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**The Future of National
Identity in Bulgaria: The
Role of Communication
with “Others” for
the Formation of
Supranational Identity**

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Preliminary communication

The Future of National Identity in Bulgaria: The Role of Communication with “Others” for the Formation of Supranational Identity¹

The article is grounded in a 2021 national survey exploring the modern identity of Bulgarian citizens, undertaken as part of the National and European Dimensions of the Modern Identity of Bulgarian Citizens project, supported by the National Science Fund. It delves into the shifts occurring in the national identity of Bulgarians amid increased global mobility and communication between ethnicities and nations. This trend challenges traditional notions of national borders, eroding the insularity of national cultures and fostering a sense of supranational identity. Comparing two regions within Bulgaria—the Veliko Tarnovo district, predominantly inhabited by ethnic Bulgarians, and the Kardzhali district, characterized by an ethnically diverse populace, with a notable Turkish ethnic majority—the article examines the evolution of these processes. Despite signs suggesting a weakening of national identity and the emergence of supranational identities (such as European or global citizen) alongside indications of local identity formation, the research findings reveal that, presently, national identity remains the primary and guiding factor in the self-identification of Bulgarian citizens.

KEYWORDS:

mobility, interaction with others/the different, national identity, supranational identity, European identity, local identity

¹ The article has been produced within the scope of the research project titled “National and European Dimensions of the Modern Identity of Bulgarian Citizens,” under project number КП-06-Н 50/6/ 2020, supported by the National Science Fund of Bulgaria.

The challenges of the modern age

Today, we reside in a world defined by mobility and communication among individuals of diverse ethnicities and nationalities. This dynamic is fundamentally altering the essence of national borders, eradicating the insularity of national cultures and ushering in a "new era characterized by its dominant features and form" often labeled as global.² Towards the end of the 20th century and the onset of the 21st century, European societies encountered a distinct phase marked by a shift in the concept of the national community. This transition involved a departure from the entrenched value of national sovereignty's inviolability toward a more open perspective, emphasizing communication, interaction, cooperation, shared interests, cultural distinctiveness, and embracing differences. The integration processes among European nations, notably intensified since the 21st century's inception, particularly with the European Union's enlargement, are instrumental in reshaping the identities of European citizens. As borders progressively open, enabling swift long-distance travel, issues pertaining to evolving identities gain heightened significance. Consequently, a pertinent question arises concerning the extent to which "cosmopolitan consciousness" has developed on individual and collective levels. This consciousness aligns with the contemporary interconnectedness and interdependence among European states and their citizens.

The ongoing processes of mobility, particularly migration—a hallmark of the modern era and notably prevalent in European societies—have rendered state borders largely insignificant. These processes facilitate the transmission, assimilation, and amalgamation of diverse representations, values, and behavioral models from various ethnic, national, social, and cultural contexts. Consequently, the distinctive hyper-mobility of the contemporary age accentuates the discourse on the transformation of national identities. It sheds light on how interactions with "other" nations—those distinct from one's own—impact numerous facets, leading to the erosion of enduring traditions, values, and representations established over centuries. Simultaneously, it paves the way for the adoption of new traditions, values, and behavioral patterns derived from foreign societies and nations. This phenomenon contributes to the formation of elements constituting a hybrid supranational identity, comprising a blend of universal ideas and practices. Notably, these dominant elements do not seek to divide nations and peoples but rather unite them through the shared experience of embracing diversity. Mobility, encounters, and communications with the "other" emerge as pivotal factors empowering individuals, carriers of ethnic and national distinctiveness, to broaden their connections beyond their ethnicity and nation. They begin to engage with the global civil society, embracing universal human values, ideas, and practices. As individuals traverse borders and dwell outside their native countries, they become increasingly cognizant of the boundless possibilities fostered by integration and globalization.

² Martin Albrow, *The global age: State and society beyond modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996).

