Comparison of Radical Right-Wing Parties in Bulgaria and Romania: The National Movement of Ataka and the Great Romania Party

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Abstract: *This paper focuses on a comparison of two radical right-wing parties, Ataka and the Great Romania Party, their positions in the national party system, and their relationships with the governing parties as well as with other national right-wing parties. In this essay the party programmes, electorate, attitude to minorities, and degree of nationalism will be compared. Another important part of this paper is comparison of the election results of these parties and their chances of remaining in the national parliaments (and thus becoming a crucial part of party system). All the details mentioned above will be analyzed against the background of theories of radical right-wing parties.*

Key words: *Bulgaria, Minorities, Nationalism, Party systems, Populism, Radical right-wing parties, Romania, Xenophobia*

Introduction

There were many economic and political changes in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989, and the topic of rising ethnic nationalism was (re)opened. In Balkan countries like Bulgaria and Romania, the elites have artificially provoked nationalist tendencies in order to acquire public support. The defence of national interests and populist slogans were claimed in the 90's in Romania by the radical parties[2] as well as the government parties. Conversely, nationalist proclamations by the parties in Bulgaria could be found exclusively on the periphery of the political spectrum.

The aim of this paper is to analyze two radical right-wing parties that were represented in the national parliaments in the time of entry to the European Union – the Bulgarian National Movement of Ataka (Ataka, *Natsionalen Săyuz Ataka*), and the Great Romania Party (PRM, *Partidul Romania Mare*) in Romania. The goal of the present study is to compare these parties, their programmes, electorate, electoral results, and their position on the political playing field of these countries in the period starting after the last elections before accession to the EU (2004 for Romania and 2005 for Bulgaria) up until spring 2009. This article provides an overview of the PRM's situation in Romania in the 90's to better understand its current position.

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[2] The terms radical and extreme right-wing parties will be explained in the first chapter.

The work has been divided thematically into three parts. After an introduction of the theoretical framework, the discussion moves to the analysis of the party programmes. I examine the party programmes of PRM and Ataka according to these criteria: national doctrine, economic and foreign policies, and attitudes towards minorities. But to get a more complex idea of party programmes, another point of comparison is added – electorate. In the final part of the paper I analyse the position of PRM and Ataka in the political spectrum.

Why is it appropriate to classify these parties as radical right? What are the similarities in their programmes? How do they influence the behaviour of other parliamentary parties in these countries? I will try to find answers to these questions in this article.

1 Theoretical framework of radical right-wing parties in the post-communist area

Many authors deal with theories of radicalism, extremism and populism of right-wing parties (Backes, Jesse 2005; Betz 1998; Ramet 1999; Mudde 2000) that produce a very extensive list of theoretical definition of the right. I will mention only a few of them, and try to apply them to PRM and Ataka.

First, before I move to typologies of radical right, I have to differentiate between the terms of radicalism, extremism, and populism. Richard Stöss has identified the essential characteristics of extreme right: nationalism, rejection of equal rights, and rejection of democratic rules and humanistic ideology (Stöss, quoted according to Ramet 1999: 6). Stöss as well as Mareš describe the main sign of extremism: an antidemocratic character, which stands in opposition to a constitutional system (Mareš 2003: 21). Extremism is one pole of the continuum democracy – extremism. Radicalism stands between democracy and extremism but still belongs to the constitutional system. It has been accepted that radical right parties are completely dissatisfied with plural democracy and protection of rights, and very critical of the democratic form of governance (Mareš 2003: 34).[3] Radical parties criticise democratic rules and demand deep changes, but at the same time they accept the state's monopoly on political violence (Mareš 2000: 34).

Populism is another term necessary to explain. In contrast to extremism and radicalism, populism indicates methods and ways used to gain the public support and political power. The right-wing populists demagogically pit current mood and prejudice against the ruling class. They

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[3] Radical right-wing parties are anti-modern, anti-western, anti-European. They fight against individual values (freedom, self-determination), democracy and political parties, against anything foreign, and against immigrants (Mareš 2003: 35).

offer seemingly simple solutions to every significant problem – everything will be solved after we solve the question of asylum seekers, immigrants and minorities (Mareš 2003: 35).

