

Corruption and media freedom in Bulgaria and Romania: different levels of European integration

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Abstract

This research represents a comparative analysis of the Bulgarian and Romanian European Integration in terms of corruption and media freedom. I argue that, however, both states have multiple common grounds to be analyzed together, as is done in the previous academic research, they take rather different paths after their accession in the European Union regarding their progress in fighting corruption and ensuring free media. I analyze why and how this happens through the theoretical lenses of Constructivism on the matters of identity formation, integration, and spread of values. I will present an overview of the IR academic discourse on the topic, then attempting to fill its lapses in the Analysis section. There, I utilize qualitative content analysis on official reports, issued by the European Commission within these 10 years framework of EU membership in order to investigate the research question. I am to interpret the information from these sources and present the four major aspects of the case, leading to the current situation.

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
1.1 Topic	1
1.2 IR Relevance	2
1.3 Research Question	3
1.4 Structure	3
2. Theoretical Framework	5
3. Literature Review	6
3.1 EU and the Integration Process	7
3.2 Eastern Enlargement	8
3.3 Puzzling Results: Corruption, Media Freedom and Democracy	11
3.4 Chapter Conclusion	14
4. Methods	16
4.1 Data Selection	17
4.2 Method	18
5. Analysis	20
5.1 European Integration vs. Deep Corruption	20
5.1.1 Integration: Overview and Main Trends	21
5.1.2 Structural Preconditions	23
5.2 Improvement Attempts and the Lack of Such	24
5.3 Ambiance Hostile for Freedom	26

5.3.1 Media Climate.	26
5.3.2 Media Freedom as Corruption Component and Vice Versa. .	28
5.4 Civil Society Engagement and Activism	30
5.4.1 Bulgaria	30
5.4.2 Romania	32
5.4.3 Interpretations	33
5.5 Chapter Conclusion	35
6. Conclusion	36
7. Bibliography	39

1. Introduction

1.1 Topic

This research presents a comparative analysis between Bulgaria and Romania's integration in the European Union in relation to corruption and media freedom. This comparison means to highlight how and why ten years after their accession, they have developed significantly distinct in the above-mentioned spheres.

Since the formation of the European Union, it has been more than merely a political and economic entity; it has also broadened and deepened the cooperation between its members, community belonging, and has established itself as a major source of common values and standards (Oshri et al, 2016:115). This can be seen in the very way of its functioning – starting from the accession criteria which each candidate is supposed to fulfil, to the different development plans for each year that the members should cover in order to keep up to the progress of the union as a whole (Guibernau, 2011:34). However, there has always been a substantial discrepancy in the member states' progress due to varied historical and cultural backgrounds, geographical location, considerable gaps in their economic developments, along with different years of accession (meaning not equal time within the union) (Agnew, 2001:29). Those factors determine various comparisons and groupings of the states when examining their progress in terms of European integration.

One such case is Bulgaria and Romania. The two states have several common grounds to be compared on, thus, they have often been put under one cap when referred to in many political, media, and academic debates. Among these factors are the geographical location – neighbouring states on the Balkan Peninsula; common communist past; relatively similar economic development; and simultaneous accession to the EU in 2007. These two states have often been put together and looked at through the same lenses. Furthermore, it appears that both fulfilled the requirements at least to some acceptable extent, both made sweeping changes when they joined the EU and got involved in programs for further improvement; both received substantial aid from the European Union in order to come closer and closer to the common European norms and standards. In addition to this, as recognized by the European Commission, certain weaknesses remained in both new member states up until the present days.

One such a major and common issue is corruption, interconnected with the problem of media freedom; they have been crucial critical points that require development and improvement. Furthermore, this is essential not only for the European Union values as it is one of the union policy sectors but also in regard to the fundamental human rights charter. Within these 10 years of exceptional and unparalleled monitoring, the diverging trajectories of Bulgaria and Romania represent the EU's limits of influence after accession. However, it is still an important factor; local features appear to be more crucial and essential.

The examination between these two states' progress is aiming to point out the differences between them and to question their actual level of integration and coverage of the European standards and norms in terms of corruption and freedom of the media. It poses the problem of their actual improvement within their 10 years of EU membership – why they still struggle to fulfil the EU's criterion on corruption and particularly how one reached significantly further than the other.

1.2 IR Relevance

This research is situated within the broader field of European integration that itself represents a topic of regional development and soundness, which is further substantial for global stability and security. Thus, however, this study may look like a euro-centric case study as it is examining two particular states and the EU, it is of crucial importance for the wider context due to its deeper meaning and significance for the better understanding of the state – international organization relation and its link to the global politics and society.

Furthermore, Bulgaria and Romania are considered the most underdeveloped members of the union, which determines their particular examination pivotal for overcoming those issues, hence, achieving greater overall progress of the region, leading to better international overall stability. The two interrelated issues – corruption and media freedom represent major features of the European Union values and norms; moreover, in broader terms, they embody central traits of democracy. This further relates to the fundamental and wide IR field of democracy, a major concept broadly recognized as a feature of social, economic, and environmental progress and overall growth leading to achieving security with sustainable bases.

All the mentioned links and features determine the topic's situation within the academic sphere of IR and will be strengthened and elaborated in the following sections.

1.3 Research Question

Bulgaria and Romania may have multiple common grounds to be analysed together, especially at the beginning of their EU membership, they show rather puzzling results in their further development particularly in terms of corruption and media freedom. According to the data, Romania demonstrates greater progress than Bulgaria and however slower than planned and expected, it is improving, but Bulgaria is actually worsening.

Then appears the question, why have they reached rather different extents of integration in terms of the EU reports over the states' progress? What factors, events, and processes through this 10 years framework contributed to the current situation with corruption and media freedom in these states?

I argue that in order to come to the core of the issue, these two states, often put together, should be opposed and compared. By tracking down their attempts in covering the EU norms of corruption and media freedom, I could show how and why it is not happening properly in Bulgaria.

1.4 Structure

I am to continue this research with the section Theoretical Framework, which will explain how and why I will utilize Constructivism and Social Constructivism in particular as theoretical approach to the research question.

The following section of the Literature Review includes existing academic research in the field of European Integration in the context of regional development and also links it to the broader topics of stability, democracy and spread of values. It tracks the patterns of academic research of this region and points out its pretermissions when it comes to the differences between Bulgaria and Romania.

As discussed in the Methods section, the data selection consists of empirical data over the EU integration progress of Bulgaria and Romania - the reports assessing progress under the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism and in the European Commission's annual reports and statistics.

These distinctions will then be explored in the Analysis part through a textual content analysis of the Union's reports and statistics under the constructivist framework in order to

examine why despite the common features, Romania shows different and better results in covering the EU's criteria of corruption and media freedom.

This research's significance is determined by the need of detailed examination of this sample in the academic field, which to further contribute to a better understanding of the specific case and elaborating improvement policies. Effective, accountable, and transparent institutions are essential to achieving consideration for human rights, efficient rule of law, successful governance at all levels. Media freedom and pluralism are fundamental elements of healthy democracies. Weaknesses in these spheres could hinder an effective application of EU laws, policies and programs, and prevent Bulgarians and Romanians from acquiring their full rights as EU citizens. Therefore, my research is based on one such comparison between Bulgaria's and Romania's level of European integration as they represent a case of two states often categorized together in terms of numerous common criteria, which however differ significantly in their advancement.

2. Theoretical Framework

I am going to conduct this research through the theoretical lenses of Constructivism and Social Constructivism, incorporating central concepts of the theory from several main constructivist scholars (i.e. Alexander Wendt, Michael Barnett, Katzenstein and Finnemore) within the other academic discourses of the researched topic and aspects of it.