For over three decades, Bulgaria and its citizens have actively participated in these transformative processes with an escalating intensity. Presently, the Bulgarian national identity is undergoing continual evolution: Bulgarians are progressively assuming the roles of Europeans and global citizens. Unlike historical precedents that spanned a century or more, this transformation unfolds within a considerably shorter timeframe. This change permeates every facet of life and has become an enduring feature of public life, permeating the social fabric and consciousness. It's a shift that extends across all spheres of society and is rapidly reshaping them. This unique trajectory of social development logically culminates in the proliferation of a supranational identity. As individuals increasingly identify with numerous communities, the ultimate outcome tends towards identification with an overarching community that unifies the others.

On the other hand, constant mobility and encounters with increasingly diverse cultures and societies, often occurring within short spans, sometimes lay the groundwork for discordant identities. Instead of fostering a supranational identity, these interactions occasionally precipitate a contrary trend marked by seclusion, localism, and regionalism. Consequently, within contemporary Bulgarian society, while the processes of European Union (EU) integration persist, there exists a simultaneous trend towards the "atomization" of society and the seclusion of individuals within smaller national communities. Hence, Bulgaria's integration into various supranational structures at the EU level doesn't invariably translate into a corresponding shift in the country's societal consciousness or an automatic cultivation of a supranational identity. While European integration presents opportunities for such progress, the initiation, depth, and extent of these changes hinge upon a complex interplay of numerous external and internal factors.

Since Bulgaria's accession to the European Union over 15 years ago, the perception among Bulgarian citizens of their inclusion in Europe has evolved to varying degrees, influenced by international and national political, socio-economic, cultural, demographic, educational, and other factors. In the conventional self-identification of Bulgarian citizens, a link with Europe existed as a facet of national identity. However, European integration has significantly reshaped this connection. Bulgaria's integration into the European community, encompassing the adoption of European laws into national legislation, participation in EU policies and programs, automatic acquisition of European citizenship, functioning of European institutions within the country, the enhanced mobility of Bulgarian citizens across EU nations, and the integration of EU symbols into daily and celebratory culture (such as the flag, anthem, and Europe Day), has spurred transformations in the country's national self-awareness and self-identification. On an international scale, Bulgaria's integration into Europe has redefined the geopolitical implications of its regional positioning. Rather than being labeled solely as a Balkan or Southeastern European country, Bulgaria is now identified as a European nation, positioned as the "external border of the EU." Through exposure to European influences and heightened intercultural interactions, not only have Bulgaria's geopolitical connotations shifted, but

Bulgarian citizens have also reconstructed their perception of themselves as integral parts of Europe.

Identity is a conscious self-reference to a structured normative and value system, which includes the basic attributes of a community to which we assign ourselves; if so, the registered changes in the self-reference of Bulgarian citizens to Europe not only in the geographical sense but also in terms of values and norms signify that changes have taken place in the national identity that is oriented to the formation of elements of a supranational European identity.

In search of an explanation for supranational identity: scientific approaches

For over 30 years, scientific researchers of the formation of a supranational/European identity have sought new conceptual schemas with which to describe that identity.

Since the 1990s, amidst the era of globalization, the demarcations between national and ethnic groups have steadily become increasingly delicate and permeable, and the interaction between cultures increasingly strong, research interest has come to define *identity* in terms of a *multiple* and *hybrid* identity in the framework of conceptions of *cultural pluralism* or *multiculturalism*.³ The intense migration movements have resulted in new phenomena and processes, and, respectively, in new theoretical frameworks for their study, such as *transnationalism* and *methodological nationalism*.⁴

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Examples of the search for explanations of supranational identity can be found in the works of Anthony Smith, Charles Taylor, Jean-Marc Ferry, Terry Eagleton, Jacques Attali, etc. In 1991, Smith discussed the challenges to the European project as a model of supranationalism, and the perspectives of a European "supernation."⁵ The publication in 1992 of Taylor's book *Multiculturalism. Examining the Politics of Recognition* started a discussion on the trends of changing identity resulting from the fact that, in the course of globalization, most states have become ever less able to resolve various problems and are delegating much of their authority to local government or supranational structures and organizations.⁶ As a consequence, new forms of identity are undermining the previous narrow identification with the national state. Jean-Marc Ferry has developed the idea of post-national identity related to the principles of universality, autonomy, and responsibility. Eagleton uses the concept of global identity,⁷

³ Charles Taylor et al., *Multiculturalism. Examining the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994). Ayse Caglar, "Hyphenated Identities and the Limits of 'Culture'," in: *The Politics of Multiculturalism in the New Europe*, ed. Tariq Modood and Prina Werbner (London: Zed, 1997), 169-85.