Hans-Georg Betz has defined radical right-wing parties with some criteria that are valid for all democracies: a fundamental rejection of the democratic rule of the game, of individual liberty, and of the principle of individual equality and equal rights, and their replacement by an authoritarian system are based on race, ethnicity or religion (Betz, Immerfall 1998: 3).[4] This typology is suitable for understanding radical right-wing parties and their categorization. Nevertheless, the typology of Casse Mudde seems to be the most appropriate for applying to the radical right-wing parties in Romania and Bulgaria, and that is why I use this theory for the classification of PRM and Ataka.

C. Mudde has set forth criteria defining the radical right as well as types of right-wing parties. He defines the radical right in terms of four characteristics: nationalism, xenophobia, law and order, and a programme of welfare chauvinism (Mudde 2000: 177). Parties promoting a nationalistic doctrine call for political and cultural unity to produce a monocultural society dominated by the state. They speak out against internal enemies (homosexuals) and external enemies (supranational organisations). The socioeconomic programme is based on the dichotomy "us" and "them", which defines a group of one's own people to whom the social benefits are addressed (Mudde 2000: 177).

When we talk about radical "right-wing" parties, we have to consider the specific meaning the term has in the two countries. The basic description of PRM and Ataka (anti-Semitism, nationalism, xenophobia, law and order, anti-democracy) corresponds with all the theories of the radical right mentioned above. The emphasis on the strong role of state in the welfare area shows its similarity with the left-wing parties. If we proceed from Mudde's theory that this is one of the basic characteristics of the radical right-wing parties, we can then conclude that PRM and Ataka are both radical right-wing parties, as they fulfil all of Mudde's criteria. If we look at the spectrum democracy – radical right – extreme right, it is possible to conclude that Ataka and PRM belong on the radical right also from this point of view. They participate in democratic mechanisms and recognize the legitimacy of the state's monopoly on physical violence. They do not try to destroy the democratic form of government but focus on its radical change.

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[4] He distinguishes two ideal types – national populist and neo-liberal populist parties. But he adds that these categories are only ideal types, and many of the right-wing parties have the signs of both types (Betz 1994: 108). If we try to apply this theory to PRM and Ataka, we can conclude that both are among the national populist parties.

In analysing the radical right-wing parties we must consider the territorial, cultural and historical differences between areas, specifically differences between countries in Central and Eastern Europe. For this area, some particular categories of radical right-wing parties have been set. Sabrina Ramet has defined five categories, the borders of which are porous: ultranationalist, fascist, clerical, ultraconservative and radical populist (Ramet 1999: 6). PRM and Ataka also use populist strategies to gain more attention for themselves and to gain voter support. According to the criteria for these groups, we can in my opinion rank PRM and Ataka as radical populist parties. Mudde has also divided radical right-wing parties in the post-communist area into several groups. PRM is among the extreme right-wing communist parties that connect nationalistic ideas with nostalgia for the communist regime. Ataka does not advocate the return of communism, so it can be placed into the category of post-communist extreme right-wing parties that are newly established and focus on current political problems (Mudde, quoted according to Mareš 2003: 52).

2 Comparison of party programmes and electorate

Party programmes are analysed in this chapter according to these criteria: national doctrine, economic and foreign policies, and attitudes toward minorities. Some of them are similar to Mudde's criteria for the radical right-wing parties: nationalism (national doctrine), xenophobia (attitudes to minorities), and welfare chauvinism (economic policy). I will also compare the electorate of PRM and Ataka to get more complex information about both parties.

2.1   <u>Programmes</u>

2.1.1   National Doctrine

The basis of the PRM party programme is the National Doctrine proclaimed in 1993 with the goal of a prosperous state covering the sovereign, independent, and integral territory of the Romanian nation (National Doctrine 2008)[5]. Emphasis is placed on national values and traditions, defence of national interests, and culture and religion. The Romanian state is obligated to protect all citizens, and citizens are conversely obligated to protect Romanian national interests (National Doctrine 2008). The programme of the National Movement of Ataka speaks in the same way. Bulgaria is, according to the programme, a state of one nationality, based on a common religion, culture, and ethnicity. Ataka advocates an official religion, participation by

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[5] National Doctrine is a long-term party programme; the main ideas established in 1993, still valid for the last elections in November 2008.

