

**THE IMPORTANCE OF STEREOTYPES TO INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
(The Case of Bulgaria)**

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The goal of this paper is to examine the impact of negative and positive stereotyping in international relations concerning Bulgaria's intercultural experience from the 19th century to the present using primary and secondary sources such as the British consular reports, British travel writing, internet coverage, scholarly articles. It puts forward the following questions:

- Do prejudices and beliefs about a foreign country reflect on inter-state relations?
- What can the consequences of positive and negative stereotyping in international relations (IR) be concerning a small country like Bulgaria?

Stereotypes still continue to dominate international relations which makes small countries like Bulgaria feel concerned about the image they have to build up in a changing world, in a changing Europe hoping for realistic assessments on behalf of its international/ European/ EU partners.

According to the American publicist, Walter Lippmann (1922), the creator of the concept of stereotype, stereotypes are routine judgments, simple and often insufficiently grounded but defended by many people with great conviction. In fact Lippmann is fairly positive when he tries to explain the role of a stereotype as something useful and inevitable, something that helps us perceive the world around us with greater easiness before the moment of actual seeing. The positive role of stereotypes can then be seen in the fact that they give a standardized conception or image of a product, person or country which may make it easier for communicators to adapt to something unfamiliar to them. For Lippmann stereotypes are based on our prejudices which help us to perceive the world around us led by our real or unreal images of things. Thus stereotypes can be either positive or negative. Most of those about other nations contain both negative and positive attributes. In his book "Images of Nations and International Public Relations" Michael Kunczik (1990) argues that there is no clear difference in defining concepts such as attitude, stereotype, prejudice or image. Authors often mix them or there is almost an entire overlapping between them. The image should be interpreted as something created and cultivated by its possessor be it a person, a product, a nation, a people. Prejudices and stereotypes can be seen as being created by the environment and are usually ascribed. Kenneth Boulding (1965) goes further when he assumes that the conception of images involves their present day meanings, past aspects and future expectations. National image can therefore be understood as what one believes to be the factual truth about a certain country or its people. The stereotype is a simplified and stable image associated with race, religion, ethnic origin, age, sex, past histories or nationality ascribed to all members of a given culture or group. We can notice that the historical component of a national image is of crucial importance. It is often based on travel narratives, past histories, memories of past events recorded in diaries, newspapers or journals and entirely depends on the attitudes, prejudices and deliberate goals of those who produced the written accounts. National images are often coined on the basis of false events ascribed to a country or nation with the only goal to create a negative or positive impression about a country and its people. This suggests why images and stereotypes may be so important in international relations.

Why are stereotypes in an international context so persistent with respect to Bulgaria and how does this reflect on the international image of the country?

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Finding No1: A nation's image usually depends less on the nation judged than on those doing the judgement (Kunczik, 1990).

Let us cast a quick glance at how Bulgarians have been assessed by some of their neighbours, distant or close in the course of a century. The immensely idealised image of the Bulgarians in the works of XIXth century Croatian and Slovenian writers such as Ivan Kukuljević-Sakcinski (1816-1889), Petar Preradović and Anton Ashkerts is an obvious attempt to depict the Southern Slavs on the Balkans as a race capable of enduring the hardships of centuries old imperial pressure without losing their identity and sense of justice.

Bulgarian readers owe much to another Croatian writer, Stepan Radich, a graduate in Political Science whose book "Bulgaria Revived" published in 1917 reveals the Bulgarian character in historical perspective. He creates an extremely favourable image of Bulgarians as people of gentle, peaceful, industrious, hospitable, frugal, sober-minded, moderate, reserved, open to innovation and progress disposition. He sums up Bulgarian historical experience and philosophy in a way that has never lost its attraction for us- the farther from Asia, the closer to Europe! Radich is not less impressed by the activity of educated women in Bulgaria as part of the Bulgarian intelligentsia and sees in them one of the vehicles for the country's remarkable advance in most of the spheres of human progress. Religious and ethnic tolerance are traits of the Bulgarian character he puts a special focus on. Analysing Bulgarian tolerance he doesn't miss the opportunity to stress that it is a value shared by all Southern Slavs who look at faith from its moral side and believe in one universal God who is neither Turkish, nor Jewish or Christian but a Father of all people. That's how Bulgarians looked like in the eyes of a Croatian intellectual 75 years ago just four or five years before the first national catastrophe (the book was actually written in 1913)

Finding No2: The closer the image of a nation to another, the greater the probability for them to understand each other. (After Hofstetter (1957)) The positive descriptions of Bulgaria and the Bulgarians by narrators from the Western Balkans are a proof that the expectations of those image builders were very close to what they saw or felt about the country they described. In relation to this we can come to the idea that the fewer the conflicting points between countries and the farther they stand, the more positive their images of the country they judge. Something we have to remember when we mention the travel accounts of the Pole Boleslav Blazhek (1928).

