Communicating European Union Accession

The Case of Bulgaria

Linka Toneva
Abstract

This study presents an analysis of the political discourses of governments on European Union accession issues. The research centres on Bulgaria and is based on the examination of statements of key political figures from the government authorities in the period 2002-2005. Main research question is what types of discourses are developed by the government in relation to European integration and as regards the costs and benefits of EU membership and how these issues are communicated to the public in an accession country. The particular designs and characteristic features of EU accession discourses are presented and tested for changes over time. In the lack of public contestation of the decision to join the Union, the Communication strategy of the government is found to be limited to building a positive image of EU membership among the Bulgarian public and EU discourses are entirely engaged with presenting EU membership as a first-order priority. This allows for the utilization of foreign policy achievements for pragmatic political reasons, primarily for preserving electoral support.

Key words: Bulgaria, communication strategy, European Union accession, political discourse, public opinion
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1 Introduction

On 10 January 2002, the Government of the Republic of Bulgaria initiated a public communication and information strategy in a document called “Communication Strategy for the Preparation of Bulgaria for Membership in the European Union¹”. This document was followed by an Action Plan (covering the period 2002-2006) and by annual Working Programmes for the implementation of the Action Plan.

A look at the content of the “Communication Strategy” shows a paradox. The integration of Bulgaria to the European Union (EU), as the text explicitly stresses out, “enjoys the enormous support of Bulgarian society” (Communication Strategy 2002: 1). On the other hand, the strategy underlines that “[t]he support for membership is rather abstract and the citizens do not perceive many of the real problems connected with the actual membership” (ibid.). However, turning to the goals of the initiative for communication with the public, one can observe the determination of the governmental authorities to preserve this vague notion of what EU membership constitutes. Its task is outlined clearly from the beginning: to “give an opportunity to every social subject (institutional, group and individual) to become aware of the domination of the positive aspects of the process” of Bulgaria’s integration to the EU.

1.1 Research Purpose and Questions

Public support and public attitudes in general are an important component of European integration which plays a significant role in the guiding and shaping of the integration process (Gabel 1998) and of enlargement, in particular (Jones and van der Bijl 2003). Those attitudes are to a significant extent related to the “cues from the key social and political elites” in the particular country (Szcerbiak and Taggart 2004: 568-69). This consideration has guided me when determining the direction of my research towards political discourses on EU membership in an acceding country. Departing from the official document of the “Communication strategy”, I intend to analyze further the communication activities of the political elites in Bulgaria to see what kind of communication strategies they are

¹ I will refer to it using the shorter title “Communication strategy”.
performing in practice and, based on that, to see what political considerations lie behind the particular designs of those communication strategies.

**Question:**

**What types of political discourses are developed in the communication of EU accession to the public in Bulgaria?**

Related questions which will be discussed are:

- Is the government strategy part of any “communication game” or games? What are the characteristics of those games that can be distinguished through the discourses that govern them?
- Why are those discourses developed with those particular designs?

1.2 **Empirical Material**

1.2.1 **Types of Material**

The empirical material I utilize can be divided into three specific groups. The first group consists of the official documents of the Bulgarian government, starting with the “Communication strategy” of 10 January 2002 and all subsequent documents, related to it. The second group includes interviews, statements and speeches of political actors. This type of material is the most important for the research purpose and the most substantial one in terms of quantity and scope. My focus is on the central figures in the EU Accession discourse: Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Minister of European Affairs. My attention will be on their public statements addressed at the general public. Therefore the most important empirical resources are the statements in the mass media: newspapers, television, radio, as well as speeches available on the governmental internet portals. The third sources I utilize are interviews which I have conducted personally. The interviews are made for evaluation purposes and are therefore centered on experts, civil partners, academics. Thus some valuable critical reflections are obtained from these circles on the information and communication work of the government authorities. This part of the material has only additional value for the study as it helps in the analysis of the results.
1.2.2 Collecting the Material – Scope and Sufficiency

The main considerations when deciding upon the material were to choose the key figures (those with high authority, representing the government) and to analyze their political messages in their entirety. Biases of the material need to be discussed however. Firstly, the government discourses will be judged by analyzing the political messages conveyed by only three personalities from the government in the respective time period. This limitation is imposed by the need to diminish the scope of the otherwise enormous material. Secondly, the collected material from public statements of three political figures is based entirely on interviews in the major media channels, directed to the general public in Bulgaria.