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Bulgarian Orthodox Church in legislation, and the establishment of compulsory religious teaching at basic school. Ataka also demands the full prohibition of and clearly defined sanctions against ethnic parties and separatist organisations (20 Principles of Ataka Party 2009; Programme Scheme 2009)[6].

We can find similarities in their programmes, and in their thinking about the political development after 1989; both parties regard the economic situation after the fall of communism as completely unacceptable, and call for radical change. PRM describes the fall of Ceauşescu's regime as an international conspiracy of USA, USSR and Hungary (Gallagher 2003: 12); therefore it calls for punishing the perpetrators of economic and social disaster after 1989 (National Doctrine 2008). Like PRM, Ataka brands most Bulgarian politicians and activists for human and minority rights as national traitors, and calls for sanctions against those who vilify Bulgaria (20 Principles of Ataka Party 2009). We find differing opinions about the former communist regimes. PRM glorifies N. Ceauşescu[7] as national hero who fought for independence of Romania (Shafir 1999: 214). We do not find a similar position in the programme of Ataka, although its economic demands are close to the economic system of the previous regime (see chapter Economic policy). The communist regime in Bulgaria, despite its paternalism, did not have the same experience as that of Romania.

2.1.2 Economic policy

The economic parts of their programmes are almost identical. Both parties promote full nationalization of industry, criticise the effects of globalisation on national economies, and voice their fear of the open market after the joining the EU. The important part of the programmes deals with the generous welfare system. PRM promotes a balanced wage policy, parity in taxes and income between social classes, the return of Romanian property from foreigners, etc. (National Doctrine 2008). Ataka also demands re-nationalization of strategic factories as well as a strong welfare state (Programme Scheme 2009). Ataka rejects the principles of cooperation with the IMF because income and taxes should appropriate to the needs of Bulgaria and not the IMF (Ganev 2006: 87).

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[6] 20 Principles of Ataka Party is a long-term party programme; the Programme Scheme includes more current demands; both are valid for the next elections in June 2009.

[7] As well as general I. Antonescu who ruled in the country during WWII.

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2.1.3   Foreign policy

Attitudes towards joining the EU are clearly defined in the programmes of both parties. PRM's opinion on European integration is generally less negative than Ataka's. Ataka presents clear opposition to the EU. PRM, on the other hand, does not disapprove of Romanian membership, but places emphasis on protecting national interests (National Doctrine 2008). Today Ataka does not demand that Bulgaria leave the EU; nevertheless they call for revising some of the documents that endanger the national interests of Bulgaria (shutting down the nuclear power station in Kozloduj, for example) (Programme Scheme 2009).

We can observe marked distinctions in the parties' position towards the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. While PRM consider NATO the only possible instrument to protect the strategic interests of Romania, Ataka rejects Bulgaria's membership in NATO and calls for revision of the treaty, non-participation in military action, full neutrality, and the absence of foreign military bases in Bulgaria (20 Principles of Ataka Party 2009). On the contrary, PRM demands a very strong military state, thinks that Romania should play a mediator's role between NATO and Russia, which is (according to the PRM programme) a very important partner of Romania (National Doctrine 2008).

2.1.4   Minorities and territorial requirements

The problem of ethnic minorities is widespread in the Balkan countries. Romania is a quite homogenous state, with 89 % Romanian population, and 11 % consisting of Hungarians (Harghita, Covasna and Mureş), the Roma, a declining German population (in Timiş, Sibiu, and Braşov), plus Jews (7–9 thousand) located mostly in the capital, and others.[8] In Bulgaria the minority population is almost 17 %, which represents a greater potential for ethnic tensions. The Turks (9.4 %) and the Roma (4.7 %) are the largest minorities (Volgyi 2007: 4).

Only PRM makes territorial demands (because of the situation in Romania). There were increased Romanian demands to restore the historical territory of Romania in first few years after

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[8] Other minorities: small numbers of Poles in Bucovina (Austria–Hungary attracted Polish miners, who settled there from the Krakow region in Poland in the 19th century), Serbs, Croats, Slovaks and Banat Bulgarians (in Banat), Ukrainians (in Maramureş and Bukovina), Greeks (Brăila, Constanţa), Turks and Tatars (in Constanţa), Armenians, Great Russians (Lippovans, in Tulcea). Some minorities have one seat set aside for them in the Parliament to represent them in the political structure of Romania (Serafim 1999: 3).

the fall of Ceauşescu's regime.[9] PRM wants to protect the people of Romanian nationality who straggled into many countries (olahi, vlahi, blahi, rumeri, moldoveni, nistreni) and speaks of the Moldavians as ethnic Romanians[10] (National Doctrine 2008). Because of the situation with the Romanian Hungarians, PRM has become less outspoken on this topic. PRM has feared that these demands could justify counter-demands by the Romanian Hungarians in Transylvania (Hollis 1999: 283).