The two approaches might be quite similar to each other in their fundamental ideas of the social construction of the reality but they differ in the matter of 'how'. According to the Constructivist theory, the core features of international relations are historically and socially constructed. The theory of Social Constructivism, on the other hand, claims that these features are constructed through interaction with other entities. This difference is well incorporated with the plan of my research, as I am to utilize Social Constructivism as a major theoretical perspective in the first two sections of the Literature review in order to situate the issue in a broader social context in terms of the external relations and significance of the entities at hand. Further, as this section is structured narrowing down the focus, in the subsection of the Literature Review, I am to turn to the Constructivist concepts. The purpose of doing so is that the discourse of this research will be brought to a point that requires a more narrowed and subject-oriented approach. Constructivism will help to elaborate better the state-specific features in an answer to the research question.

Applying Social Constructivism to this case is suitable because it provides good theoretical insights on the topic of European integration and the role of the EU as a global actor. This enhances the importance and broader meaning of the case, thus, it contributes to setting the research within the IR field.

On the other hand, Social Constructivism is rather a metatheory in itself – less interested in causal explanations and more interested in interpreting how structures and agents interact and are mutually constitutive. Having this in consideration, I am also going to turn to Constructivism to explain the rest, as it is more focused on the experience and identity of particular units (Bulgaria and Romania in this case). This will be useful for the latter part of this research, which is also more focused on these units rather than in their social settings and helps to explicate both states specifics in this matter.

3. Literature Review

In the following chapter, I will connect the case of Bulgaria and Romania's European Integration in terms of corruption and media freedom to the wider and major IR research areas and provide an overview of the case's aspects and significance. I will track the pattern in the academic research on the topic in order to point out the main trends and misses in them and situate this within relevant theoretical approaches. For this purpose, I will start from presenting the broader context of the case and gradually narrow down the focus.

In the existing IR debate, the topic of this research is part of the broader field of European Integration research and literature, particularly the specifics of the integration of the East and Southeast states. In order to outline the importance of this region and the European Union itself, the first part of this review is aiming to highlight its features as a global actor. Further, as European integration entails elaborating common interests and developing systematic cooperation between states, mutual assistance and spread of standards (Schokking and Anderson, 1960:397); it is strongly related to the wider IR research field on the matter of stability and security, which will constitute the second subtopic of this section. After this, in the next subtopic, I am to narrow down the discussion of integration to the specifics of the Eastern Enlargement, tracking the main academic discourses linked to it. The related literature, as expected, provides a critical overview and points out the issues of the region as it usually comes down to its communist past and level of economic development.

Afterwards, in the fourth part of the review, I will present core concepts and ideas of the academic debates on the matter of corruption and media freedom as phenomenon, largely considered as fundamental characteristics of democratic societies with effective institutions, linking it to the broader IR discussion on the topic of democracy – transparency and accountability. Then, this will be narrowed down to the academic discourse over the issue of corruption and media freedom in Bulgaria and Romania particularly, critically questioning their development in these spheres in order to outline the puzzle of this research again. In this last subsection, I am to discuss the patterns of the related academic research, highlighting its misses, logically leading this research to the methods and analysis part, where I will attempt to fill them.

3.1 EU and the Integration Process

In order to settle my research in the IR academic field, I am to start with outlining its importance and meaning in the international arena. In accordance with Social Constructivism, it is crucial to start from that as the states' identity awareness is determined by its place in world affairs (Jackson and Sorensen, 2006:162). In the case at hand, the major global entity, having an impact on Bulgaria and Romania's situation is the European Union. It has evolved as a leading example of regional interdependence, hence, European integration has developed into a model of regionalism for the international system (Stefanova, 2006:81). This interdependence requires setting certain common norms and values that to keep the entity together through building trust between the member states and in the union itself, which to allow further cooperation and common path toward progress. This spread of mutual standards highly influences the states' domestic policy, thus, alters their identity.

The process of the union's development and integration is a significant factor for building sustainability in Europe, contributing to regional conflict resolution and restoring stability, which is also crucial on a global scale (Stefanova, 2006:81; Pelinka, 2011:23). The progress of the European integration made the EU a major player in the international relations within a globalized environment, therefore, what is happening in its member states is of high importance in the global context as well. As Maull (2005:776) further argues, the union managed to launch a powerful method of governance based on integration, which turned to be successful and made it a subject of interest of many as an organization to get into and cooperate with. This determines the states' striving to be part of it, especially when it comes to the weakest states in the organization – Bulgaria and Romania.

This can best be explained through the social constructivist concept that states crave legitimacy; they are acting according to the values of a broader international community because they believe that the greater the legitimacy, the easier it is to convince others to cooperate (Barnett, 2014:161). The seven successful rounds of enlargement, especially those between 2004 and 2007, which nearly doubled the number of members, are a good example of this, as it strengthened the positions of the organization and brought incontrovertible benefits for the member states (Vachudova, 2014:122).

The subsequent integration consists of economic, political, social and cultural interaction and standards incorporation. It is an ongoing process that has vast influence and effects at global, European, national and local levels, thus, there is a wide variety of academic research on it (Stefanova, 2006:81). The social constructivist perspective determines the social factors as equal or even more important than the material (Jackson and Sorensen, 2006:162), which further means that trade and economic cooperation constitute only part of the deep relations, which the process entails. The European integration means profound interaction between member states, synchronization in their foreign policy, ensuring security and stability of the whole region, which further spread its effect beyond the union.

The convergence on standards, the internationalization of norms, and the emergence of an international community shape the identities and foreign policies of the states (Barnett, 2014:165). Scholars (Sandholtz and Gray, 2003; Stefanova, 2006, Bulmer and Joseph, 2016) have identified and discussed numerous ways in which international factors influence domestic endeavours and interests. The social constructivist turn in IR theory suggests that statehood is dependent on multifaceted processes of recognition and it could be regarded as legitimate only through recognition (Oshri et al, 2016:121). Thus, states, especially weaker ones like Bulgaria and Romania, strive recognition through accepting international values, implementing integrational policies, and entering international organizations.

The EU institutions often view this convergence as a virtue that produces positive consequences on the effectiveness, legitimacy, and credibility of EU's external actions (Marangoni and Raube, 2014:473) (Pech, 2016:9). Thus, the EU countries need to implement those values in their domestic politics in order to establish their positions on the European and the international arena (Pech, 2016:9). In order to achieve simultaneous development of the whole region and hence, to enhance its positions on international level, all its twenty-eight members have delegated by treaties to coordinate their policies in a number of areas and to work within common union's institutions. These factors correspond with my choice of data to be used for the analysis of the case, having the European Commission as one such major EU institution. Regarding that, it is important to notice also, that these institutions not only coordinate but also monitor and report the progress made by each member state.

This widened European and global perspective, presented here, serves as bases for understanding of the integration process and its importance, as well as for clarifying the EU

role both on the international arena and within the domestic states' processes. This is needed for the purpose of my research not only as a base for the following arguments but also because it provides the foundation of the chosen method's data selection.

As discussed above, the European Union has many premises to exercise high levels of impact over Bulgaria and Romania. Moreover, the two states themselves have even more incentives both social and material, to collaborate and strive towards integration. However, specific national factors appear to have a stronger influence over the integration of these states. Below will be discussed the specifics of their integration in order to see why they have reached a discrepancy in their progress.

3.2 Eastern Enlargement

The enlargement of the European Union is meant to consolidate political and economic progress in the Eastern and Southeastern region and foster its integration with the West (Larrabe, 2006:117). However, the EU demonstrates continued activity as an actor of political change and democratization, as argued by Guibernau (2011:38), its integration strategy is still a fragile construction of a community under a process of developing its senses of identity, cooperation and actual level of involvement. Which supplements to what Vachudova explains in her work (2008), how candidate states' governments are fundamentally changing their agendas to implement policy changes to make them EU-compatible.