⁴ Steven Vertovec, "Super-diversity and its implications," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30, no. 6 (2007): 1024-54. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01419870701599465>; Nina Glick Schiller, and Andreas Wimmer, "Methodological nationalism and beyond: Nation-state building, migration and the social sciences," *Global Networks* 2, no. 4 (2002): 301-34.

⁵ Anthony Smith, *National Identity*, vol. 11 (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1993).

⁶ Charles Taylor et al., *Multiculturalism. Examining the Politics of Recognition*.

⁷ Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* (Chichester, West Sussex, U.K.; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2000).

while Albrow refers to the relativization of identity in the global time that comes after modernity.⁸ The idea of the formation of a European identity as a kind of supranational identity was also discussed by several authors at the beginning of the 21st century. Here we may mention the theories of Robert Miller⁹ or Hakan Ovunc Ongur,¹⁰ who developed the idea of European identity as one of the many identities individuals build based on their affiliation to different social groups. These authors also claim that the different forms of identity (for instance, European, national, and regional) are not necessarily rivals. According to other contemporary social scientists,¹¹ the context-based concept of identity corresponds most fully to the supranational nature of European identity. This concept links the definition of the various and heterogeneous dimensions of European identity to concrete social, cultural, etc., contexts.

Although some researchers discuss the growing perception of “Europe as a mental space,” they define this space mostly as a collective mental image of Europe rather than as a formation of collective identities that might help create “an integrated, albeit culturally differentiated and branched European demos” and might “provoke the crystallization of an obvious self-identification as a European person.”¹² On the other hand, the view of “Europe as a mental space” refers to a very important dimension – namely, the horizons, reference frameworks, in the terminology of Alfred Schutz, the criteria and rules that reveal the links between the elements of a supranational world serving as a reference community for the formation of an identity.

In the social sciences and humanities in Bulgaria at the end of the last century, identity was studied with a focus on Bulgarian ethnicity/nationality, critically introducing the theoretical concepts of primordialism, social constructivism, and ethnosymbolism.¹³ In the last years of the 20th century, the topic of identity in the aspect of emerging changes in identification in the socio-political transition became a special focus of scientific research and publications.¹⁴ The beginning of the new millennium is marked by the debate about the images of the ethnic and religious “other,” which, however, remains

⁸ Martin Albrow, *The Global Age: State and Society Beyond Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996).

⁹ Robert Miller, *The Development of European Identity/Identities: Unfinished Business. A Policy Review* (European Commission, 2012), accessed on November 15, 2023, https://www.mela-project.polimi.it/upl/cms/attach/20120906/175214213_9680.pdf.

¹⁰ Hakan Ovunc Ongur, “Towards a Social Identity for Europe? A Social Psychological Approach to European Identity studies,” *Review of European Studies* 2, no. 2. (2010): 133.

¹¹ Robert Miller and Graham Day, eds., *The Evolution of European Identities* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

¹² Fritz Schütze and Anja Schroder-Wildhagen, “Europe as a Mental Space” in *The Evolution of European Identities*, ed. Robert Miller and Graham Day (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 255–78.

¹³ Ivan Hadzhiyski, *Collected Works. An optimistic theory of our nation*, vol. 1 (Sofia: Bulgarian Writer, 1974); Ivan Hadzhiyski, *Collected works. Life and Soul of Our Nation*, vol. 2 (Sofia: Bulgarian Writer, 1974); Dimitar Angelov, *The Formation of Bulgarian Nationality* (Sofia: Science and Art, 1981).