Both countries have avoided violent ethnic conflicts, with the exception of the early 90's when ethnic conflict between Romanian and Hungarian broke out in Transylvania. Interethnic relations in Romania became an important issue at the beginning of the new democratic regime (Carey 1997: 149). Bulgaria, unlike Romania, has been able to avoid the threat of ethnic conflict. The nationalist parties were weak and were unable to institutionalize their political demands. Although these parties had a strong potential because of the presence of ethnic minorities, their opportunities have been narrowing, and they find themselves at the margin of the political spectrum (Beichelt, Minkenberg 2003: 17). The Turkish minority has established its own party, The Movement for Rights and Freedom (DPF, *Dvizhenie za Prava i Svobodi*) has occupied the political centre, and has made territorial demands like the Hungarian Democratic Union in Romania (UDMR, *Uniunea Democrată Maghiară din România*) that represents the Hungarian minority in Romanian Transylvania. The nationalistic parties in Bulgaria were weakly financed, and their protest was not only about ethnic issues but mainly the economic situation (Volgyi 2007: 34-35).

PRM and Ataka have similar attitudes toward minorities. They have fought against the integration of these minorities into the public sphere, and both are racist and anti-Semitic. PRM glorifies the ideology of the Iron Guard[11], is determined fight against national enemies, calls for the prohibition of the UDMR, and some of its representatives deny the Holocaust, etc. (Carey

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[9] The possibility of independence of Moldavia in 1990 was based on the assumption that Romania and Moldavia could and should unify. Romania wants reunification of its historical territory; Romanian elites have seemed to be in favour of unifying, but the Romanian public had much more ambivalent attitudes (Roper 2002: 106).

[10] For example in February 2008 C. V. Tudor wrote a letter to the chairman of the EP in which he informed them about the existence of an independent Moldavia, and stressed that Bessarabi and North Bukovina were integral parts of Romania (The Letter of C. V. Tudor to Chairman of EP).

[11] The Iron Guard was a fascist organisation that pursued pogroms on Jewish people in interwar period. The main representative was professor Cuza. After its prohibition it was reorganized into Everything for Homeland (*Totul pentru Tara*) and became a mass organisation. Its intellectual core consisted of teachers, doctors, journalists and also students. It called for social harmony, expulsion of the Jews, and dissolution of political parties (Tejchman 1997: 48).

1997: 164-165). Ataka accuses the Romas and Turks of causing the bad economic situation in Bulgaria, labels the DPF as an anti-systemic ethnic party, and calls for its prohibition. Ataka calls for the use of massive police intervention and the creation of local militia (Ganev 2006: 87). It also advocates requiring Turks and Macedonians to take Bulgarian names because "Bulgaria is only for Bulgarians" (Tavanier 2005: 2). Both parties could be characterized as anti-Semitic, but usually they highlight anti-Turkish or anti-Hungarian attitudes.

2.2 Electorate

PRM attracts mostly young people with higher education. The electorate of PRM is composed of citizens in big cities who are frustrated of post-communist developments, who feel left behind (old people yearning for the return of the old regime, or young people who are frustrated on the labour market) (Gallagher 2003: 13). The problem of the Hungarians in Transylvania has not had a big impact in other places; thus PRM has concentrated tactically on prejudices against Romas and Jews (Hollis 1999: 282). Its membership base has grown rapidly as the result of its participation in the distribution of government benefits after 1992 (more on this in the next chapter).

The electorate of Ataka is made up of traditional supporters of the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP, *Bulgarska Sotsialisticheska Partyia*) who consider its behaviour insufficiently radical. More than 30 % of its voters are people who had voted for the National Movement of Simeon II. (NDSV, *Natsionalno Dvizhenie Simeon Ytori*) (Tavanier 2005: 2). The Party has gained the votes of protest voters who were dissatisfied with the economic situation and the high level of corruption.