This is linked to the asymmetric interdependence of the whole enlargement process - the last accepted states have more benefits from joining than the better-developed initial members (Moravcsik and Vachudova, 2003). Therefore, it is in their national interest to catch up with the entry requirements. Yet, as Barnett argues (2014:163), states do not value institutions so much, because they believe in their superiority, but rather because they are symbols that attract resources. Eastern European countries, seeking accession to the EU, implemented various reforms, not only because they see them as beneficial, but because the integration strengthens their positions. This corresponds to the Stefanova's statement (2006:81) that the EU's broader integration strategy in terms of its last enlargement (including Bulgaria and Romania), lacks needed new mechanisms beyond the existing enlargement policies. Therefore, the integration issues of those last accepted states,

appears to be of crucial importance for the stability and further development of the union, reaching global levels of significance.

In this case, it is more suitable to turn to the constructivist concepts of how the reality is constructed – that it is rather a matter of the self-identity and domestic environment of particular entities (Bulgaria and Romania) than of their social interaction. In the constructivist literature (e.g. Katzenstein, 1996) one way of looking at such a case is to study how international norms appear to reinforce dissimilar effects in different states and to further speculate about their specific domestic factors that underlie this variation. Therefore, examining cultural – historic premises and state-specific identity features is crucial in answering the research question.

The literature related with the East and Southeast enlargement is primarily questioning the level of integration of those states, highlighting their specific features, and arguing that the studies within the sphere of European integration should look at their progress differently than the one of the Western states (Klinke, 2015:567). Numerous academics (e.g. Szolucha, 2010; Larrabe, 2006:117) state that the flourishing period for the EU that realized the 2007 enlargement, was followed by extensive enlargement fatigue, which troubled the integration of the newly accepted members. Agnew (2001:30) further argues that, along with the historical, geopolitical, and economic factors, the inclusion of the Eastern states creates ‘an union with various ‘degrees’ of actual membership’.

The 2007 enlargement significantly influenced the union’s political balance and decision-making (Larrabe, 2006:122). Vachudova suggests (2014:123) that the Union’s leaders consider the Balkan states as ones with some geopolitical benefits, however, with small economic advantage. Thereat, these states have greater security risks and lower economic potential than the other members (Vachudova, 2014:123). As she previously has argued, members like Bulgaria and Romania perceive the EU membership similarly to the other post-communist applicants that still wait in the membership queue – as a way for European integration that will contribute for further development in every sphere (Vachudova, 2008). Therefore, it is in their national interest to catch up with the entry requirements.

On the other hand, Appel et al (2006:140) comment that the increased diversity of new members within such an international organization often undermines the integrative project. Kaldor and Vojevoda (1997:59) suggest that the region's lower abilities are due to unfortunate historical processes, which influenced negatively the main course of European

consolidation. While it is commonly argued that the two 2007's accepted states have generally fulfilled the formal institutional requirements by the time of their accession especially in terms of their democratic nature, it is more complicated to evaluate that clearly their level of consolidation of actual democratic behaviour and culture (Kaldor and Vejvoda, 1997:60). As stated by Appel et al (2006:140), there is an extensive amount of academic discussions questioning the Southeast enlargement. It mostly contests the union's ability to assimilate more new members over time and if its norms have been implemented within these new members.

Besides, there is another set of literature more narrowed down at the particular specific of the last-accepted states' (like Bulgaria and Romania) communist past. It is dealing with those states societal and institutional transition toward democratization and European integration (Alexander, 2008; Ekiert, 2015). As Larrabe further argues (2006:135), these countries may share numerous features, in particular, the striving to overcome the political and economic burdens, remained from their communist past and to integrate into Euro-Atlantic institutions, however they still exemplify a divergent group with diverse historical and cultural features and different levels of economic development. Further, Pop-Eleches (2007:142) states, that the shift toward democracy and European integration is indeed more important in those peripheral states, with more unfavourable structural conditions, where the domestic civil society needs greater Western support.

Having these common factors of the region's integration presented, I am to narrow the discussion even more, looking at Bulgaria and Romania's integration in particular and the questions of corruption and media freedom and the deeper significance of these concepts.

3.3 Puzzling Results: Corruption, Media Freedom and Democracy

From the above showed broader social and political perspective on the European integration and Eastern enlargement, in this section, I am to narrow the discussion down to the specific case at hand, looking at Bulgaria and Romania's way to the EU and the issues of corruption and media freedom. I will link these phenomenons to the IR discussion providing a theoretical explanation of their nature.

The academic literature theorizes two main ways to look at the factors, which affect the state's level of corruption. The first channel suggests that economic incentives influence the attitude of the actors toward the cost and the benefit of engaging in corrupt acts (Sandholtz

and Gray, 2003:762). The constructivist approach rejects this one-sided material focus (Jackson and Sorensen, 2006:163). The second one is based on the level of social integration and the transmission of values and norms (Sandholtz and Gray, 2003:762). This is more suitable for the case at hand because it corresponds with the constructivist turn on the topic of international integration - international institutions ability to change state's identities and interests (Wendt, 1992).

As Sandholtz and Gray (2003:762) argue, the norms and standards of the international society have the potential to delegitimize and stigmatize corruption. The better-integrated states are more exposed to normative influences against corruption (Sandholtz and Koetzle, 2000:40). This is related to the EU's integration agenda and the case of Bulgaria and Romania's corruption issues. As discussed previously, the union, through the process of integration, has potential and capacity to alter states' activity, influencing their interests and values. Particularly these two issues are included in the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights, related with human rights, democracy, rule of law and freedom. This outlines them as significant parts of both the international concepts of human rights and the union itself. It also strengthens the research question's significance.

The corruption rates represent a phenomenon determined by strong domestic factors, but a state's corruption level could be also externally influenced (Sandholtz and Gray, 2003:761). States, well integrated into the EU, appear to be more open to import ideas, information and norms, apart from goods and capitals (Sandholtz and Gray, 2003:761). Feebleness in these fields could hinder an effective application of EU laws, policies and programs, and deter Bulgarians and Romanians from acquiring their full rights as EU citizens.

In constructivist terms, Finnemore (1996) and Wendt (1992) agree on the significance of the international factors in shaping state identities, but Wendt largely disregards the role of domestic factors. Martha Finnemore's analysis (1996:128) over the question of national interests in international society recognizes both international and domestic factors in the construction of reality. She argues that when conducting a constructivist analysis, we should start from the state's identities and interests and when we proceed further to the external influences, we should focus on the particular way in which the international society affects the particular state's identities and interests (Finnemore, 1996). This strongly corresponds with the nature of this research – as one more focused on the internal factors and how they determine the external, taking both into consideration.

As Lindstedt and Naurin (2010:301) argue, in the field of international relations, transparency has been linked to regime effectiveness to reduce the risks of conflicts and has a contribution for constituting a potential solution for the weaker sides of democratic accountability. Moreover, there appears to be growing awareness that corruption is not merely a moral problem but also a large hindrance to development and improvement in broad parts of the world (Lindstedt and Naurin, 2010:302).

Media freedom and pluralism are fundamental parts of healthy democracies. If there is a lack of independent media, the release of information is controlled, which is a sign of a potentially corrupted government with capability to affect the public opinion and behaviour (Sandholtz and Koetzle, 2000:32). This is also a mark of an absence of sanctioning mechanism and accountability. Therefore, the existence of corruption in one unit is very likely to be present in its sources of information as well, which creates an issue that highly affects any potential development. The issue of corruption has a reflection in any other aspects of the political, economic, and societal sectors of a state. Particularly, it is a fundamental reason and a core feature of the lack of media freedom. Furthermore, they constitute a top sector of the European Integration – from the entry pre-requirements to a field constantly monitored, improved, and spared further. They relate to its core values and goals; accordingly, they are a major trait which each member needs to contain.

Highly interconnected, the two phenomena disrupt the existence and functioning of all democratic institutions. Therefore, they are largely considered as fundamental characteristics of democratic societies with effective institutions, linking it to the broader IR discussion on the topic of democracy – transparency and accountability.