¹⁴ Maya Grekova et al., *National identity in a situation of transition: historical resources* (Sofia: Minerva, 1997); Ana Krasteva, ed., *Communities and Identities in Bulgaria* (Sofia: Petexton, 1998).

within the Bulgarian society (images of Bulgarians, Turks, Roma, etc.) rather than going beyond it.¹⁵ After 2007, a European emphasis emerged in Bulgarian scholars' research on national identity as the examples of authors such as Katia Hristova-Valtcheva, Velichko Valchev, Fons J. R. van de Vijver, Zorniza Ganeva, and Lilia Sazonova demonstrate.¹⁶

As we can see, without claiming to be exhaustive, the publications regarding identity in Bulgaria are not few. But it is also evident that in recent years there have not been many new publications on the topic. Moreover, the larger share seems to be ethnographic and ethnological publications, sociological studies are fewer. At the same time, the transformations to which the contemporary identity of Bulgarian citizens has been exposed in recent years have been particularly intense, given the specific domestic political situation (political crisis, frequent elections, prolonged inability to form a regular government, etc.), as well as the foreign political situation (the unsuccessful, at least for now, negotiations for inclusion in the Schengen area, the ongoing refugee and migrant crisis, etc.). This is why we consider as particularly important the nationally representative survey that we carried out in 2021, thanks to the project "National and European Dimensions of the Modern Identity of Bulgarian Citizens" funded by the National Science Fund, on the results of which this article is based, insofar as it is, firstly, specifically dedicated to the topic of identity and therefore allows its detailed study and, secondly, makes it possible to take into account the recent changes that it is undergoing at the contemporary stage of the development of Bulgarian society.

Modern studies on identity, particularly European identity, reveal its multifaceted nature, marked by numerous overlapping layers of self-identification. These layers come to the forefront depending on different contexts and situations. Currently, both Bulgarian and European social sciences are actively exploring explanatory conceptual frameworks in the study of supranational identity formation. The potential development of new theoretical constructs explaining supranational identity, however, heavily relies on empirical research that accurately maps the actual stages reached in this identity's formation among citizens. Therefore, our article aims to illustrate the structural shifts occurring in the contemporary identity of Bulgarian citizens and the role of supranational identity in their self-

¹⁵ Bogdana Todorova and Maxim Mizov, *The Bulgarian ethnic model - myth or reality* (Sofia: Avangard Prima, 2010); Albena Nakova, *Communication between Bulgarians, Turks and Roma. Cognitive aspects* (Sofia: Askoni-publisher, 2010).

¹⁶ Katia Hristova-Valtcheva, ed., *New actors in a new environment: accession to the EU, civil society and multi-level governance* (Sofia: BECSA, 2009), Velichko Valchev and Fons J. R. van de Vijver, "National and European identities of Bulgarian and Dutch students," in: *Quod Erat Demonstrandum: From Herodotus' ethnographic journeys to cross-cultural research: Proceedings from the 18th International Congress of the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology*, eds. Gari Aikaterini and Kostas Mylonas (Athens: Pedio Book Publishing, 2009), 279-88, accessed on November 15, 2023, https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/iaccp_papers/40/; Zorniza Ganeva, "Key aspects of European identity," in *Psychology - traditions and perspectives*, ed. Ivanka Assenova and Stanislava Stoyanova (Blagoevgrad: Neofit Rilski University, 2010), 224-33; Lilia Sazonova, "National and European Identity in Comparative Perspective," *NotaBene* 28 (2015), accessed on November 15, 2023, <https://notabene-bg.org/read.php?id=320>.

identification. To achieve this, we will utilize the findings from a social survey conducted in 2021 as part of the project 'National and European Dimensions of the Modern Identity of Bulgarian Citizens' (KP06-H50/6/30.11. 2020), funded by the National Science Fund under the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Bulgaria.