Finding No 3: Descriptions of nations or countries whether favourable or unfavourable are often loaded with the ideological partialities, weaknesses or insights of those who produce them.

Although evidence of this type is highly questionable and often deemed as having no connection with scientific inquiries, we are inevitably drawn to it since such community images determine to a great extent our position in the European/Balkan family of nations. The fairly hostile attitude in Greek historical or travel writing to Bulgaria and the Bulgarians in the course of a century (1860-1970) stems from the intensive efforts of the Greek state and society towards political and national unification and the perception of Greek history as a unique blend of Ancient, Byzantine and Modern Greek history. Hence the traditionally 'barbarous' image of the Bulgarians persists and remains unchanged. Bulgarians are deemed as incapable of assimilating the fruits of modern civilisation. They are backward, slow-witted, clumsy and uneducated and do not understand the essentials of high culture. Bulgarian women were not spared, either. True representatives of the Orient Bulgarian women are trying to become emancipated or acquire West European values in the worst

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way possible ruining old family traditions. The mask of Europeanness cannot hide the Oriental residue within the Bulgarian character abundantly illustrated with examples of harsh political reality during Stambolov's term of office as Prime Minister. Bulgarian obedience and discipline are opposed to the Greek liberal spirit and love of freedom. Yet within such a highly critical perception of a neighbouring state the researcher can find some, if not many, positively assessed achievements of Bulgaria. Kazanzakis for example dares to acknowledge the successful building up of a national system of education and the competent governance of the country in the beginning of the century. Of course, this unexpected achievements of the neighbours the author explains with their unprecedented nationalism. As if Greek nationalism had never existed! By no means these descriptions are stereotypes of distinctly unflattering type, embodying the fears of Greek society or rather of Greek cultural and political elites of their Northern neighbours involved in the fierce competition for supremacy on the Balkans.

The image of Bulgaria under Turkish rule is well reflected in British consular reports. Being in favour of the 'balance of power' principle in the international security system of the time, Britain had its strategic interests in sustaining the status quo called the Turkish Empire. Although most of the information presented to the British political elite concerns the interests of Britain in Turkish imperial lands, the name of Bulgaria appears always when the reports give account of the ethnic and religious characteristics of the population living on this territory. However the area referred to as Bulgaria is ascribed characteristics typical of the empire of which it is a part. For example the British consul in Varna Saint Claire (1865) admits that 'the condition of the town is not worth describing regardless of its strategic position' which directly suggests the overall backwardness of the empire. In 1868 Vice Consul Mayers in Varna highly evaluates the reforms of the Ruse governor Midhat Pasha but notes that the good effect was lost after he was replaced by a new governor who did nothing to preserve the achievements of his predecessor. Corruption on all levels of Ottoman administration was unprecedented. In 1870 cattle stealing in the Shumla (today's Shumen) region turned out linked with the local administration which forced the new governor to stop investigations. Vice Consul Mayers expresses his regret that Ottoman authorities do not in the least care to improve the condition of agriculture and the infrastructure of the region. All consulates express their indignation at the lack of reliable statistical data on the commercial dealings in the empire. The management of the Ottoman empire is deemed as poor and incompetent with strongly corrupted customs offices, courts and administrative institutions.

After the liberation of Bulgaria from Turkish rule the tone of the consular reports is substantially changed. The image of Bulgaria created in them contains again such elements as backwardness or lack of civilisational brilliance but this time one can feel the hope that the Bulgarian people will finally make their civilisational choice. Charles Harding, second secretary to the General Consulate of Britain in Sofia (1887), marks not without a great interest three important events in Bulgarian history: the unification of the Principality with Eastern Rumelia which he calls a revolution, the Serbian War against Bulgaria (1885) and the abdication of Prince Alexander. The last one reduced the credit rating of Bulgaria in Europe. He claims that the population in Bulgaria 'is waking up for the ideas of the West and feels the need of a western type of civilization.

Finding No 4: Negative stereotypes and images of Bulgaria are very easy to sustain but difficult to change.