Those are certainly limitations in the collected material. They however will not present major obstacles for a non biased analysis of the research questions for the following reasons. Although I am focusing only on a selective number of political actors, they are the most relevant figures for the purposes of the current research – those that form the decisions and are held publicly accountable. The Minister of Foreign Affairs is directly responsible for the implementation of the “Communication Strategy” and its related activities and represents a diplomatic, official foreign policy discourse. The Minister of European Affairs (also Chief Negotiator) represents a technocratic, administrative discourse, related to the technicalities of the negotiation process for accession to the EU. The Prime Minister, especially under a coalition government which is the case in the analyzed period, represents a broader political discourse of the government’s priorities in relation to EU and the accession policy. Thus the selected figures, although limited in number, present a broad range of political discourses of the government, related to the EU accession. As for the range of the analyzed statements, my consideration was to use only the political messages, conveyed through media channels, directed at broad general audience: national daily and weekly newspapers, national radio stations and national television channels^{2}. When examining those statements, representativeness is guaranteed by the fact that they are analyzed in a thorough and exhaustive manner. This comprehensiveness is guaranteed by the fact that I have accessed all public (through mass media sources) statements of the selected political figures via an extensive media archive. All the interviews are transcribed and are in electronic format (in Bulgarian), thus available for reference.

^{2} See Appendix 1
1.3 Time Frame

Communication between governments and publics is both a very concrete, explicit and also very abstract and intangible question. This means that a clear limitation of the scope and the time frame of the study is crucial for the results that can be expected.

The date of the adoption of the Communication strategy (10 January 2002) can be considered as the beginning of the realization of a communication strategy for EU accession. On the other hand, it can also be argued that the process of communication to the public of the issues related to the accession of Bulgaria to the EU had already begun by the time the Communication strategy was adopted as an official document. This however depends on what is included in the concept “communication strategy”. Even though “Communication strategy” is the title of a government document, the scope of this concept can be broadened to include a number of (or all) “communication activities” of the government authorities. Many of those activities are actually based on the strategies and goals, outlined in this document: information bulletins, seminars, internet servers, etc. As my research question concerns the different communication games of the Bulgarian government, I find it most relevant to center on the key political figures in the communication process and to analyze their statements, thus unveiling the specifics of the government discourses on EU accession.

With these considerations in mind, I have limited my study to the time frame of January 2002 – December 2005. The initial date is chosen as it marks the official engagement of the government into communicating the EU accession (through adopting a strategic document). The closing date is chosen because it allows for a substantial time period of 4 years to be analyzed while excluding the events from 2006 as too recent. The year 2005 marks the parliamentary elections (26 June). This is particularly interesting because the communication events focused on the elections can be evaluated to see in what ways the government utilizes EU accession for strategic purposes before elections.

1.4 Disposition

The study proceeds by presenting a brief theoretical background to the discourse analysis approach. It then offers the methodological backbone of the analysis and some justifications of the choice of case study. The next chapter centers on a theoretical discussion of the importance of national context for the design of political discourses and of the relationships and hierarchy of
government discourses on European Union accession with particular focus on the Bulgarian case. The two following chapters then offer a close examination of the government discourses in Bulgaria in the analyzed period. An attempt is finally made for elaborating on the question why those discourses have been developed with those particular designs and emphases. The thesis ends with conclusions from the conducted research.
2 Methodological Standpoints

2.1 Discourses in the Political Practice

Discourses of the political elites in an accession country, related to the European Union membership issues, are at the center of this research. Discourses are fundamental elements of the political process (Gaffney 1999: 208). Political discourses can be understood as:

the verbal equivalent of political action: the set of all political verbalizations, and expressible forms adopted by political organizations and political individuals. [Discourse] generates response which may range from indifference, through hostility, to enthusiasm and which may or may not lead to political action. It is as complex in its inter-relations as political action is. The significance of any instance of political discourse will be affected by its overall relation to political action. And together discourse and action constitute political practice.