Democracy is a system, broadly considered as successful and leading to development (Lloyd, 2010:547). The democratic form of government is recognized by the international community as the needed bases for any further social, economic, environmental and overall progress (Lloyd, 2010:547). Therefore, it is a matter of strong commitment of the European institutions, respectively, also by their members (Noutcheva and Bechev, 2008:116). The European Union has become a major entrant of these features, especially since the inclusion of former communist states (Noutcheva and Bechev, 2008:117). The EU's assistance in this matter comes to four main areas, one of which is supporting independent media. They

pursue both top-down and bottom-up approach including democratic institution building and anti-corruption measures (Lloyd, 2010:558).

However, when it comes to the issue of those democratic norms – corruption and media freedom, Susan Rose-Ackerman (1978), states that a more national and individual dimension should be taken into account, appears to be more relevant to the case of Bulgaria and Romania. She suggests that material incentives and simply imposing standards by a former entity cannot exactly explain the origination and transmission of democratic, societal and personal values. That corresponds to the Abbot and Snidal's (2001) emphasis on the deeply intertwined combination of values and interests in addition to the feeling of consequences are the cores of corrupt behaviour. Therefore, the process of integration with all of its structural meaning and theoretical explanation is not enough to understand the case at hand and more state-specific features should be taken into account.

3.4 Chapter Conclusion

The presented Literature Review served to set this research within the IR academic field, as well as, situating it within a broader context. However, coming from those existing academic debates, there seems to be a gap when it comes to deepening the examination of European integration regarding separating the subjects of research into groups due to the specifics of each state's integration. In other words, on the bases of the different scholar's categorizations of states and levels of European integration, there is a place for comparison between the particular subjects within one category.

The common academic approach toward investigating the progress of these two states mismatches the information from the official union's reports. The empirical data from Bulgaria and Romania about corruption and media freedom shows that they are not integrating with the same pace and pattern. Hence, the existing academic research is insufficient and generally fails to track substantial differences between the two states' progress. Therefore, there is a need of further examination in order to understand why this difference appears, what the factors for these delays and failures are – an important question for these states' further development and overall progress of the EU.

Social Constructivism was used to explain the social setting of the case, particularly the process of integration. Constructivism was used to open the discussion about the importance of the states' specific identities in examining those social relations. As I am now

to narrow down the focus to the states' domestic features that influenced the differences in their integration, in the following parts, I am applying constructivist approach, rather than social. Having presented the broader context, narrowing down the focus is suitable for examining certain delays and failures (Pelinka, 2011:26) apparently happening in Bulgaria and Romania.

Accordingly, the following sections will present further research, concentrated on Bulgaria and Romania's development in the researched spheres and highlighting the differences in order to explain the reasons of the variation in their actual improvement.

4. Methods

As discussed in the previous section, there appears to be a gap in the academic debate related to the topic of European Integration and the problems of the South-eastern region in regard with a possible fragmentation of the units it consists of and conducting separate researches on them in order to reach deeper levels of analysis. This paper is one such a case as it provides a comparative analysis between Bulgaria and Romania's level of EU integration in order to discover what led to the Romania's better results.

As stated in the previous chapter, in order to reach the depth of the research question, I would need a more focused approach on the particular units of this research – Bulgaria and Romania. Therefore, I adopt a more institutionalist ontology, having the formal institutions of states as main objects. As described by Mahoney and Rueschemeyer (2003:375-376) this kind of ontology seeks to find features driving social and political outcomes, chain of factors leading up to a phenomenon.

This will be supplemented with an interpretivist epistemological approach as it is suitable to be applied on a research using qualitative methods and it is compatible to the constructivist perspective that is applied in the paper. As Halperin and Heath (2012:39) argue, Interpretivism maintains a non-generalizing approach, which is exactly the case here, as we need to step back from generalizing the two states and look into, interpret the processes that led to the current situation. This approach is relevant also because it entails the need to understand the meaning and the construction of the certain social environment in order to explain a phenomenon (Halperin and Heath, 2012:42). Furthermore, as Neuman (2000:19) suggests, Interpretivism looks into a certain issue as socially constructed rather than objectively determined, which also corresponds well with my research – that Bulgaria and Romania may have common objective factors over which to be put together but exploring their further development employs considering social factors.

According to that, in this section, I will critically discuss possible ways to track and examine Bulgaria and Romania's development within the EU in attempt to cover this gap and provide better understanding of the case.

4.1 Data Selection

My analysis will be focused on the official annual reports of the European Commission from 2007 to 2017, which track both Bulgaria's and Romania's progress and developments after their accession in the European Union along with the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism reports which observe particularly the processes of fighting corruption in both states. The reports from those 10 years' time framework will be my main source of data to analyse. I will go through all of them because the factors, processes and events are not appearing systematically, thus, looking at every third report, for example, would not be sufficient and there are high chances of missing something important.

The reports are appropriate and significant to this case, as they not only provide a broader international perspective, but they represent official European Union documents examining, evaluating and steering a state's growth, which is a core factor for the nature of the researched topic. I have chosen this sampling model because it covers well the whole period of research – the years of integration of Bulgaria and Romania. These documents are also public and available online, which makes them easily accessible still, their validity is strengthened by the fact that they are official information from the union itself.

As discussed in the first section of the Literature review, the choice of data was influenced by the research around the EU's role and the process of integration. Due to the fact that the integration and the efforts for achieving simultaneous development of the whole region happen through common union's institutions and are well tracked by them, it is suitable to examine these processes from the documents issues by those institutions.

The European Commission itself is pivotal to international relations as it has a key role in outlining development policies, which determines its role as a body of global significance. Moreover, as the Commission itself proclaims in its priorities and policy information, ensuring justice, fundamental rights, and democratic change in the member states before all, is a way of strengthening the union's position as an international actor. Therefore, it is engaged with composing development plans for the member states, as well as, extensive monitoring of their progress and issuing the results in reports and statistics.

The Mechanism for Cooperation and Verification (CVM) is a security measure created by the European Commission when Bulgaria and Romania were accessing the European Union due to their difficulties to implement reforms related the fields of the freedom, security and

justice or internal market-policy, which are integral component of the European integration. Under the CVM, the European Commission issues a progress report every 6 months.

Coming from that, these data sets not only provide well-tracked information about the Bulgarian and Romanian integration to the EU, but also are also reliable sources and correspond to the field of this research – European integration.

4.2 Method

To approach the research question, I intent to use a conventional Content Analysis, as this method is used to concentrate on and highlight the main problems within a document.

Content analysis is a suitable method for this research because it provides a systematic study of textual information and enables the research of a bigger number of sources (Halperin and Heath, 2012:318-19), which corresponds to the nature and the volume of textual information, which I have decided to use and described above. It is suitable for this paper because the developments of both Bulgaria and Romania after their accession to the European Union in 2007, especially in terms of corruption and media freedom, are well tracked by the official EU reports.

More specifically, I am to conduct the most common approach in content analysis - a thematic analysis. In it, the coding scheme is based on categories projected to capture the topics of interest within a text (Franzosi, 2004:187). However, one of this method's setbacks is that there cannot be a universal coding scheme due to the very nature of the textual information: different texts emphasize different things, and they allow various ways of looking at them, thus, different investigators could view different things in the same texts (Franzosi, 2004:187). This can be overcome via developing a good and sufficient coding scheme, which further requires copious familiarity with the input text and its characteristics.

Regarding the specific operationalization of the data, I am going to derive the needed information through defining key words and phrases within the texts – corruption, corruption index, abuse of power, malfeasance, bribery, embezzlement, conflict of interests, media, freedom of speech, media freedom, censorship, media owner etc. This corresponds to how Halperin and Heath's explanation of coding in content analysis (2012:323) as involving the identification of passages of the chosen textual data and applying labels to

them that indicate they are examples of some thematic idea. The coding process of such kind enables relatively quick collection of the data from the texts to be examined together, thus different cases to be compared.