Great powers humiliated Bulgaria soon after its liberation from the Turks at the Congress of Berlin (1878) because the leading principle in international relations was the 'balance of power' and too big a state in the core of the Balkan Peninsula posed a threat to the first

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comes into the family of independent states. First come, first served! The Bulgarian state could not become the home of all Bulgarians living outside its borders. The unfair division of the peninsula caused the First Balkan War (1912). Some 27 years before the unification of the Principality of Bulgaria with Eastern Rumelia (1885) Austria-Hungary urged the Serbian Kingdom to invade Bulgaria. The result was two victories – one military over Serbia and the recognition of the unification of the two Bulgarias by the Great Powers. To show the hypocrisy of war and civilization George Bernard Shaw produced his play pleasant “Arms and the Man” set in Bulgaria during the Serbo-Bulgarian War. In the play he gives a vivid description of the main character Raina, her room, her father Major Petkoff, her mother Catherine and their notorious library. Shaw’s scathing irony when he describes 19th century Bulgaria should obviously have done a lot to create a negative stereotype of Bulgaria and the Bulgarians. The description of Raina’s room is unique. It is decorated in the worst possible taste, a taste reflected in the mistress’s (Catherine Petkoff’s) desire to seem as cultured and as Viennese as possible. But the room is furnished with only cheap bits of Viennese things; the other pieces of furniture come from the Turkish Ottoman Empire, reflecting the long occupation by the Turks of the Balkan peninsula. On the balcony, standing and staring at the romantic beauty of the night, “intensely conscious that her own youth and beauty are a part of it,” is young Raina Petkoff. Just inside, conspicuously visible, is a box of chocolate creams, which will play an important part later in this act and which will ultimately become a symbol of the type of war which Shaw will satirize. Raina boasts about her family’s library, “the only one in Bulgaria” (Shaw 1303, act 1). Shaw writes: “It is not much of a library. Its literary equipment consists of a single fixed shelf stocked with old paper covered novels, broken backed, coffee stained, torn and thumbed; and a couple of little hanging shelves with a few gifts books on them” (Act 3).

Having adopted the chronological approach to tracing sources for stereotypes associated with Bulgaria we will refer to 1911 Encyclopedia Britannica- a truly reputable source of information concerning the period before the First World War. Modern Bulgarians will probably be shocked to find out that their ancestors were considered a race ‘possessing few salient physical characteristics’, ‘men being rather below medium height, compactly built and very muscular, among the peasantry’. Women are described as ‘generally deficient in beauty’ and ‘quickly growing old’. To set Bulgarian readers at ease we should remind them that recent anthropological research places Bulgarians among the tallest people of the XXth century with the majority of people today a lot above medium height including younger women. How did the British have to perceive the far off Bulgarians soon after the latter proclaimed themselves independent and became a constitutional monarchy in 1908. Let us assume that most of the character traits attributed to the Bulgarians on page 777 of 1911 Encyclopedia Britannica did exist. The authors of the entry relied on a majority of Bulgarian sources and contributors so we have to be very careful not to put blame on them for the final version of our national portrait. The description involves a number of comparisons with neighbouring Servians, Romanians and Greeks in which Bulgarians can hardly be ranked higher than their neighbours. We are ‘*less quick-witted than the Greeks*’, ‘*more prone to idealism than the Servians*’, ‘*less apt to the externals of civilisation than the Rumanians*’. From here on we just need a couple of travel stories supporting encyclopedic evidence in order to create the stereotypes of a nation in a rudimentary state, stereotypes which are to persist in the minds of generations of West European readers. How are we actually described in the encyclopedic entry:

“...they possess in a remarkable degree the qualities of patience, perseverance and endurance, with a capacity for laborious effort peculiar to an agricultural race. tenacity and determination with which they pursue their national aims may eventually enable them to

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vanquish their more brilliant competitors in the struggle for hegemony in the Peninsula. Unlike most Southern races , the Bulgarians are reserved, taciturn, phlegmatic, unresponsive, and extremely suspicious of foreigners. The peasants are industrious , peaceable and orderly; the vendetta, as it exists in Albania, Montenegro and Macedonia, and the use of the knife in quarrels, so common in Southern Europe, are alike unknown.....All classes practice thrift bordering on parsimony, and any display of wealth is generally resented.....The Bulgarians are religious in a simple way, but not fanatical, and the influence of the priesthood is limited. Many ancient superstitions linger among the peasantry, such as the belief in the vampire and the evil eye; witches and necromancers are numerous and are much consulted”.