The survey methodology

This nationally representative survey targeted Bulgarian citizens aged 18 and above, encompassing 1,022 respondents, forming a sample representative of Bulgaria's population. The survey employed a two-stage nested sample design, utilizing simple random sampling with probabilities proportional to the number of residents in the localities, thereby ensuring a sample stratified by residence. Notably, the sample structure aligns seamlessly with the country's population composition as reported in the 2021 census, covering parameters such as sex, age, education, ethnicity, religion, and residence.¹⁷ The selection of respondents within households involved a door-to-door search method employing a modified Leslie Kish approach, utilizing the nearest date of birth. Interviews were conducted at respondents' homes, exclusively engaging Bulgarian citizens with a permanent address within the locality. This meticulous sampling methodology guarantees representative data for the entire population, ensuring that the collected responses are indicative and typical of the country's populace. Throughout the survey, fundamental ethical principles such as voluntariness, anonymity, and data protection were strictly observed.

The semi-standardized face-to-face interview method was used to collect statistical information.

Among the respondents interviewed, 47.4% were male, while 52.6% were female. In terms of age distribution, 2.3% were aged 18-30, 30.1% were aged 31-50, 29.0% were aged 51-65, and 19.6% were aged 65 and above. Regarding educational attainment, 1.9% had no formal education, 17.9% had less than secondary education, 42.6% had completed secondary education, and 37.6% had tertiary education. In terms of employment, 32.1% were employed in the public sector, 28.7% in the private sector, 5.7% were self-employed, 6.4% were unemployed, 19.5% were retired, 1.8% were housewives, and 5.0% were students. Ethnic composition revealed that 80.6% identified as Bulgarian, 11.9% as Turkish, 6% as Roma, and 1.4% as other ethnicities. Regarding religious affiliation, 72.0% identified as Orthodox Christians, 3.2% as Evangelicals, 0.4% as Catholics, 8.0% as Sunni Islam, 0.3% as Shia Islam, 1.6% as followers of other religions, and 13.0% identified as non-religious.

Based on the survey results, we will try to show how Bulgarian citizens see their identity along the axis of *local - national - supranational* and whether the permeability of the national borders implies permeability of the boundaries of identity as well. However, in this article, we will present the results not of the entire survey but specifically from two regions within the country: Veliko Tarnovo and Kardzhali. This selection was purposeful. As it is widely recognized, Bulgaria stands as a multi-ethnic state where ethnic

¹⁷ infostat.nsi.bg/infostat/pages/module.jsf?x_2=344.

Bulgarians constitute the majority of the population. According to the latest officially published census data in 2011, ethnic Bulgarians comprise 77% of the population. The other significant ethnic communities include ethnic Turks at 8% and the Roma at 4.4%. Smaller ethnic groups constitute a much lesser percentage. Veliko Tarnovo, primarily inhabited by ethnic Bulgarians, was chosen to portray the transformations occurring within the identity of this ethnic group in their purest form. Accordingly, 100% of the individuals in the sample and interviewed respondents in the Veliko Tarnovo district are ethnic Bulgarians. On the other hand, Kardzhali represents a region with an ethnically diverse populace, where ethnic Turks significantly predominate. Supporting this distinction, 96.7% of the sample and interviewed individuals in Kardzhali are ethnic Turks, while only 3.3% belong to the ethnic Bulgarian group. These distinctive ethnic compositions in both regions allow us to make theoretical generalizations and draw comparisons regarding the nuances in identity formation and the evolving perceptions of identity concerning the interplay among local, national, and supranational identities among the two largest ethnic groups in Bulgaria.

Results of the empirical social survey of the population

The survey questionnaire was intentionally designed with the initial question directed at all respondents, inquiring about the three most pivotal characteristics by which they define themselves. The primary objective behind this query was to assess the significance of national and/or ethnic affiliations alongside their identification with supranational structures, without any prompt suggesting this type of identity. Subsequently, for those who indicated its significance in their self-identification, the survey aimed to discern the level of importance attached to these aspects in their ranking.

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In response to this query, 37.1% of the respondents in the Veliko Tarnovo region highlighted their national identity, defining themselves primarily as Bulgarians. Furthermore, an additional 11.4% not only identified as Bulgarians but also emphasized their citizenship as part of the Republic of Bulgaria, further emphasizing their national affiliation. Among the surveyed individuals, 28.7% prioritized their national identity as their foremost self-identification; 5.7% positioned it as the second most important, and 2.8% ranked it third. These statistics indicate the significance of national affiliation for slightly over one-third of Veliko Tarnovo residents. These findings underscore the importance of national affiliation, given that respondents voluntarily highlighted this aspect without any specific prompt in the question. Notably, among various identifications such as name, residence, profession, social status, age, education, and marital status, a substantial proportion of interviewees—approximately one-third—specifically emphasized their national identity and affiliation, with the majority placing it as their primary identification. This observation further solidifies the importance of this aspect in the perceptions of the surveyed individuals.