Then, considering their particular context within the document and the specific tone of the sentence – whether it relates to a problem or an improvement, measure the states' progress toward coveting of the European Union's norms. This way, going chronologically through the reports and making notes on the search results, I am going to create a narrative to track their development in a comparative manner in order to highlight the differences that result in Romania's better current situation. Then, as suggested by Halperin and Heath (2012:323), the codes will be sorted into groups. They are structured in accordance with the thesis purpose and research question. Therefore, each subtopic represents one such a group - an aspect of the case. These units attempt to fill the gap within the academic debate that is presented in the previous section and to answer the research question – how Romania got better integrated within the EU in terms of corruption and media freedom but Bulgaria could not make such an improvement.

They are created simultaneously while conducting the research. The initial idea of how to organize the big amounts of data was inspired by the Literature Review and theory and the collected information is focused on how the states' identities – culture and specifics and their interaction are main factor of the construction of the reality. The two parts of the Literature review are linked with the first two parts of the Analysis and they are more state-focused. The next two parts of the analysis is inspired and linked to the last section of the Literature Review, representing democratic features, and is more engaged with the societal factors leading to the current situation. This initial organization of the information was very useful as it provides full coverage of the domestic factors of any state's integration – government and society. It was later modified in accordance with the findings. Therefore, sub-sections of these two main ones were created so that the results can be presented in a more structured and organized way. These groups, showing the results of this investigation, will be presented and examined in the following Analysis section.

5. Analysis

As discussed in the previous sections, ever since Bulgaria and Romania were accepted, they have been sternly monitored by the EU and its respective institutions. The reports and data from this 10 years framework, continue to show severe endemic issues in the spheres of corruption and media freedom. With both of them being major bases of democracy and EU values, they harm the overall progress of the states and the trust in the whole enlargement process. Therefore, in this section, the two states' puzzling results will be examined and analysed through the theoretical lances of Constructivism in order to get better insights of how they have developed differently.

This is conducted in accordance with the above-described methodological approaches, thus, the results are divided within four major sections. Each of them represents a major aspect, contributing to the current situation. The first one 'European Integration vs. Deep Corruption' is aiming to point out structural patterns that differ the two states on the bases of an overview of the integration process. The second one - 'Improvement Attempts and the Lack of Such' is tracking and analysing governmental acts, leading to the current situation, and represents the state's 'side' of the case. Then comes the section 'Ambience Hostile for Freedom', presenting another aspect of the research question – how the corruption and media freedom interact to create favourable or hostile environments for one another. The last aspect, that constitutes another RQ feature, is 'Civil Society Engagement and Activism'. It examines the societal side of the case through tracking the patterns in it. The chapter will finish with a conclusion, presenting the insights that I have reached.

The following analysis section will track major political and societal patterns, examine and critically interpret them, in order to investigate the research question of how and why Romania developed differently than Bulgaria in terms of their European integration in the field of corruption and media freedom.

5.1 European Integration vs. Deep Corruption

In constructivist perspective, Finnemore (1996:128) argues that international norms are transmitted to states mostly through international organizations by shaping national policies through influencing states' interests. As Marangoni and Raube (2014:474) state, both states exemplify the whole extent of the union's influence after their accession, but also that as

the EU has a role, the domestic responsibility is still the leading factor in achieving real change. This corresponds to the Katzenstein's view (1996) of the construction of the reality – that internal factors have greater influence on the state's identity, interests, and policy' thus, determine international behaviour. This collision between the external and internal structures - the recognized incentives of integration and cooperation in enforcing anti-corruption and pro-media freedom norms representing the legitimacy and recognition craving versus the domestic factors stopping this from happening, is examined in this section. In terms of methodology, this part was composed through using 'accession', 'reforms', 'corruption', 'evaluation', 'corruption index', 'improvements', 'democracy', 'values', 'implementation', and 'overview' as major key words in the content analysis.

5.1.1 Integration: Overview and Main Trends

The EU membership has provided Bulgaria and Romania with more opportunities, financial resources, and active participation in the EU's governance and decision-making. However, the EU's membership provides additional incentives for creating pluralistic democracy and strive for liberal reforms; serious concerns remain regarding the rule of law, the quality of governance regularly reported in official EU documents along with calls for constraining the corruption. Nonetheless, it has been 10 years since Bulgaria and Romania joined the union, for which period their indicators in all development aspects largely remain below the union's average. For all this time, they have been subjects of unprecedented post-accession monitoring and have shown mixed results in addressing the issues of corruption and media freedom.

Both Bulgaria and Romania submitted official application for EU membership in 1995, which was ensued by numerous reforms in order to fulfil the accession criteria and the union's norms (Schimmelfennig, 2005:834). These reforms consisted of unification and strengthening of their democratic systems, institutions and rule of law; implementation of the international standards of respect to the fundamental human rights, including freedom of expression, media, and civil activism. The integration process toward accession provided certain improvements and development in both states, however, there remained the need of further reforms of the institution structures in both states, along with greater efforts in the fight against corruption and declared that these areas will be strictly monitored.

The EU accession was largely perceived as a milestone for reaching greater socio-economic development and democracy fostering (Kelley, 2004:428). Inspired by the promise of these improvements and by the potential spread of European values and standards, both nations had some significant improvement in terms of corruption for their first year of membership. However, even then, both did not cover the estimated progress they were supposed to achieve according to the EU's development plan but started promisingly.

The events in Romania for this first year are linked their president Traian Băsescu, who was twice threatened to be removed with an impeachment but twice revised in power through change of the law in his interest. This was followed by an instant increase of the corruption rates in the following two years, during which the progress has been back and forward. Strongly criticized by the European Commission, this lack of development has been sanctioned through reduction of the development funds from the union.

Bulgaria, however the initial inspirations, also struggled with corruption and democratic consolidation and largely failed in ensuring basic civil rights through unfinished promised reforms. This failure created a spiral of serious social, political, and economic discontent, strengthened further by the poverty, lack of opportunities, centralization in the major cities and huge demographic crises especially influencing the peripheral regions. These last-mentioned issues were actually worsened with the European membership as it gave possibility for huge migration toward the Western states, creating even more depopulation and drainage of specialists.

It was in 2011 that the situation started to get different in Bulgaria and Romania. Romania again showed improvement, while the data about Bulgaria remained critical with the worsening patterns. Then, 2012 was the point when the patterns changed significantly for Romania due to a large both social and government initiatives and reforms took place.

Bulgaria has never been evaluated better than Romania, however twice they were nearly equal in their evaluation in fighting corruption— in 2009 and in 2014. After 2014, Romania is improving even more rapidly, while Bulgaria is in decline. In 2015, the EC report states that the level of corruption in Bulgaria are three times higher than the average European state. Up until 2017, it continues this pattern of increasing and moving away from Romania's results, which show more and more improvement, however not as fast as planned by the EU. At the last reports, it is even commented the possibility of dividing the two states' Mechanism for Cooperation and Verification reports for the sphere of corruption.

On 25 January 2018, the European Commission released its last report, referring to the analysed 10 years' timeframe, which only confirmed the growing gap between Bulgaria and Romania's developments. The report recognized the need of more reforms and in Romania, although, it stated that since 2014 'the consistency of the progress has started to point to sustainability'. Opposed to its southern neighbour, which implement reforms rather slowly. Within these 10 years, the diverging trajectories of Bulgaria and Romania represent the EU's limits of influence after accession. However, it is still an important factor; local features appear to be more crucial and essential.

5.1.2 Structural Preconditions

These results represent an overview of the development of the corruption issue and provides a grasp of its magnitude. It also shows the difference of the events in these two states that led to the current situation. This lack of improvement in Bulgaria could be interpreted as degeneration of the European values and standards through the nation specifics, leading to a situation of somewhat of a facade democracy. As however at the beginning, the state had the inspirations to improve, it soon became obvious that this progress is not happening, and reforms are not enforced. The higher rates of corruption are indicative of retrogression of the global and European principles that were supposed to be implemented, in favour of personal interest, sacrificing the common wealth and progress. Therefore, it can be even argued that while the political and administrative establishments continually undermine the democratic values, principles and procedures, they do not properly exist with their international meaning and essence. As the state itself maintains favorable environment for corruption, the chances of development are largely compromised.