We can see that the experts who worked on the entry relied on sources written until 1904. In fact only one of the sources was published in 1911. The rest dated back from the XIX th century. So the above image construction is from the perspective of the powerful OTHER , depicting the state Bulgarians were in until 1904 and carries a number of hidden messages. First, Bulgarians were an obviously backward or ‘agricultural race’. Second, the dichotomy East-West is suggested by the presence of the adjective ‘phlegmatic’ which takes Bulgarians closer to the East than to the West. Third, the reader is led to believe that people of such inferior position to their ‘brilliant’ neighbours threaten the status quo of the Peninsula. This willful misinterpretation of Bulgarian national goals is understandable in view of what happened between 1912-1918. As for the economic conditions of the ‘brilliant’ neighbours, they do not significantly differ from those in the land of the ‘agricultural race’. On the other hand, superstition at the beginning of the XXth century was not a monopoly of Bulgarians only. Neither was suspicion to foreigners. The Utilitarian discourse system to which Britain naturally belongs does not prescribe the application of the internal egalitarian rules of behaviour to outsiders. Although it has little tolerance for social relationship based on hierarchy, to those outside the system, superiority and suspicion are the driving forces. Even if we assume that looking for the Bulgarian traits of character through the eyes of foreigners is not very rewarding , we have to persist thus bridging the powerful with the less powerful, the known with the less known, Western Europe with eastern Europe.

We cannot help mentioning one of the most successful anti-Bulgarian campaigns of Greece during the Second Balkan War (1913).

Finding No 5: Travel narratives, articles (leading or not), first hand impressions or experiences produce positive or negative attitudes in reading audiences thus shaping the images of other nations.

The Greek press managed to finalise one of its greatest negative PR campaign, relieving Greek diplomats from the burden to turn into negative image makers. Europe and America were supplied with letters and photographs of Bulgarian atrocities committed to peaceful civilians which completely alienated the sympathy of civilized nations for Bulgarians. Greek lobbying in the French and American press did wonders. Bulgaria was not only a loser country but a morally degraded nation accused of killing thousands of people of Greek or other origin. Being cut off from the world by five hostile enemies (Servia, Greece, Turkey, Romania and Montenegro) Bulgaria had no idea of the Greek anti-Bulgarian campaign. Thanks to the investigation conducted by the Carnegie Foundation for Peace the world found out that all atrocities in the Balkan wars were carried out rather by the Greek army than its Bulgarian counterpart. Still the suspicion concerning Bulgaria is still alive in the memory of some.

Finding No 6: Positive images/ attitudes are easier to promote if created on the basis of remote resemblance.

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Boleslav Blazhek is a Pole who crossed Bulgaria in 1928 with a team of Polish teachers. His trip to Bulgaria he described in his travel notes "I Travelled round Bulgaria" published in 1931. The tiny book has been recently translated into Bulgarian and is a unique presentation of Bulgaria and the Balkans as places unexplored and unknown in Poland. Blazhek's first encounter with the unknown are the Bulgarian students studying abroad on board the steamer that is taking him and his co-patriots to the first Bulgarian port on the Danube, Vidin. The spontaneous friendships with the young Bulgarian passengers and the warm reception they gave the Polish tourists in the form of a musical greeting made the Polish visitors feel well disposed to the country and its people, "We suddenly felt we would not be strangers here". Right from the start these Polish tourists felt touched by the dedication and responsibility of their hosts who had been waiting for them in the course of three days keeping the hired accommodation in spite of the long delay. Perhaps present day Bulgarians will be highly intrigued to hear from the mouth of a foreigner his impressions of the Bulgarian Customs officers and the 'extremely simplified customs procedures which were not provoked by any forced civility to foreigners'. One voyage to Istanbul allowed Boleslav Blazhek's to compare the extent to which Bulgaria and Turkey of the late 1920s had Europeanised themselves and his evaluation is in favour of the first. Reading through the pages of the travel notes we feel the spirit of the time-a people wanting to get rid of the memory of a wretched past, termed by Blazhek 'Oriental'. What he claims to have seen was a world very close in fortune to Poland, not primitive, uncivilised or cunning **but friendly in an unaffected way, hospitable, cheerful, uncorrupted, filled with pride and optimism , a world a lot closer to Central Europe** than to the Orient the way he imagined it. Take , for instance his description of Bourgas , "If it were not for the huge quantities of fruits, vegetables and flowers, nothing would remind one of the East. The town was clean, the streets-wide, the buildings-European. Extremely sympathetic with what he found in Bulgaria Boleslav Blazhek is inclined to exonerate Bulgaria from responsibility for the existence of ugly spots here and there, 'There is no other way! Bulgaria is too poor to embark on serious building and reconstruction immediately, besides, she has to bear the fatal consequences of the lost war. Boleslav Blazhek's cataloguing of some of the traits of the Bulgarians sounds unbiased and the reader will find his commentaries hardly tainted with either political or civilizational prejudice.