(Gaffney 1989: 26, as cit. in Gaffney 1999: 200)

This study will depart from the theoretical standpoints of the positivist tradition in which language is viewed as means through which actors describe their world and forward their interests. Discourses and political language thus “frame and constrain given courses of action, some of which are promoted as sensible, moral and commanding wide levels of support, while others are discouraged as stupid, immoral and illegitimate” (Burnham et al. 2004: 242). Discourses are genuine political practices. This study will show that, indeed, politicians are highly aware of the practical significance of political discourse. Or as Meglena Kuneva, Minister of European Affairs of Bulgaria puts it, “there are no empty words in politics, every word is action and there is no turning back” (“Novinar” Daily, 06.01.2004).

2.2 The Method of the Study
2.2.1 Design of the Analysis

The main research question, which this study addresses, is “What types of political discourses are developed in the communication of EU accession to the public in Bulgaria?” The answer to it is provided by the analysis of political statements from three major political actors in the European accession process in Bulgaria: Prime Minister Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, Minister of Foreign Affairs Solomon Passy and Minister of European Affairs Meglena Kuneva. Those political figures represent the government coalition, which was in power during the period June 2001 – June 2005 and which consisted of two liberal centrist parties: National Movement “Simeon II” (NDSV) and Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS).

The analysis proceeds first by examination of the political discourses in the period January 2002 – June 2005. A number of communication “games” are outlined in the political language of the analyzed statements. As a second stage of the study, a test period is used to examine whether changes in the discourses occur in time and what influences possible changes. The test period has a time frame of six months, starting from June 2005 when parliamentary elections took place in Bulgaria and it ends with the end of 2005.

Four types of independent variables can be distinguished to facilitate the evaluation of changes in the communication strategies after the new government has taken power. Those are: (1) Stage of the accession process; (2) Party priorities/Party program; (3) Change in the type of coalition configuration; and (4) Change in the type of leadership (change of the Prime Minister after July 2005). The possible influence of the above mentioned independent variables on the communication games/discourses of the government needs to be discussed further.

Firstly, the stage which the accession process has reached has implications on the levels of public support for EU membership in the accession country. This is so because the issue of accession assumes “a much higher profile in [the] internal political debates as the accession negotiations proceed” (Szczerbiak 2001: 106). By June 2005 Bulgaria has already signed the Accession Treaty and the date of accession is expected to be January 1, 2007. It is thus obvious that by mid-2005 EU accession is perceived as an immediate prospect and this perception has repercussions on the domestic rhetoric as regards the expected short-term costs of the approaching membership (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2001: 13). Consequently, at such a later stage of the accession process, when EU membership from a question with symbolic significance “becomes a question of real political negotiation” (Henderson 2001: 21), a government should face more pressure to initiate debate, to provide information, to engage in communication, etc.

Secondly, the parliamentary election results of June 2005 have lead to the establishment of a new governing coalition in power. The party priorities of the new political actors can be expected to exert certain influence on the
communication process of EU accession and the form and content of the debates. In this case the new presence in the governing coalition is the Socialist-led coalition “Coalition for Bulgaria” (Bulgarian Socialist Party - BSP), a left-wing political organization, a “successor” of the Bulgarian Communist Party (Karasimeonov 2003: 136). Its priorities as regards EU accession do not differ substantially from the general trends, governing the EU policies of previous parties in power since EU accession process began (Todorov 1999: 10). Since the inception of transition, BSP has declared its orientation towards “political, economic and cultural integration of Bulgaria in the European structures, as well as towards the institutional development of this integration in all spheres” (“Programme of the Bulgarian Socialist Party”, adopted October 1994). Its most recent political platform, adopted during the 45th Congress of the party, declares “full membership in the European Union” as one of the main priorities of BSP (“Political Platform”, 13 June 2002). Therefore the change of the party configuration after June 2005 doesn’t affect the EU accession as a major priority of the new government. However certain changes in discourses on EU accession might be expected to come from possible contradictions between pre-election commitments of the left-wing BSP and the EU accession policy requirements (social policy, financial, state-budget commitments).