Comparing this to Romania, the government and the nation there managed to keep the European inspirations and however later, achieved improvement and found ways to fight the above-described unfavorable structural factors. Here comes one of the social and structural differences that the states had even at the beginning of their membership. As discussed in the literature review, they might have similarities in their history, in particularly referring to their common communist history, but as a structural precondition, it is important to note, they experienced this moment quite differently. Romania was under severe poverty and even starvation, however Bulgaria was never in that situation under the

communist rule. Therefore, it was even more essential for the Romanians to now build a better reality. Indicative for this interpretation, is how the events and processes in Romania are constantly compared to what has been under the communist authority. The developments there are often referred to the past, which seems as drawing inspiration and taking a lesson out of it.

Having this as an initial presentation of the dimensions and structural framework of the issue, in the following sections more aspects of the case will be discussed.

5.2 Improvement attempts and the Lack of Such

Continuing the examination of state-specific factors, this section will look into the government's side of the case, using 'government', 'anti-corruption mechanism', 'reforms', 'anti-corruption measures', 'abuse of power', 'malfeasance', 'bribery', and 'embezzlement' as major key words.

To start with, simultaneously with Bulgaria and Romania's accession, the union itself imposed one of the initial anti-corruption mechanisms. It restricts the financial funds it releases for these states when they do not meet the required improvement each year. This measure is significant for both states as they are not so economically wealthy and even more, as through the years, they developed certain extend of dependence on this European financial aid. In correspondence with the previous analysis section about the collision of external and internal interests and actual actions, this mechanism does not seem to have influenced the corruption rates in neither the states. In Bulgaria these funds are decreasing each year, and for Romania, the restrictions have ups and downs related to the other factors that will be discussed further.

This leads back to the state-centric factors examination. One of the most significant government acts that seem to have led to the current situation of discrepancy is the large juridical reform that happened in Romania in 2011-2012. As recognized by The Mechanism for Cooperation and Verification, the juridical system is strongly related with the issue of corruption, thus reforms in the former, stimulate direct improvements in the latter.

The reform constituted of investigations of government officials, key political figures, mayors, magistrates, company' directors, administrators and others. This resulted in a 40 percent decrease in the subjects condemned for corrupt acts in comparison with the

previous year. Since then, the European Commission's assessments of Romania's progress in its efforts to reform its judiciary and to restrain the widespread corruption are becoming increasingly worrying for the authorities in Sofia. While Romania appears firmly committed to tackling high-level corruption, Bulgaria is idle, and the balance for years of EU membership is discouraging. The inexplicable enrichment of part of the political class and its associated senior civil servants and magistrates has long been publicly visible; however, the inmates and prisoners for corruption after 2007 are only two.

The picture in Romania is quite different, where the independent prosecutor's office has been created in order to fight high-level corruption, and has managed to imprison over 1,500 people, most of whom in leading positions, convicted of corruption and abuse of power. These positive law-enforcement actions were also noted in the latest European Commission monitoring report.

Another positive practice, established in Romania, is creating favourable working conditions of the employees in the anti-corruption institutions. In addition to staffing, a strong countering corruption procedure is the detailed depiction of functions and procedures for investigating corruption and illegal enrichment.

All these government initiatives resulted in small but steadily increasing immediate economic growth of the state as they created more favourable environment for starting local businesses and attracting investments.

Bulgaria, on the other side, have serious obstacles in order to reach the results of Romania's corruption fight. The first major problem is related to the questionable independence and weak accountability mechanisms of the prosecution. There seems to lack a political consensus in the country needed to amend the current inefficient legislation. Such revision is needed also for boosting the prosecution office effectivity and independence from the executive and the judiciary power.

The lack of effective judicial reform seems to be the second major obstacle in the fight against corruption in Bulgaria. There are virtually no convictions for high-level corruption, which is by itself an evidence for the strong political influence, and simultaneously – dependence on the judiciary. This further contributes for cumbersome litigation, combined with countless procedural and legal obstacles leading to possibility of cloaking of judicial cases with suspicious nature.

Additionally, as multiple times criticized by the EC, the responsibility for the fight against corruption in Bulgaria falls on a large number of institutions with weak and fragmented coordination between them.

As can be observed in the information, presented above, the context around the given key words in the reports is rather positive and optimistic in regards to the situation in Romania, simultaneously, negative and criticizing for Bulgaria.

The widespread corruption practices hamper the economic development and create uncertainty among the population, foreign investors and entrepreneurs. The lack of adequate measures overtime led to general uncertainty and distrust by the population, which is at the same time suffering because of the weak economic development. This subsequently creates favourable circumstances for establishing a pattern of deep corruption on all levels, leading this research to the next section - analysing the established hostile ambience.

5.3 Ambience Hostile for Freedom

As discussed in the Literature review, the specific aspect of media freedom is also rather critical as it symbolizes a main pillar of today's, and particularly the European society's identity and its core value – democracy. Together with the matter of corruption, they create a sector between the government and the society, created by and mixing both. The most used key words for this section are 'media', 'freedom of speech', 'media freedom', 'censorship', 'media owner', and 'conflict of interests',

5.3.1 Media Climate

Just as with the corruption rates, the situation with the media is also improving at first in both states. However slowly and insufficiently according to the plans, they show certain progress. These changes for the following three years when the Bulgarian media started its decline and already in 2014, Romania is sufficiently better according to all official reports.

Even more, the later reports suggest that Bulgaria has the lowest ranking in the EU and the reports severely criticize that the media control there is in the hands of politicians and interest groups. The report from 2017 goes even further, saying that Bulgaria's media freedom is at even worse rates than it was before the accession.

The Bulgarian government and its institutions are stated to be exercising huge pressure and censorship as means of repression against political and public opponents, which damages the proper functioning of the whole democratic process.

There is also huge, systematic, and widely known pressure against any independent media and individuals representing it. This strain is against all of the small media too, especially regional ones, that are reported to work in a violent environment. The only editorials, which could function with a certain level of comfort, are the ones, which have connections with the local authorities and big oligarch, therefore, supposedly, serve their interests.

As the media represent a major mechanism between the society and the government, it is crucial for shaping their identity – opinions, collectiveness and multiple other features, which then forms an altered culture. If we turn back to the societies at hand, it is important to remind of their communist past, discussed in the Literature Review. As back then, the media was owned by the state and there was barely any alternative source of information, it was broadly used for the own purposes of the leading elites. There is also another ‘tradition’ that highlights the importance of the media in those states – the society is used to not having alternative sources and simply get information from the easiest place. This phenomenon represents how reality is constructed by other historical and cultural factors.

The issue of media ownership is another factor that undoubtedly has a huge influence on its freedom. Freedom of the media is not possible without economic independence. The underlining reason for this issue is considered to be the lack of financing from sources different from the ones, having political interests in them.

During the last 10 years, the media market in Bulgaria is in a continuous rapid deterioration. This is partly due to the above-mentioned inability to maintain independent media, following that, the quality of the media inevitably is worsening too. This could be measured in the growing disregard of common international journalistic rules and standards by, for example, spreading fake news, in order to enhance the number of readers. This issue creates a monopoly over the media.

This is exactly the case with Bulgaria as the media ownership is concentrated in the hands of few owners connecting politicians and big business. In Romania, after the very beginning of their membership, the situation with the media remained in somewhat of a stagnation about which the EC’s report from 2013 showed large criticism. In 2014, this criticism was

answered with an investigation under the previously discussed juridical mechanisms, when corrupted big media owners were imprisoned. This is just one of the examples of Romania's readiness and attempts for change, which Bulgaria broadly lacks.

This was followed and supplemented by even more intense policy supporting media freedom, not only investigating and punishing crimes against it but also providing the editorials a safe environment and encouraging them to work ethically. This led to a pattern of gradual improvement of the media sphere in Romania, distinguishing it more from the situation in Bulgaria.