Simultaneously, the survey results reveal that around one-eighth (12.4%) of all respondents from the Veliko Tarnovo region define themselves in the context of supranational structures. Among these, 3.8% of the interviewees identify themselves based on their affiliation to

Europe, considering themselves as citizens of Europe, while 8.6% perceive themselves as citizens of the world. Notably, this particular identity assertion is exclusively expressed by urban residents in the region. None of the interviewed rural residents attributed a supranational identity to themselves.

Additionally, a comparison between the viewpoints of urban and rural inhabitants demonstrates a higher significance of self-identification through national affiliation among the former than the latter. Approximately 46.6% of urban respondents emphasize their national affiliation in their self-identification. The analysis of responses among urban residents suggests a noticeable influence, indicated by the Cramer's V coefficient of 0.331 and the Chi-square value of $\chi^2=0.000$, signifying a relatively robust correlation. Among this group, 33.3% prioritize their identification as 'Bulgarian' in their primary self-identification, while 13.3% place it as their secondary identification.

On the other hand, 33.3% of urban residents self-identify as 'citizens of the world' (Cramer's V = 0.156, Chi-square $\chi^2 = 0.000$), while 11.1% identify as 'citizens of Europe' (Cramer's V = 0.236, Chi-square $\chi^2 = 0.000$). This demonstrates that a total of 44.4% of urban respondents indicate the formation of a supranational identity. Consequently, it appears that both national and supranational identities coexist among urban dwellers, as nearly equal proportions of them associate themselves with both national and supranational affiliations.

33.3% of urban residents self-identify as 'citizens of the world' (Cramer's V = 0.156, Chi-square $\chi^2 = 0.000$), while 11.1% identify as 'citizens of Europe' (Cramer's V = 0.236, Chi-square $\chi^2 = 0.000$). This demonstrates that a total of 44.4% of urban respondents indicate the formation of a supranational identity. Consequently, it appears that both national and supranational identities coexist among urban dwellers, as nearly equal proportions of them associate themselves with both national and supranational affiliations.

In terms of rural residents, 30% prioritize their national identity (Cramer V=0.217 and Chi square $\chi^2=0.000$). Among them, 25% place it as their primary identity, while 5% rank it third. Interestingly, identifying with Europe or the world isn't common among rural residents. Supranational identity isn't apparent here. However, 15% of these residents highly value their local identity (Cramer V=0.318 and Chi square $\chi^2=0.000$), connecting strongly with their community. These findings confirm that as our society experiences transformation and constant change, contrasting trends in identity development emerge. While some lean towards forming a broader identity linked to the global society, others increasingly prioritize local and regional connections. The survey in Veliko Tarnovo's region mirrors these contradictory trends.

However, when respondents were presented with various proposed identities and asked to rank their importance, including national, ethnic, European/EU citizen, global/citizen of the world, regional/the Balkan region, local/the settlement, religious, professional, and affiliation to a circle of friends, an astounding 100% identification emerged with the national affiliation. In essence, every participant in the sample identified as

a Bulgarian citizen. Notably, the majority—77.1%—ranked national identity as their foremost identification, with 14.3% placing it second and 8.6% third.

The majority—77.1%—identify strongly with the settlement in which they reside, often ranking it as their second identification choice, following national identity, and less frequently as their third choice.

Equal shares of people identify as citizens of the EU (17.1%) and citizens of the world (also 17.1%). The smallest share, only 5.7%, identifies with the Balkan region.