Thirdly, a change in the coalition configuration occurs after June 2005 as compared to the pervious period. The difference includes changes in the parties in the cabinet, the ministers in the cabinet, in the parties in the parliamentary majority. The number of parties in the coalition is increased from a two-party coalition to a formation of three. The differences in number are followed by a more substantial variation in the ideology of the parties. While the 2001-2005 coalition of NDSV and DPS was a coalition of two liberal centrist formations, the elections in June 2005 added a left-wing party with a different ideology to the government formation. This new government formation lacks however clear and distinct, negotiated joint interests and policy priorities, on which a genuine coalition is to be based (Shopov 2006a). The tripartite coalition after June 2005 was formed due to necessity for utilization of the government mandate and due to risk of new elections which would probably lead to significant delay in adopting the acquis communautaire and slow-down of the EU accession process (IEP 2006: 29). Those inherent ideological variations inside the governing majority imply possibilities for changes in the form, content and emphases in the European debates in Bulgaria at a governmental level. Furthermore, what is crucial for this study, are the changes in the government team, where (apart from the leadership change which will be discussed below) Solomon Passy was substituted by Ivailo Kalfin as Minister of Foreign Affairs. The Minister of European Affairs remains the same.

And fourthly, an important leadership change takes place after July 2005, when the new coalition government is presided by Sergey Stanishev, leader of BSP. This has two implications. On the one hand, a tri-party coalition imposes certain restrictions and compromises on the leader’s part, who has to take into
consideration the positions and interests of three separate and independent political formations. This maneuvering can limit the influence and leadership role of the Prime Minister, as compared to the previous Prime Minister Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. On the other hand, there are certain internal compromises inherent to the BSP. This is not the first occasion when the various party fractions and key figures in the party choose to place a less influential personality on the lead of the party. It is meant to occupy the leading position without consuming the entire authority in order for the other political figures in the BSP to preserve their leadership capacity. This has been an old tradition in this century-old party.

The factors, presented above have potential influence over the EU communication process and the changes in those factors, which have occurred after the elections in June 2005 might have certain explanatory power over eventual differences in this process. Therefore, I have used the test period June 2005 – December 2005 to see whether those factors have indeed influenced any changes in the designs of the government discourses.

2.2.2 The Case Study Method

This thesis uses the case study method. The choice of this method is motivated by the fact that the area under analysis is still not widely researched. Conceptual frameworks and hypotheses about the relationship between public debates, European attitudes of the civil societies and the political discourses of the elites in EU accession countries have not yet been developed. Where analyses are available, they primarily focus on the ten new Member States which joined the EU in 2004 while research of the case of Bulgaria has not been undertaken. Thus an in-depth case study on Bulgaria can present a contribution to the research on EU communication in accession states.

There are of course pragmatic reasons for choosing a single case analysis when working under limitations of time and of conciseness of the study (Jerre 2005: 12). In this case I have prioritized for depth of my research rather than aiming at broad analyses of a number of cases which would have indeed given better opportunities for generalizations (Lijphart 1971: 691). All these considerations contribute in favor of a case study method in which a case can be studied as a whole and analytical openness can be preserved until the very final stage of the research process. Nevertheless, the present analysis is not devoid of comparative value. It is based on comparative examination of different types of

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3 The previous BSP Prime Minister (1994-1997), Jan Videnov, whose first professional employment was that of Prime Minister of Bulgaria, was also the result of such internal compromise.
political discourses which are discussed and compared at two different time periods.

2.2.3 Focusing on the Bulgarian Case

Since the early 90s European integration and membership to the EU has developed as an issue of prominence for the transition countries in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). Yet, research on political discourse, communication strategies of the government and on public attitudes towards the EU is centered mainly on Western and Southern Europe (Tverdova and Anderson 2004: 187). As mentioned above, this leaves CEE states under-researched and makes a case study focused on one of those transition countries an interesting and relevant endeavor. What makes the Bulgarian case worthy of attention is the fact that unlike the first group of accession countries from CEE who joined in 2004, referendum for accession has not been held and is not expected in Bulgaria. At the same time there has been a debate and discussion about holding one and there are no particular political reasons or considerations (such as public opinion on EU) that might hinder possible public contestation of the decision to join the Union. The extent to which generalizations can be made through the observation of only the case of Bulgaria is debatable. But those specifics of the Bulgarian situation can provide good opportunity to analyze the political behavior and attitudes in communication with the public by governments who face little opposition to their European direction and are who backed by deep public support for EU accession.
3 Government Discourses on EU Accession

This section presents an attempt for theoretisation of the question of discourses of governments in an EU accession country. It provides the theoretical basis of my further empirical analysis of the communication practice in Bulgaria. I examine the specifics of the political culture and participatory tradition in Bulgaria. Furthermore, attention is paid to the features of a post-communist transition society in general terms as regards Central and Eastern European countries. In this discussion theoretical standpoints are not clear-cut and there are contributions from many theoretical traditions: from theories that deal with civic culture; with participation; with communication and information; public relations approaches. As the area of government strategies for communication of EU accession issues is un-developed in theoretical terms and hugely under-researched, empirics sometimes will precede the theory.