Both parties are associated with many people who participated in the old communist regime; e.g. the chairman of PRM C. V. Tudor and many others who belonged to communist apparatus (Hollis 1999: 282). Some members of Ataka are former members of the Communist Security Service (Ganev 2006: 87; Tavanier 2005: 2). The truth is that there are people among the founders who are still connected to Russia (Pettifer 2005: 4).

Ataka and PRM publish their own magazines, Ataka and Romania Mare, where chauvinistic opinions are brought out, as well as opinions on economic situation of people who do not share their ideological point of view (Gallagher 2003: 21). Ataka has also satellite channel Skat. Both media broadcast their disagreement with the political elites, and contributed to their parties' success in the elections of 2005 (Savkova 2005: 10).

3 The position of PRM and Ataka on the political scene and in party system

This chapter will analyse the position of both parties on the political scene of each country. First, the situation in the 90's will be described (election results, participating on government), which was very different in the two countries. The second part of this chapter will focus on the "best" election results that the parties have achieved, in 2000 the Romanian party, and 2005 in Bulgaria. Then, I will try to analyse why PRM lost support so quickly, and whether Ataka will stay on the scene or will follow PRM. Finally, a more detailed analysis of the political spectrum will be added.

3.1   The radical right in the 90's

The Party of Great Romania was established 20 June 1991 as a political wing of the wider extreme nationalistic Movement for Great Romania[12]. In the 1992 elections PRM won almost 4 % of the vote[13] (table no. 1, The results of parliamentary elections 1992). PRM joined the coalition to support the government of the Social Democratic Party of Romania (PDSR, *Partidul Demosratáei din Romania*) along with another party of the radical right, and one socialist and one agrarian party.[14] This coalition split up, and PRM benefited the most from this. Its electoral results improved in 1996, and its chairman C. V. Tudor came in fifth in the presidential elections[15] (The results of parliamentary elections 1996; The results of presidential elections 1996).

In contrast to Romania, there was no relevant right-wing party in Bulgaria, which meant that no party gained more than 3 % of the vote or got into the Parliament as a representative of

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[12] It promoted Romanian national interests, renewal of territorial greatness, reconnection of territories lost in WWII, and recognizing of fascist dictator I. Antonescu as national hero.

[13] In Romania elections are held to both chambers of the Parliament at the same time, so only the results to the Chamber of Deputies are mentioned because the results to the Senate are almost the same. The electoral system is proportional, with Hare's quota, and the rest of the mandates distributed by D'Hondt. The mandate clause was 3 % in 1992 and increased to 5 % in 1996. In spring 2008 a change of electoral system was made. The new personalized system was used in the elections held in the end of November (Maršák 2006: 213).

[14] "Red Tetragon" – PDSR, fascist PUNR – Party of Romanian National Unity (*Partidul Unităţii Naţionale a Românilor*), PRM and PSM – Socialist Party of Labour (*Partidul Socialist al Munciiú*). Sometimes it is called the red-brown coalition or the pentagon – it was also supported by Agrarian Party (PDAR, *Partidul Democrat Agrar din România*).

[15] The presidential elections are direct, with an absolute majority system, the term is 5 years.

this part of the political spectrum.[16] Ethnicity and extremism were not issues that were able to mobilize public support (Bell 1999: 254). In comparing Romania and Bulgaria we see that they were very different in the 90's. In Romania, two right-wing parties (PRM, PUNR) were represented there; on the other hand, in Bulgaria there were no right-wing parties in the Parliament despite the fact that ethnic minorities are much more numerous in Bulgaria. The explanation for the situation in Romania could be the violent conflict in Transylvania, and also the question of Moldavia's reconnection to Romania.

3.2   Its best election result: could it be repeated?

At the end of the 90's the support for PRM was increasing. PRM grew stronger when Gheorge Funar, the former chairman of PUNR, joined in 1998. In the 2000 elections PRM won almost 20 % of the vote, and became the second strongest party in the Parliament; Tudor proceeded to the second round of presidential elections (The results of parliamentary elections 2000; The results of presidential elections 2000). This quick jump in the PRM's support was the biggest surprise of these elections. The success was caused by the rising numbers of protest votes, but the rise did not codify the sources of political legitimacy for PRM (Strmiska 2001: 49). In 2001 PRM came out strongly against the government's plan to guarantee language rights for the Hungarian minority, and reopened the campaign to prohibit UDMR because of its alleged betrayal of Romania (Day 2002: 388). Tudor called for establishment of a national alliance for the restoration of Romanian unity, accused Hungarians of attempting to secede, and proclaimed a policy of assimilation in "Hungarian territory" (Serafim 1999: 4). This and other similar activities reflected the increasing popularity of PRM.