Hence, national identity stands as the most crucial for Bulgarian citizens in Veliko Tarnovo's region. Next comes local identity, tied to where they live, indicating what scholars call glocalization. This means, in a globalized world, there's a renewed interest in local uniqueness instead of uniformity. Supranational identity ranks third, reflecting a sense of belonging to Europe, a global citizen perception, and occasionally, a connection to the Balkans. The data shows urban dwellers are more inclined towards a supranational identity: 20% identify as EU citizens (compared to 15% rural), and 26.6% see themselves as global citizens (compared to 10% rural). Feeling linked to the Balkans is similarly low for both urban (6.7%) and rural residents (5%).

The prevailing identity among Bulgarian citizens in the Veliko Tarnovo region is their national identity, followed by a strong identification with their local community, showcasing the concept of glocalization - a resurgence of interest in local distinctiveness amid globalization.¹⁸ Supranational identity, encompassing a sense of belonging to Europe or the world, ranks third in importance, with minimal association to the Balkan region. Urban dwellers tend to embrace supranational identities more than rural residents, with higher proportions identifying as EU citizens and citizens of the world. The study's focus on Veliko Tarnovo's ethnic Bulgarians reveals the continued prominence of national identity, albeit with emerging signs of a supranational identity among some citizens.

The findings from the Kardzhali region present a starkly different perspective compared to Veliko Tarnovo, highlighting distinct patterns. Notably, 26.7% of residents prioritize their local identity associated with their settlement, diverging from the emphasis on national identity seen in Veliko Tarnovo. Ethnic identity follows closely, deemed crucial by 16.7% of respondents, whereas only 13.3% identify primarily as citizens of the Republic of Bulgaria. A mere 6.7% identify as citizens of Europe. Specifically, 96.7% of Turkish ethnic respondents prioritize their local and ethnic identities, placing national and European identities at a much lower significance. This discrepancy underscores a fundamental difference in the perception of national identity between the Bulgarian ethnic majority and other ethnic communities, potentially posing a challenge to national social cohesion. Ethnic Bulgarians associate national identity primarily with their Bulgarian ethnic group, where citizenship-based identity is viewed as secondary.

¹⁸ George Ritzer and Zeynep Atalay, *Readings in Globalization: Key Concepts and Major Debates* (Chichester, West Sussex, U.K.; Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, 2010); Victor Roudometof, *Glocalization: A Critical Introduction* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016).

Focus group discussions reaffirmed this understanding among ethnic Bulgarian participants. In contrast, other ethnic groups emphasize local and ethnic affiliations over national identity, reflecting a distinctive response to the notion of identity, with some expressing the importance of ethnicity indirectly by stating the equality of all ethnicities, implying its significance to them.

On the other hand, the fact that the largest number of surveyed people emphasize their local and ethnic identity also indicates the lesser importance of any form of supranational identity. The European identity is indicated by the smallest share of residents of the Kardzhali region, while the global identity, "citizen of the world," is absent.

However, when the participants were asked to choose between several designated identities and to rank them according to their importance for the respondents, the rate of identification with citizens of the Republic of Bulgaria increased significantly to 76.7%, coming in first place. Coming in second place is the identification with the settlement, 56.7%. Ethnic identity is in third place, 43.3%. The share of persons identifying with supranational structures also increases to a significant 53.3%, which is the total of 30% who define themselves as citizens of the EU, 20% as citizens of the world, and 3.3% as connected with the Balkan region.

Moreover, the largest percentage of people who emphasize their identification as a citizen of Bulgaria place this identity in the first place – 50%. Of those who identify with their settlement, the largest shares place this identity in second and third place, respectively 23.3% and 20%. Of the respondents who identify with their ethnic affiliation the largest share places it in second place – 23.3%. People who identify with supranational structures attach various degrees of importance to these. Of those who identify themselves as citizens of the EU, the largest share (23.3%) place this identity in second place; of those who see themselves as citizens of the world, the largest share (10%) place this identity in first place. As for the persons who identify with the Balkan regions, only 3.3% of all respondents, place this identification in third place, a fact that underscores the smaller importance residents of the Kardzhali region attach to this identification.