My attention will first center on the importance of national contexts and civic culture for the proper understanding of the character and the instrumental role of political messages. I will then proceed with a discussion of different types of EU-related political discourses.

3.1 Discourses and the Importance of the National Context

If political messages and their instrumental role are to be understood properly, consideration has to be paid to the question of national political culture because political discourse is “embedded in national contexts” (Gaffney 1999: 199).

As a country, emerging from almost half a century of totalitarianism, Bulgarian civil society suffers from maladies common to all the CEE countries: “weakness of society”, low level of public debates, undeveloped participatory tradition (Jerre 2005). A vital ingredient that could make democracy work still has to be developed – this is the input of the citizenry in terms of social dialogue and interactions between citizens themselves, and between the citizens and the institutions: “democratic institutions need as their basis the kind of culture that grows out of participation” (Dainov 2004: 5). The post-communist heritage of
disintegration of the social fabric is furthermore complemented by general hostility towards “coercive mass mobilisation” for example in voting which results from “having been forced to participate in these kinds of activities during the communist period” (Szczerbiak and Taggart 2004: 562). This context of low level of public debate and weak tradition towards participation has to be considered when we analyze the level of contestation of membership in the EU at the elite level and also at popular level. On the background of “very limited public debate”, “broad elite and (although to a lesser extent) popular consensus in favor of (…) EU membership” (Szczerbiak and Taggart 2004: 559-60) has developed in the CEE countries and for “most of the major political parties across the East-Central European states EU membership is desirable” (Tverdova and Anderson 2004: 188). European integration has been “an unusually consensual issue in East Europe” (Bielasik 2004: 2). In the Bulgarian case it is indeed “the most powerful consolidating factor” in domestic politics (IEP 2006: 29).

At popular level in Bulgaria public preferences towards EU membership have been relatively high and continue to remain at high levels since mid-90s when the process of EU accession gained direction. In 1996 for instance, support for EU membership was measured to be “slightly over 50% in Bulgaria”, compared to the lowest level of support – about 30% (in Estonia) (Tverdova and Anderson 2004: 192). What is more significant however is the very low level of opposition to membership among the public. Furthermore, compared to other CEE countries, it was three times lower than in Czech Republic, four times lower than in Latvia, five times lower than in Hungary and Estonia, around three times lower than in Slovakia (Tverdova and Anderson 2004: 193). Those high levels of support to EU accession have remained stable over time and the Spring 2004 Eurobarometer shows 65% of the public view EU membership as a positive thing, while only 6% view it as negative (Eurobarometer 2004: C50). This places the Bulgarian public among the most EU-oriented societies with positive views on EU membership both among the established Member States (EU-15) and among the CEE countries.

One other “peculiar characteristic of Bulgarian political culture” (Todorov 1999: 6) has to be considered when evaluating political discourses on Europe and EU issues. Alongside with thinking of EU accession in terms of “a return to Europe” or a “road to Europe” (ibid.), accession is also understood at both elite and at popular level as embracing a model for political, economic, cultural development. This stems from a particular feature of the political culture in Bulgaria.

“Political life in this country has always been receptive to foreign models. The openness of Bulgarian politics to foreign models could be observed already at the dawn of Bulgarian political life. European political models have themselves become properly national Bulgarian political culture. The entire political experience of the nation has been accumulated in a process of assimilation of political models coming from Europe.” (Todorov 1999: 6)
This corresponds to significant levels of dissatisfaction with the domestic political system and lack of credibility of the domestic institutions. Thus this context of openness towards models, borrowed from foreign environments and backgrounds, allows for pro-European discourses which present accession to the EU as “a matter of unquestionable first-order priority” (Todorov 1999: 18).