Coming closer to the Second World War we should expect to come upon travel writing registering the greater developmental progress of Bulgaria. In spite of the relatively high mortality rates the country experienced its highest population growth for the whole XXth century in 1939. 1939 Birth Statistics registered 900 000 new born infants. At the bottom of it were mainly economic ventures with Germany which might have speeded up industrialisation if it were not for the Great War.

Lovett Fielding Edwards comes to Bulgaria as part of a voyage up and down the Danube river right before the Second World War. His goal of course was not Bulgaria or the Bulgarians but Serbia who spirited citizens were admired by the West. The Epilogue of his "Danube Stream" sounds as a painful parting of a 'pampered passenger' with the 'friendly fellowship of the river' and already suggests the presence of the mechanical, menacing shadow of the approaching war. A citizen of the world, a traveller in love with the object of his exploration, Lovett Edwards revels in sights and encounters with people of the lands he became attached to. What do we learn about Bulgaria and the Bulgarians seen through the eyes of a Brit who makes a real effort to dissipate the widely spread prejudices of the West concerning the East or the Balkans:

".....the Bulgars do not in the least deserve their reputation for crudeness, roughness and bad manners which European prejudice has forced upon them. We found

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them friendly, simple and helpful. Wherever we went, we were well treated, and in fact found in them all those virtues for which we had sought in vain among the Rumanians, who arrogate to themselves a higher standard of culture."

Just like Boleslav Blazhek he does not miss to note his first encounter with the official representatives of the land, the passport officials:

The Bulgarian passport officials are the most sensible and considerate of their kind I have yet met.

The financial control was equally considerate, if somewhat stricter, and insisted on taking a note of all the foreign monies in our possession when we landed.

Obviously the ethos of state officials in those days seems to have been a lot different from the code of values followed by the new generation Bulgarians whose pattern of behaviour today provokes the disapproval of natives and foreigners alike.

Amongst the copious supply of information concerning the historical past of both Rumania and Bulgaria and his observations on how the two peoples dealt with the low level parts of the Danubian banks the author remarks, "But the Bulgarians were more enterprising than their Rumanian neighbours and have set to work reclaiming this very considerable area of fertile land in a manner truly Dutch. The sustaining dyke was completed in 1930.' Further on he insists on finding unexpected similarities between Bulgaria and his native Britain :

The little town of Nikopol lies in a cup-shaped valley in the cliff which extends on its either side as raw and white as the chalk cliffs of Dover.

We might look at this as a fascinating attempt on behalf of the travel writer to bring the unknown closer to the British reader. The citizen of today's Rouse might feel flattered that Rustchuk did not escape the attention of Mr Edwards for whom the great river served not only as a unique travelling route offering 'the most restful of all holidays' but also as a factor both uniting and disuniting people and cultures:

"The two towns(Rustchuk and Giurgiu) are directly opposite one another and a connected by a regular and frequent ferry. Yet they are miles apart in general appearance and in outlook.

Rustchuk is a surprisingly large town, better ordered, cleaner and generally more sympathetic than Giurgiu.If one were to personify them, Giurgiu would appear as a slightly shifty Levantine trader, with a keen sense of money, an obsequious air covering a somewhat bully nature, and an indifferent sense of cleanliness and morality; Rustchuk as a hard-working peasant, patriarchal in his life, solid and trustworthy in his dealings, perhaps a little stupid but a very good companion. Both towns are obviously suffering from the crisis, but whereas the poverty of Giurgiu appears sordid, that of Rustchuk seems cheerfully and uncomplainingly born."

A bit more about Rustchuk whose portrayal reveals the character of its citizens:

"Though a larger town, it has not so great a port as Giurgiu. Nevertheless the quays are extensive and the newly built railway station is one of the most pleasing and well arranged I have seen in any country. The inhabitants are rightly proud of it and it figures prominently among the picture postcards."

'Proud' is an adjective intensively made use of by both the Pole Blazhek and the Brit Edwards when they speak about the the Bulgarian people, quite in contrast to how we feel today!