The National Movement of Ataka[17] was founded in May 2005, so it was more surprising that it became the fourth strongest party in the Parliament[18] (table no. 2, The results of

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[16] Nevertheless, among the parties in the Parliament there appear some factions e.g. in Union of Democratic Forces (SDS, *Sayuz na demokratichnite sili*). the most important radical right-wing parties were the Patriotic Labour Party (OPT, *Otechestvena Partiya na Trudači*), and Bulgarian National Radical Party (BNRP, *Balgarska Natsionalna Radikalna Partiya*) etc.

[17] Ataka was founded as a coalition of three parties: National Movement to Protect the Homeland (NDSO, *Natsionalno Dvizhenie za Spasenie na Otchestvovo*), Bulgarian National Patriotic Party (BNPP, *Bălgarska Natsionalna-Patriotichna Partiya*) and Union of Patriotic Forces – Defence (*Săyuz na Patriotichnite Sili i Voinite ot Zapssa – Zashtita*). The chairman was Volen Siderov, who had established a party of the same name before the founding of the National Movement of Ataka, but registration was postponed and the party did not participate in elections.

[18] The electoral system is proportional, 4% threshold, D'Hondt method for dividing of votes in a single state district.

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parliamentary elections 2005). It was caused by voter dissatisfaction, and because of the bad economic situation in Bulgarian society. But a new factor, heretofore almost unknown factor also appeared: the chauvinism of the extreme right, and anti-Turkish sentiments that had never been represented in the Parliament. The emergence of anti-Turkish attitudes was connected with fears by non-privileged social groups who were afraid of opening the borders with Turkey and a possible increase in the number of Muslims in Bulgaria[19] (Pettifer 2005: 3). After the success in the parliamentary field, the party repeated its success in the presidential elections of 2006, in which V. Siderov got to the second round[20] (The results of presidential elections 2006). The success was crowned for a third time in elections to the EP in which Ataka doubled its previous percentage of votes in parliamentary elections (The results of elections to EP 2007).[21]

The continuous growth of voter preferences for PRM in the 90's was the exception in the post-communist area. The government participation of ethnic parties (UDMR, DPS) in both countries was countered by the growth of nationalistic feelings. But this is not the only reason for voters' support in Romania and Bulgaria. People were dissatisfied with post-communist developments, with political elites, economic depression, high inflation, unemployment, and the high degree of corruption. PRM and Ataka took advantage of this situation and got mostly protest votes. The best result for PRM came in 2000 in which the party campaigned on corruption and socioeconomic topics that attract voters who are not identified with its programme in an ideological sense (Gallagher 2003: 24). The same reasons apply to Ataka. People were mostly dissatisfied with the previous government of the National Movement of Simeon II., and with the pervasive corruption; these led to a very low turnout (the lowest since the 1989) (The results of parliamentary elections 2005). Support for Ataka continuously rose; the success was repeated in the presidential elections in 2006 and European elections in 2007, in which it got 14 % of the vote.

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[19] It coincided with the opening of negotiation for Turkish membership in the EU.

[20] The president is elected directly through a two round absolute majority system, the term is 5 years.

[21] The representatives of Ataka and PRM allow for the establishing of a political group in the European Parliament with the name Identity, tradition, sovereignty (ITS) (members are: French National Front, Austrian Free Democratic Party etc.). The establishing of the group is conditional on having members from 5 countries at minimum, which was reached with the entrance of Bulgaria and Romania to the EU. ITS was dissolved after the European elections in Romania 2007 because it lacked enough members.