3.2 Relationship and Hierarchy of the EU Accession Discourses

The European Union has recently involved itself in a number of debates (with the participation of civil society partners) on both the enlargement process and the future of the Union in general. Communication policy and transparency policy have slowly evolved from a general political will to bring “the public closer to the EC’s institutions and a way of stimulating a more informed and involved debate on European policy”. (Heritier 2003: 822). Furthermore, the candidate countries have themselves engaged in communication and information activities for acquainting their citizens with the Union and its policies, which they were expected to become part of. Many have developed strategic documents for such a communication policy, or Communication strategies. This has provoked recent research on communication resources and strategies mainly focused on chief EU actors – such as the Commission or the Parliament (Anderson and McLeod 2004, Eriksen and Fossum 2002, Meyer 1999, Heritier 2003, Schlesinger 1999).

In the theoretical discussion below I will focus entirely on the government discourses and strategies for communication on EU accession issues. Some aspects of this communication process are two-sided and can also be discussed from a bottom-up perspective – stakeholders initiating debates, requesting information, etc. The research purpose of this thesis however is to elaborate on the communication of governments on EU issues and therefore the scope of the analysis will be entirely on top-down perspectives.

3.2.1 To Inform and to Convince

The general theoretical debate on the issue of communication strategies of the EU proceeds in terms of a differentiation between information and communication. Those two concepts are even portrayed as opposites, where the first one is a top-down approach, while the second is a constantly on-going two-sided interaction between the decision-making body and the interest groups in society and the individual citizens. Or as Giuliano Amato, former Prime Minister of Italy puts it, “communication is dialogue, information is one-way” (Davies and
What is particularly important in this interaction is the question of participation and openness of the interaction channels. This brings forward the concept of access. Access implies two forms. Those are “active access, i.e. the possibility of transmitting information, and even demands, to a political or administrative decision-making body, with or without the explicit right of being heard (...) [while] the decision-making body reacts formally to the concern at issue; and passive access, i.e. the possibility of obtaining information about on-going decision-making processes and the persons involved in a decision-making body” (Heritier 2003: 821). In the top-down approach of providing information, the information is offered in a “processed from by the respective decision-making body” in the form of “information brochures, information on the internet, for instance, or oral presentations” (ibid.). It is clear that those two strategies towards informing and debating with the public serve very different instrumental political functions because when choosing between informing and communicating, the decision-making authorities indeed “determine who has the right to know who the decision-makers are, what procedures they employ, what their areas of interest are, and what the consequences of their decisions are” (Heritier 2003: 819).

Having clarified the conceptual differences between information and communication, which are particularly relevant for my analysis of EU communication strategies, I can now turn to examining the particular configuration of discourses applied in the case of the “Communication Strategy” in Bulgaria and the political messages on EU accession issues.

The title of this strategic document orients the reader towards notions of openness, debate, interaction between the decision-making bodies, responsible for the activities in the strategy, and the public towards which those activities are directed. Discussion can then be expected to be prioritized in the communication policy of the government and emphasis to be placed on debating with stakeholders, with opinion leaders in society, with key interest groups and the civil society representatives (Communication Strategy 2002: 4). This priority, although outlined in the document and in some related initiatives, is in practice placed under the first-rate goal of acquainting the public of the benefits from EU membership and making the citizens aware of the “the price which Bulgaria would pay if it fails to join the EU, or if its accession is delayed” (Communication Strategy 2002: 3). Those strategic goals provide the basis for very different political discourses to be utilized when communicating EU accession. One type of discourse has to convey objective messages of “what the EU is” and to “disseminate objective information about the EU”, which means to inform the public, while other types of discourses have to “explain what the benefits of membership are” (ibid.) which means to convince the public.

In an ideal-type situation those two separate goals can be achieved when discussion and debate are present and when costs from accession are also paid attention to. Where the public is not acquainted with the price is has to pay in both
short-term and long-term perspective and where debate is not stimulated, there is little room for a bottom-up approach to communication and what prevails indeed is that information is processed by the decision-making bodies and offered to the public top-down (Heritier 2003: 821). As the national context and political culture in Bulgaria (as discussed above) is a fruitful ground for such an approach to EU communication, absurdly as it may sound, the Bulgarian public becomes an “object of communication”, or is subjected to communication: an oxymoron term which substitutes the right of being an equal participant in the two-sided interaction of communication.

