of countries, which together are members of one union or which are our geopolitical friends. This means calling into question our foreign policy orientation as a whole. And the conditions for such a thing at present and near future unlikely to have.

The crisis situation has exacerbated the contradictions between countries in the European Union - between old and new member states; between poorer and richer; between those who firmly support the US in their policies towards the troubled countries /Germany, France, UK/ and those who have more critical and reserved position.

Europe continues to conceal the truth about the movement of migrants. "Now Europe is the victim of a great migration from Asia and Africa. But it is powerless because it stubbornly refuses to name the real culprits - its own politicians ... Sarkozy has huge personal contribution to the destruction in Libya, which marked the beginning of the refugee wave. If countries that destroyed Libya, Syria and Iraq, admit evil things, the solution to the refugee problem becomes obvious - as much as bombs thrown, so people can accommodate"[[12]](#footnote-12). In fact, the fault of politicians is they serve their economic elites and respect the opinions of their peoples. And they all tend for maintaining high levels of prosperity to trample the rights of other nations.

Both in Europe and in Bulgaria, instead of seeking and finding the truth, the focus is on the danger of the Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism and terrorists and all Muslims are loaded with all the blame for the events. The aim is to focus the fears and hatred of public opinion to them, and not to the policy of the developed Western countries. So does Turkey, so does the ruling elite in Bulgaria.

"The picture of the three-year drowning child Aylyan shed tears the world but not make him stop glosses over the truth. Why, for instance all media and politicians called Aylyan "Syrian" and miss, it is the child from Kurdish city of Cobani? This is a very important detail!

For example Erdogan spoke, he was moved to tears by the death of the child and that the West is guilty that haven’t overthrown Assad. But we all know that Erdogan de facto is at war with the Kurds in Syria, i.e. with the ethnicity of drowned child. Moreover, it is from the city of Cobani, which has long had nothing to do with the power of Assad, nor with Syria"[[13]](#footnote-13).

So far, the European Union also moves in selfish and compassionate framework of measures, think of ways to distribute the refugee, to make a fund to subsidize the countries of North and Sub-Saharan Africa and other similar measures, but not to review the overall policy towards countries that contributed to problems. So the Bulgarian policy butts like a stone in this dominant and bleak orientation.

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