The European Commission also recognizes the overall global worsening of the media freedom during recent years, however, they remain critical and intolerant for the EU member states' media situation and require immediate changes for cases like Bulgaria, where it is rapidly exacerbating. This situation is indicative for lack of democracy and freedom of speech – major global and European values. Moreover, the failure of protecting the independent media leads to many broader issues, corruption, lack of transparency and mass manipulation, which worsens the prospects of progress and improvement.

5.3.2 Media Freedom as Corruption Component and Vice Versa

The two issues – media freedom and connection, are incredibly interconnected, as each is a component of the other. Looking at the specific case at hand and its dimensions, explained above, there are several other aspects of this relation.

To start with, the European Union interference in this sphere is both corrupted and inappropriately reflected in the media. The funds given to Bulgaria for stimulation media independence lacks any transparency at a national level. As it goes through the government and its institutions, it does not reach the media that it is aimed to enhance; corrupted government parts direct the financial help towards the government serving media, therefore, damages the media ownership and worsens the situation for small media. Even more, in the case of Bulgaria, this money is in many cases the main finance that maintains editorials, therefore, Bulgaria has been continuously asked to increase the transparency of this process.

This way, the financial support from the EU, going through the government, reaches only its loyal media, which guarantees that its activity will be reflected according to their

interests. Therefore, this process shows the two ways connection of corruption and media freedom – both corruption damages the potential development of free media, meanwhile, the lack of such media encourages the increase of corruption.

This relation is highly linked to the media's business model. First, the gradual disappearance of the traditional press media and the decline of the national televisions auditory has resulted in an increase in the internet media, which is more widely available. Those factors make the media sphere less attractive for investment, especially foreign such, in national media. This, in turn, makes the investment in media more attractive to people who have other, more personal interests in them. In this case, it is a question of time the business-oriented investors are replaced with politically motivated actors, who see the media simply as a mechanism to influence of the public opinion and control over the information that reaches the people.

In this sense, at the beginning of their EU membership, the situation in Romania was slightly worse, as there was not only political influence, but in general lack of much information. Later, it started to improve with the reforms of the juridical system and the other anti-corruption mechanisms, however, Bulgaria started to worsen.

The situation in Bulgaria is a strong example of the relation between the two issues. The process of change of the media ownership started straight after the state's accession in 2007 and for these ten years, concentrated more than 80% of it in the hands of one person. In such a case, the media is no longer working according to the principles of the market, but rather as a weapon for political conflicts and public manipulation. It becomes a mechanism enhancing corruption as it makes the public, the civil society 'blind' for what is actually happening; not only it lacks proper investigative journalism, which to unveil the malfunctioning of the institutions, which is a means to fight corruption, but also, through the materials that are issued, represents direct examples of it.

The media appears to be an intermediary between the state and the civil society. In healthy democracies, it is a lever in favour of the society but in disrupted ones – it is a leverage in the hands of the state. Instead of uncovering illegal or unethical processes (corruption), it is rather serving to hide them as in the case at hand. Therefore, having presented the state's affairs in terms of integration, in the following section I will also discuss the civil society's awareness and actions toward improvement.

5.4 Civil Society Engagement and Activism

As a feature of healthy democracies, civil activism and engagement are also significant for the case at hand because the related processes in both Bulgaria and Romania are not only indicative factors of corruption and media freedom, but also strongly connected to the progress in these areas. As discussed in the Literature Review, the issues of corruption and media freedom are also such factors of democracy, therefore, the civil society's consciousness over that area is important when examining it. Moreover, the protests and demonstrations in Bulgaria and Romania over those 10 years are largely striving to make a statement and a change in exactly these fields, thus, it is significant how they went differently and resulted in the differences in the current situation as well.

I am to analytically present what happened in both states over these years and more importantly, the results of this activism. Along with the civil actions, directly related to the corruption and media freedom, I will also shortly mention the other major protests and campaigns that happened just to create better understanding of the social construction of the civil engagement aspect – the mentality and values of the people. The main key words used in this part of the analysis are 'society', 'civil society', 'protest', 'demonstration', 'unrest', 'public', 'public dissatisfaction', and similar.

5.4.1 Bulgaria

To start with, with the acceptance of Bulgaria within the union, two major societal groups – the teachers (September-November 2007) and the police officers (December 2008 – March 2009) were the first to demand an increase in the standards of their institutions, which are major ones within any state. Inspired by the idea of Europeanization and the promised improvements of the institutional systems, they were very similar in their required government actions – salary increasement and overall optimization and improvement of the systems and in the persistence of the participants. The teachers' protest resulted positively as they received what they asked for, however, for the police this was just a beginning of demonstrations that will happen multiple times again over the researched years and will gain success up in 2017 – 2018. It is indicative that the first societal disturbance after the accession come from government institutions'employees.

Meanwhile, in January 2009 was the first anti-corruption protest not long after the assessment in the EU. The huge riots were striving for government's resignation, the same government that was in power when Bulgaria became a member and was raising serious questions around its capability to achieve EU integration. It did not have the wanted result.

Then a small demonstration against corruption happened in January 2010 provoked by leaked information about acts of the government and its security institutions, which are reported to be violating fundamental human rights through mass monitoring. This is again a matter of corruption within the relevant government services as the demonstration stated, however, it did not attract many people and did not have a result.

Then comes a chain of events in 2013 – the most significant year when it comes to civil activism. Starting in January, a huge protest wave breaks out around the state provoked by the high prizes of electricity and the monopolism. They soon turn to be against the malfunctioning institutions and the high-level corruption and resulted in the resignation of the ruling party. This was followed by the biggest protests within this 10 years framework and they were against the newly elected government. They required renovation in the system and staff of the higher institutions and immediate resignation of the current government. They continued from May till July, and did not have the required results, therefore, the protest were massively renewed in September and continued through October and November with huge demonstrations and occupation of the government building. They resulted in change of the government and new elections in which the initial party came to power again July 2014.

During the following years, there were only small-scale demonstrations, mainly from certain professional groups asking for improvement of their spheres and salary increasement that did not have results.

Overall, the above presented information of the civil activism in Bulgaria within 2007-2017 period show a pattern of declining interest. Starting very strong and promising at the beginning, when people show better and higher engagement with the political and social situation and are more willing to go on the streets and require what they have been promised or protect their interest if something is going wrong. However, they largely face

failure, they culminate in 2013 when the whole year is marked by rebellious demonstrations all around the state, which has contradictory success but generally does not change in the situation.

5.4.2 Romania

In Romania, the demand for higher standard also started in the year of its EU acceptance – in June hundreds of retired people protested in Bucharest and other cities requiring a pension increasement. Again, similar to Bulgaria, the civil discontent started from certain profession-based groups and were inspired by the expectation of improvement with the EU membership. In October 2008, there is a big workers and trade unionists protest, followed by one of the police officers in September 2010 for better salaries and condition. The latter, however, triggered a chain of massive demonstrations around the parliament that many more people apart from the police officers joined. This resulted in resignation of the internal minister, which was partial success, as the protesters wanted the government's resignation.

The following two years were silent and calm. The next protests happened in 2012 against a new health reform that again soon turned to be about government's resignation. The protests were rather violent and had two stages - both took place all around the country and resulted in government's resignation.

In 2012 the Romanians had their first environmental against the controversial exploitation of shale gas, which continued on waves until 2014. In September 2013, another environmental protests took place in all the major cities in Romania and was against a big mining project. It ended in February 2014 and the nation received what it demanded – the project was canceled.

That is something similar between Bulgaria and Romania – the small-scale movements from various societal groups that can not attract massive participation, are largely overlooked and ineffective.

In November 2014, the results from the presidential elections brought the public on the streets again to protest with the accusations of manipulations of the vote. This led to immediate organization of new elections.

The next big protests were at the end of October 2015, provoked by a fire accident in a club due to lack of safety measures. This provoked the biggest protest around the country. The people insisted for immediate resignation of the Prime Minister and for the first time, the discontent was also against the Orthodox Church, wanting the resignation of its Patriarch due to inappropriate statements of their representatives. The protesters insisted also to impose taxes on the church because it constitutes one of the biggest and richest private institution in the country. The demonstrations resulted in resignation of the government and the Prime Minister the same month.