The debate for EU membership in Bulgaria was (whether on purpose or not) profaned from its very beginning. It was taken out of the sphere of problematization and brought down to the level of day-to-day populism. Furthermore, it was reduced to a simple pre-election slogan. EU membership for the Bulgarians creates “only vague notions of what accession actually entailed and little conception that it was an extremely complex process involving considerable costs as well as benefits” (Szczerbiak and Taggart 2004: 559-60). At the inception of transition in early 90s, and later on as well, “public opinion was little aware of the difficulties involved in this accession, of the efforts it would demand, even in economic sphere alone” (Todorov 1999: 10). However, the instrument of general slogans with little specifics of what membership to the EU entails have been used by other CEE governments as well especially during election and referendum campaigns. One example can be derived from the Estonian case during referendum campaign in 2003, where “[t]he Yes campaign was short on specifics, using general slogans that focused on the economic and security gains of accession and presenting (…) EU accession part of an inevitable historical process determining whether Estonia would be part of the West or the East” (Mikkel : 7).

So far I have elaborated on the relationship between discourses aiming to inform and discourses aiming to convince the public of benefits of EU accession and costs of non-accession. Those two appear to be in a very deep relation to one another and in a clear hierarchical configuration with the government in an accession country (which is pro-European in orientation) prioritizing between the two types of discourses in favor of the latter – to convince. However, in order to understand the entire picture of government discourses, one has to examine the relationship between those discourses in view of the pre-election behavior of governments. What is the place in this hierarchy for the general discourses which use EU accession and successes in foreign policy as means of preserving the electoral support?

3.2.2 EU Accession Discourses and the Pre-Election Behavior of Governments

The hierarchical place of discourses conveying the message of foreign policy successes in the EU accession field is determined by the “symbolic importance of
EU membership in the domestic politics of post-communist states” and by the “centrality of the EU accession issue to their politics” (Henderson 2001: 5). In this context, domestic policies become justified by foreign policy priorities and the achievements of the government in power in EU accession policies can be interlinked within every political message relating to the Union. As accession is Bulgaria’s “immediate goal, (…) the whole Bulgarian domestic and foreign policy making is dominated by the pre-accession agenda” (IEP 2006: 29). Staying in power, a major political priority for each government, becomes dependent on how EU-accession issues are discussed and how messages are conveyed to the public because practically every domestic policy action is “externalized” and is presented as part of the foreign policy. At the same time the lack of means for public contestation of the government decision for EU accession (lack of referendum) allows for utilization of the foreign policy successes and for overexposing the issue of EU membership, especially in their pre-election behavior.

In the hierarchy of discourses communicating EU accession, the communication with stakeholders is directly related to the political goal of convincing the public of the benefits of membership, especially since EU membership cannot be expected to bring equal gains to all (Tucker et al. 2002; Gabel and Whitten 1997). Some will benefit significantly, while for others membership is actually undesirable. Initiating debate with all chief stakeholders on EU accession issues is thus a vital ingredient of a functioning communication strategy for accession. In the case of Bulgaria, this part of the communication activities in EU accession preparation is the part that can reasonably be defined as absent from a top-down perspective. It was absent in terms of the failure of the government authorities to initiate a serious debate and discussion with the key stakeholder groups even though this priority was outlined in the “Communication Strategy” and its related documents. The underlying reasons for absence of genuine discussions of EU membership conditions with the stakeholders in the process have to be examined further and I will shortly look at the question from a bottom-up perspective (stakeholders’ perspective) below.

Bulgaria is a country which is in the initial phase of establishment of its national business and entrepreneurship and it has emerged from a 100% state-owned planned economy. The process of transition to market economy and privatization in its early period usually creates two diverging realities: winners and losers, and social inequalities increase (Tucker et al. 2002). Long time is needed for the genuine economic backbone of a society to be formed – the small and medium enterprises and the middle class. This is the reason why the systematic interests in the civil society in Bulgaria are still not structured. The society still has to undergo its social, cultural, etc. structuring and stratification. It is still fragmented. Therefore significant structured interests do not exist. There are no organized professional groups of interests with resources and capabilities to lobby for certain causes and to put pressure from below towards a transparent and active communication on EU-related issues. One example can be provided as an illustration: there are about nine national daily newspapers in Bulgaria at present.
All of them, except for the party newspapers, follow the same problems and have the same audience. The reason is that their audience is indeed the same: still unstructured by specific economic and professional interests.