3.3   The fall of PRM: will Ataka be next?

Although not within the same time frame, the position of the both parties, PRM and Ataka, was very similar. Despite the fact that PRM has had relatively significant potential, it has always been a fringe party with almost no chance to keep its position as the second strongest party for the long term, or to hang on to the role of the main opposition party (Strmiska 2001: 49). At present the Bulgarian Ataka is in a similar position. Its political leverage is greater than PRM's, but due to the fragmentation of the political spectrum and the character of Ataka's possibilities, its potential for gaining power as a coalition partner is limited. After Ataka got into the Parliament, all the other relevant parties announced they will not cooperate with it. The act was supported by a letter signed by fifty civic associations directed to the President, the government, and the political parties, the aim of which was to convince the political actors not to negotiate with Ataka on the parliamentary field (Tavanier 2005: 3). This process was also accompanied by EU pressure, and a threat to end membership negotiations. Ataka still had relatively high poll numbers at the time.

By contrast, PRM had already started to lose its supporters, and in the next elections in 2004 it gained only 13 % of the vote. Also, Tudor had came in third place position in the presidential election (The results of parliamentary elections 2004; The results of presidential elections 2004). In 2005 Tudor left his party position and was replaced by Corneliu Ciontiu. To get the support of the European Peoples Party (EPP) in the European Parliament, and to make it possible to join the group, PRM changed its name to the People Party of Great Romania. But the EPP refused its membership anyway, and the reaction of PRM was to rename the party as the Party of Great Romania again. Their gradual decline in electoral support was shown during the elections to the EP in November 2007, when PRM failed to get enough votes to get into the EP (The results of elections to EP 2007).

Today public opinion polls show declining voters' support for Ataka. At the beginning of 2008 the support for Ataka was around 6 % (Bulgarians Turn to Pro-European GERB Party). One reason could be the creation of a new right-wing conservative party, Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB, *Grazhdani za evropeysko razvitie na Balgariya*). According to polls this is now the strongest party, and as a new actor it is unburdened by previous failures. In light of this fact it could take over part of Ataka's protest votes. In addition, Ataka has distinct problems with coherence – half of its members of parliament have left the parliamentary club.

PRM is in a much worse situation. The party has very quickly lost an important part of its supporters, mostly those who did not identify so much with the PRM's policies but who have

voted for it as an alternative to the other parties. Its failure in elections to the EP, in which the party failed to win a single mandate, was a great disillusion.[22] At the beginning of November the support for PRM was 3 % (PSD-PC Alliance Leads in Romania). This was definitely confirmed during the parliamentary elections in November in which PRM gained only 3.15 % (The results of parliamentary elections 2008). Thus it did not get into the Parliament and is now a non-parliamentary party. The reasons for this are not clear. It is possible that the protest potential of PRM has declined because people have adapted to the presence of UDMR in the government; or that the economic situation has improved after the EU entry, and that all of this has also been supported by the illusion of a strong president.

On the other hand, Ataka has still much more potential. The problems with corruption have increased, and Bulgaria has been notified by the EU that financial assistance can be cut off. Also the relatively significant Turkish minority could influence the voters' political positions, as there is a real possibility of negotiations for Turkish membership in the EU. These differences between Romania and Bulgaria might produce different results for Ataka in the next elections.

Conclusion

We can describe PRM and Ataka as strongly nationalist, anti-Semitic, anti-western, anti-reform and anti-democratic parties. PRM put the emphasis on the social area, which leads some authors such as Ute Gabanyi to label PRM as a national socialist party. Other authors as V. Tismeanu call it a nationalistic-populist party (Strmiska 2001: 41). Its economic programme is leftist, with emphasis on organic values based on ethnicity, which on the contrary would place PRM on the radical right (Gallagher 2003: 2). Clear definitions are also problematic in the case of Ataka. In Bulgaria there are anti-western and anti-system elements typical of radical left-wing parties. The party's dual identities are obvious – support for socialistic economy, combined with the strong anti-Semitic, racist and nationalistic messages. The members of Ataka call it "not a leftist or rightist but a Bulgarian movement" (Asenov 2007). The emphases on the social welfare for one's "own" people are one of the main characteristics of radical right-wing parties according to C. Mudde, whose definitions were used in this work. The National Movement of Ataka and The Great Romania Party fulfil all these conditions, and are both classified as radical right-wing parties. This has been confirmed by analysis of the programme documents of both

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[22] According to the theory of second order elections (European elections belong to this category), it is the rule that opposition parties as well as protest parties usually gain much more votes than the government parties. The election results for Ataka confirm this theory, nevertheless the result of PRM contests it. More see in Marsh 1998.

parties, focusing on five aspects: nationalist doctrine, economic policy, foreign policy, attitudes toward minorities, and the electorate.