The next mass protests broke out in February 2017 as the government tried to make changes in the Penal Code especially in regard to the charges of corruption, that included releasing some of the already imprisoned high officials charged of corruption. On the same month, the contested ordinance was withdrawn and the Minister of Justice resigned.

Overall, the civil engagement demonstrations over the 2007-2017 framework were largely successful and achieved relatively fast results. Another pattern that is observed is that the attendance was increased.

5.4.3 Interpretations

From the above presented overview of the civil activism acts in Bulgaria and Romania over the given time period (2007-2017), there are several conclusions to bring up.

First of all, the pattern of participation and scale of the protests is different: in Romania each new movement drags more and more people on the streets and the most significant acts of civil discontent (2010, 2012, 2015, 2017) are happening all around the country; having mass participation everywhere. In Bulgaria the activism reaches its peak in 2013 when the protests are (as in Romania) massive all around the country, apart from that, the attendance is declining. Interpreting this pattern, it shows to what extent the people care, keep themselves informed, and are willing to oppose to a government's decision that is against their interests.

Of course, the above-described pattern is influenced by other factors as well, one of the major ones is the pattern of effectiveness and positive results. In Bulgaria, the protesters get what they require three times over this framework – with the teachers strike in 2007; and

with the two waves of protests in 2013. However, if we look at this 'success' it is actually not such as the first protest wave brings one government down and the second one raises it up. After this very active year and the disappointment that it brought, the civil activism drastically drops. In Romania, each of the massive protests reach results within a month or two. This seem to empower the nation as each new time there is something going wrong, more and more people come to the streets.

Another significant factor is what people protest for. In Romania, people would go on the street more provoked by particular events and actions that they find against their interests and their aim is requiring the government to take responsibility for it, mostly through resignation, but they are generally more specific. In Bulgaria, even if the demonstration is provoked from something specific, it turns to massive discontent and civil fight against the government and the massive corruption in the country.

In addition, the Romanian nation seems to be more interested in what is going on, have strong opinions about it, and to be united around them.

Moreover, applying the above discussed situation of the media freedom within those two states, it is also a strong factor for the extent of which the nations are informed and the probability of this information to be manipulated and corrupted, it is applicable to the lack of overall interests and critical thinking, government opposition, information of what is actually happening in Bulgaria.

Having tracked the patterns, putted within the constructivist framework, the government, the media freedom, and decline corruption, have formed a more active and engaged civil society that in indeed now having strong influence and power in constructing its own reality. On the other hand, having one media manipulated society, whose acts of discontent have largely met failure, results in lack of civil engagement and a situation in it the society is not only not willing to take action, but can not unite and construct their system in accordance to the nation's interest. When corruption is on every level, the information that reaches people is largely manipulated, the values and common goals of the nation are corroding and these results in inactiveness, thus, more media dependency and corruption.

5.5 Chapter Conclusion

Following the identified misses of the academic debates, discussed in the Literature Review chapter regarding the different development of Bulgaria and Romania, this one presented deeper insights of what and how happened dissimilar after the accession of those two states.

As pointed out here, there are four major aspects of the variations in their path within the European Union – the structural dimensions of the issues; the media freedom and corruption favoring or hindering one another; the actual fight in terms of established mechanisms and reforms that happened; and the extent and effectiveness of civil activism and engagement. All those appear as answers to the research question; however, they are incredibly interconnected and dependent of each other. Examining them, led to the conclusion that various structural and societal factors such as national identity and values, ability to unite, eagerness to seek information and fight are the base of the differences. Looking at them through the lances of Constructivism, they explain well the failed integration as when the national specifics (identity and values) are in odds with the about-to-be-integrated international ones and result in a continuously failing government and inability to fight for social justice, create a hostile environment for international integration. This is the case with Bulgaria and Romania's way in the European Union in which, the latter one better manages to unite around those international values, and the former one fails.

6. Conclusion

The case of the Bulgarian and Romanian integration in the European Union has its roots deep into the IR academic debates over the role of the EU and its significance as a global actor; factor of stability; vehicle of fundamental values; force of progress and standards. Then, looking at the specific issues of corruption and media freedom, further relates the subject of this thesis with the IR discourse of democracy and human rights. This enhances even more the importance of this case and makes it one of global concern as a troubled integration in the EU is provoking the overall stability and compromises the union's place on the international arena. All these previous academic research, presented in the Literature Review, serve as bases for the further investigation of the case, situating it within the IR field and providing a foundation for further research. However, as discussed above, it has one big lapse – it fails to calculate the difference of the development of the two states after their accession in the European Union. As they have been always put together on the bases of many mutual features, I argue that it is important to look at them separately in order to come to the depth of the question – how and why after their accession, Romania managed to improve greatly in terms of fighting corruption and ensuring media freedom and Bulgaria largely failed.

Applying the theory of Constructivism helped in investigating this research question as it provided convenient approach and explanation. First, utilizing ideas and concepts from its social division regarding internationalization and integration of values and standards in the first two sections of the Literature Review helped to explain the broaden scale and meaning of the issue. Second, when narrowing the topic down in the latter two sections of the Literature Review and in the Analysis part, it serves to explain the nations' specific features – identity and values that overall diverges them. This is supplemented by an interpretivist approach in the analysis to track and explain the aspects of the case in an answer to the research question.

The above mentioned lapses of the academic discourse on the topic of Bulgaria and Romania's integration in the EU are attempt to be covered in the Analysis chapter, using qualitative content analysis on the official reports issued by the European Commission on the topic of the two states' progress.

Overall, this resulted in drawing four major aspects of the case that to answer the research question of how and why Romania is better integrated in the European Union than Bulgaria if they have so many similarities as the previous academic discourses suggest. The first one is referring to the dimensions of corruption as nationally embodied phenomenon. The second aspect that affects the current situation of divergences is what attempts from improvement by the side of the government have been done in both states for this 10 years period and what are the results. The third one is rather looking into the connection of media freedom and corruption as features strongly dependent of each other, also as a layer between the government, presented in the previous section, and the society, which is then discussed in the next. The last identified big aspect is the civil society conscious regarding social and political processes, resulting in activism and overall engagement and interest in the government's affairs and decisions. These four aspects are incredibly interrelated, each being a factor of the others.

My assumptions from conducting this research, after all, come to the need of this topic to be brought up and highlighted as these integration failures potentially undermine the democratic foundations of the European Union, thus, its position on the international arena as a major global enforcer of democratic values. There is severe, broadly recognized imbalance between the two states and the other members of the union in terms of their overall progress and standards, which is an issue itself, but the discrepancies between the two are just as important to be looked at in order to potentially improve and adapt to the union standards.

Bulgaria and Romania are states with multiple similarities and the difficulties, coming along with their further development, are results of inherently ineffective political, social, and economic structures, leading to one troubled adaptation to the European community's values and standards. The process of reformation in both is

not completed, but as shown above, Romania has already taken up the right path toward improvement.

Resolving the integration burdens requires focused efforts, unity, and proactive approach both from the side of the government and even more importantly – from the civil society. As identified in the four aspects of the issue, the institutions need to strive for more effective and transparent functioning that to increase the trust in them and reduce the corruption levels. This, however, also requires a strong civil society, which to not settle with injustice, maintains itself informed and engaged with the state's affairs, constantly demand improvement, truth, and accountability.

To conclude with, the topic of Bulgaria and Romania's integration within the European Union is of major importance for the international system. Comparing them is valuable, because it shows which practices seem to be effective and which processes appear as burdening the overall progress, which is important to be investigated in order to achieve improvement. Here, I compared the issues of corruption and media freedom in them in particular, but there is place for further research on the topic of their integration in order to reach the full depths and range of aspects of this problem as it is one of international significance.

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