The data show that along with the registered differences between the two ethnic communities as regards their notion of national identity, for the residents of both regions identification with the nation-state is of leading importance, followed by their local identity. A direct consequence of the difference between ethnic communities in Bulgaria concerning national identity is that ethnic identity comes in third place for ethnic Turks in the Kardzhali region. At this stage, identification with supranational structures – the EU, the world, and the Balkan region – is of the least importance for respondents in the regions of Veliko Tarnovo and Kardzhali alike. Regarding these supranational references, it should be pointed out that identification with the Balkan region is weakest in both regions; Bulgarian citizens do not see themselves as people from the Balkans. The strongest supranational identification is with the EU.

In the context of Kardzhali, the rural-urban divide appears to have a minimal impact on residents' self-identification. Notably, both urban and rural

dwellers primarily identify as citizens of the Republic of Bulgaria, with 80% and 75%, respectively. The secondary identification with their settlement is strong among both groups, accounting for 60% of urban and 55% of rural residents. However, a notable rural distinction emerges here. While urban residents prioritize identification with their ethnic community (60%), rural areas showcase a different trend: 40% identify as citizens of the EU, possibly attributed to a larger population of economic emigrants in EU countries from rural settings where job opportunities are limited compared to urban centers. Consequently, identification with the ethnic community ranks fourth among rural respondents at 35%. Subsequently, the typical sequence of self-identifications resumes, with supranational affiliations like "citizen of the world" endorsed by 30% of urban residents and 15% of rural residents. Additionally, "citizen of the EU" is mentioned by 15% of urban residents, while identification with the Balkans is exclusive to rural residents, albeit at a small percentage of 5%.

The findings from both regions, despite their regional and ethnic distinctions, offer insights into a typical structure of self-identification among Bulgarian citizens. The foremost identification is tied to the nation-state, though understood differently between the Bulgarian ethnic community and other ethnic groups. Subsequently, local identity emerges as the second prominent aspect, signifying a counteraction to globalization, especially for smaller nations like Bulgaria, aimed at safeguarding their distinctiveness and asserting their significance among larger nations. For non-Bulgarian ethnic groups, the third-place spot is held by ethnic identification, an attempt to underscore their uniqueness and specific traits at the national level alongside the majority ethnic group. Notably, this form of identification is absent among ethnic Bulgarians, who consider Bulgarian national identity and ethnicity as synonymous. Overall, supranational structures like the EU, the global community, and the Balkan region are placed at the bottom of the hierarchy in the self-identification structure of Bulgarian citizens. Supranational identity remains relatively weak among the Bulgarian population, although there are initial indications suggesting its budding formation.

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Conclusion

In conclusion, it may be said that encounters with "others," those who are different from us, are changing our perception of the world and ourselves. The intense movement of people and, hence, the opportunities to get to know other nations and cultures, combined with digitalization and the opportunity it offers for people to become familiar with "the others" without even leaving their native places, result in transformations of self-identification among Bulgarian citizens; self-identification with supranational structures is holding an increasingly important place. Our survey results show that this process is only beginning; in fact, it is well known that changes in the social consciousness are slow to come about and an especially long time is needed for radical changes to occur. Albeit the results shown here are from only two regions in Bulgaria, they allow deducing some structural particularities in the formation and transformation of the modern identity of Bulgarian citizens;

these are still to be checked through analyses for other regions of the country and the country as a whole. Further analyses of the survey data may reveal other interesting correlations between local, national, and supranational identity.

It may generally be said that, although there are some indications of erosion of the importance of national identity as well as signs of an emerging supranational identity (European, citizen of the world) and the formation of local identities, the national identity continues to be defining and foremost in the self-identification of Bulgarian citizens at this stage. Thus, we may say that the words of Jacques Attali are particularly valid for our country: he asserts that European nations are only in the “antechamber of the European identity,” which is a “great ideal” rather than a reality.¹⁹ The effort to achieve this ideal and the accompanying transformation of identity are sustained by the attractiveness of European values, the European way of life, and European standards, which Bulgarian citizens are striving to attain within a short time. But as regards social transformations, a short time usually means several generations.

¹⁹ Jacques Attali, *Fraternités. Une nouvelle utopie* (Fayard, 1999).

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