"In contrast to Giurgiu, we passed the passport authorities easily and comfortably, and walked into town. It is clean and solidly built, with a rather Germanic air about it."

When Lovett Edwards employs the word 'crisis' we feel tempted to stress how often Bulgarians have had to endure crisis of various intensity. The first poured down on our

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people right after the First World War. The second-after the Second Great War. The third? We are deep into it! This means every forty or thirty years, the last one being the most destructive and deforming.

In contrast with the spirit of our times the difference 'between the rich and the poor (in Rustchuk) is not easily visible:

"I am told that there are some exceedingly rich people in Rustchuk, but that their patriarchal mode of life makes them live outwardly much as their poorer neighbours. There is no ostentation."

Taking into consideration Edwards' definite interest in the life of the Serbs, his genuine attachment to Serbia which 'seems to look towards the West whereas Bulgaria looks to the East, to Russia' we cannot suspect him of being partial to what he experienced or saw during his stay in Bulgaria. Still being the offspring of the West-European cultural zone Edwards can't help mentioning that in Bulgaria 'the Turkish influence is much more apparent'.

Finding No 7: Stereotypes are deeply influenced by the behaviour of the political, cultural and business elites.

It's intriguing to learn how a political leader like Aleksandar Stamboliiski was a description after first hand observation recorded by British journalist A. L Kennedy:

"Stamboliiski was the essence of his race. He had all the qualities of a Bulgarian, and not quite all his faults. Huge in stature, broad in proportion, big-shouldered, uncouth in his movements and vehement in speech, he impressed everyone with his energy, his sincerity, and his fearlessness. His big brown face was topped with a shock of black hair, and his upturned moustaches helped to give his appearance a certain fierceness. There was a combative twinkle in his eyes, a deep furrow in the forehead between them, and a nose not without fineness. His frankness was refreshing in a country where it is the rarest of qualities. Not that he was wholly devoid of a peasant's cunning; or free from the thriftiness of his class and the avidity of his race."

Finding No 8: Negative images in international relations can be created on the basis of negative propaganda by other countries'.

This is especially obvious in most war cartoons and news in the Keesings Archive where Bulgaria is not spared a single move in its efforts to play its international game. Take for example one of the war cartoons of David Low "A Bulgarian bust". It reveals a drunken king (Ferdinand in this case) in lying on the ground in a helpless state.

In the communist and post-communist era we have been defined as 'the true or close satellite' of the Soviet Union. Under communism we remained a dark and mysterious place , unfamiliar to the West and the rest. Small wonder, if there were any images linked with the name of Bulgaria they were often associated with either South America or South Africa. For those who knew something about the Soviet bloc Bulgaria was associated with the lack of democracy and awful toilet paper.

The inadequate behaviour of Bulgarian nationals in an international context additionally complicates the other's perception of us and our country. There are remarkable similarities today between the populist Agrarian leader and Boyko Borisov, a contemporary populist darling. The role of the political, cultural and business elites is not less important for nations and their positive international images. It is they who have to build up bridges and work towards good practices of international cooperation without losing touch with national interest or the good of the country.

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Conclusion

States/ countries should behave rationally in international relations and promote all opportunities for understanding between nations/ countries as the only possible route to overcoming negative national stereotypes. A rational solution to such a long-existing problem might be the act of intensive cooperation and integration, and cultural exchange in the broadest sense of the word. This paper made an attempt to reveal the most typical traits in the Bulgarian character defined through the critical eyes of foreigners in the course of a century. Bulgarians are illustrated through a number of historical accounts and narratives but it is in their hands to change the existing negative or almost negative stereotypes gradually acquiring a new value orientation as a result of which most new values (endearingly called European values) can or will become 'inner-directed' or internalised. What can the consequences be of positive and negative stereotyping in international relations (IR) concerning a small country like Bulgaria? They can be disastrous if the negative one prevails. How can we cultivate a more different, if possible, positive image today?

The path is very long, will take a lot of years but is worth working on. The PR Campaign of the Bulgarian government concerning Bulgaria as a tourist destination is the first step towards change. For image improvement to succeed we should harness all – international organizations, churches, universities, NGOs, books, symposia, conferences, trade fairs, cultural and educational exchange, commercial partnership. Even a cocktail party can turn into a useful tool of promotion if it is attended by the right people. We should also try to clarify why our image is negative among certain groups/ countries to know the cure for the disease.

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