There are several reasons for the rise in support of Ataka and PRM. The decline in living standards, the loss of hope, and economic problems are the most important ones. The distinctive increase in crime and corruption created the space for populist parties with demagogic slogans that were successful because of the social crisis. The main culprits are said to be the government elites and the national minorities whose representatives (DPS and UDMR) proclaimed improvement of their social position (autonomy) as the part of government coalition. The high support for these parties in the general elections in 2000 (PRM) and 2005 (Ataka) was also produced by fear of the EU and the non-governmental human and civic rights organizations.

It is hard to determine what the future holds for these parties. Since 2007 Ataka has lost voter support – but this decline has not yet been confirmed by elections, only by public opinion research. After the cutting off EU financial assistance, the potential strength of Ataka has begun to return. Even so, its poll numbers still remain around 7 %. Protest against the EU, to which Bulgaria has had to return financial grants, and which wants to accept the Turkey as a member state, has re-emerged. Due to Ataka's short existence it is difficult to say if it will manage to remain on the political scene after the next election.

In the case of PRM the same conclusion applies – future developments are still open. PRM has lost many of its supporters, as was shown in the election results from the last three elections. After the last parliamentary elections in November 2008 PRM is no longer represented in the Parliament, and its potential strength has declined. Time will tell whether PRM has a chance to get back into the Parliament and remain a relevant party, as the potential of PRM is much less than that of Ataka.

To conclude the comparison made in this paper, it is important to say that voters' support for the parties rose during different periods of time but for the same reasons – the presence in the government of UDMR and PDF; the problematic economic situation; and dissatisfaction with post-communist developments. Today PRM has started to lose support, and has become an almost marginal party; it is a question whether it will ever manage to return. Ataka's decline has been somewhat reversed. However, the future is still open because the party is not rooted in society. On the contrary, the national parties are rooted in Romanian society, and despite this, PRM is no longer represented in the Parliament.

For both parties as protest movements, it is probable that if the economic situation improves, the parties will have the support only of those voters who are identified with them, and

not the protest votes. In this case they will only be able to stably rely on a few percentage points of support, which may not be enough to get into the Parliament.

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Unless otherwise indicated, the elections results are available to March 2009.

Appendix

Table no. 1. Romania – results of elections to the Chamber of Deputies and to the European Parliament.[1]

Candidate	Votes in %					
	1992	*1996*	*2000*	*2004*	*2007*[2]	*2008*
PDSR – Social Democratic Party of Romania[3]	27,72	21,52	36,61	36,8	23,11	33,09
CDR – Democratic Convention of Romania[4]	20,01	30,17				
PD – Democratic Party[5]			7,03		28,81	32,36
PNL – National Liberal Party			6,89		13,44	18,57
Alliance PNL-PD				31,5		
UDMR – Hungarian Democratic Alliance of Romania	7,46	6,64	6,8	6,2	5,52	6,7
PRM – The Great Romania Party[5]	**3,89**	**4,46**	**19,48**	**13**	**4,15**	**3,15**

Source: made by author according to the available data.

[1] Elections to the European Parliament held in 2007.

[2] Only main political parties are shown.

[3] In 1992 ran as FSND – Democratic Front of National Salvation; in 2004 as National Union PSD-PUR; in 2007 as separate party PSD.

[4] The composition: PNL, PNTCD and other small parties; in 2000 PNL ran separately; in 2004 with PD as Alliance PNL-PD; in 2007 separately again.

[5] PD – for elections 1992 and 1996 in USD – Social Democratic Union; in 2008 as PD-L Democratic Liberal Party.

Table no. 2. Bulgaria – results of elections to the Bulgarian Parliament and European Parliament.[1]

Candidate	Votes in %	
	2005	*2007*
BSP – Bulgarian Socialist Party[2]	31	21.41
National Movement Simeon II	19,9	6.27
DPF – Movement for Rights and Freedoms	12,8	20.26
Ataka – National Union Attack	**8,1**	**14.20**
GERB – Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria[3]		21.68

Source: made by author according to the available data.

[1] Elections to the European Parliament held in 2007.

[2] For elections to EP ran with some small parties as European Socialist Platform (ESP).

[3] Party was established in 2006.