Those conditions explain the lack of pressure on the government activities during the negotiation process for accession to the EU. Furthermore, there is practically no opposition in the EU accession debate, because all political parties, represented in Parliament have declared two main priorities: membership of NATO and of the EU. Although “some parties do display some soft Eurosceptic positions with regard to the defense of the national interest on sensitive issues such as the visa regime and the Kozloduy nuclear power plant”, those can hardly be considered genuinely euro-skeptic (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2001: 17). Even though the last parliamentary elections in June 2005 led to the presence of a nationalist ultra right party “Ataka” in Parliament, the absence of Euro-pessimists in general remains a trend in the political process. Even the leaders of “Ataka” cannot be considered to be against EU membership. They have only stated that they support the re-opening and re-negotiation of Chapter 14 “Energy”.

So far I have discussed the relationship between different political discourses in an accession country, related to European Union issues. I have presented an attempt for analysis of the hierarchical interrelation between those different types of discourses and the underlying political considerations of the political messages in them. In the specifics of the Bulgarian national context, those discourses have proved to be dominated by one political goal: convincing the public of the benefits of accession (which overweight the costs) and at the same time utilizing accession for political means such as preserving electoral support. In the following chapter I will examine the specific characteristic features of each of these discourses in the period 2002 – 2005, which will then allow for an evaluation of the entire government discourse on EU accession.
4 Types of “Communication Games” Played by the Government

Government discourses on EU accession are not clear-cut and can rarely be put in explicit groupings. Often one discourse penetrates all public statements and has overwhelming influence on the entirety of political messages sent by the government authorities towards the general public. In other cases discourses are issue-specific and take different forms and content regarding the subject at stake. The analysis of the empirical material showed that at least five types of messages can be distinguished in the political discourses regarding accession of Bulgaria to the European Union. I have called them “communication games”4, because of the different “roles” which the communication strategy for EU accession takes in the context of the specific messages that have to be conveyed through the political language. I present them in the order of importance, determined by the general trends in the political language during the observed period in the empirical material I have analyzed.

4.1 Communication Game 1: To Convince /EU as a Super-priority/

This first line of discourses aims to convince the public of the positive aspects of EU accession, as stipulated in the “Communication Strategy” of 2002. This discourse is basically concerned with building the picture of the EU as a super-priority, an ultimate goal of the governmental policy and basic national interest

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4 My idea to use this term was influenced by Robert Putnam’s analysis of two-level games, which I initially intended to use for research on the referendum debate in Bulgaria and its importance for utilization of foreign policy as a pre-election tool for accumulating public support. Even after having changed the design of this thesis, I decided to keep the metaphor “communication games”. Putnam offers good justifications for such a metaphorical usage (1988: 435).
for Bulgaria\(^5\). The characteristics of this type of communication game are, firstly, strong emphasis on the lack of another attractive geopolitical alternative for the country. This discourse is in connection with stressing out the possibility for geopolitical isolation in case of non-accession to the EU. On the other hand, pointing out the economic benefits of membership (especially the benefits from the pre-accession funds and the Structural Funds), develops the understanding that Bulgaria will benefit from membership more than it will contribute (positive cost-benefit balance) and thus its relative gains are higher than possible losses. The political language comprises terms such as help, generosity, and benefits: “The EU wants to help Bulgaria to adapt” (Solomon Passy, 13 February 2004, Bulgarian National Television), “the membership of Bulgaria and Romania costs money, it costs a lot of money and this is money that will come from Europe”, “We negotiated four and a half million, almost five million Euro (...) this is an enormous financial resource which our country has never obtained before” (Solomon Passy, 26 April 2005, “Nova Evropa” Radio), “The money which the EU has prepared for Bulgaria, will increase the standard of living in our country” (Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, 13 February 2004, cited by “Standard” Daily). “The question is not how much we pay but how much we receive for our membership in all international organizations (...) indeed, we pay very little, but we receive much, much more than we pay” (Solomon Passy, 29 April 2005, bTV). “Bulgaria will receive many times more (...) the balance for Bulgaria has a surplus” (Meglena Kuneva, 29 April 2005, bTV).

Thirdly, in political discourse the EU is portrayed as a part of the historical and civilization choice of Bulgaria, made back in 1989. Central point is the signing of the Accession Treaty (April 2005) which is compared to the historical event of the Unification of Bulgaria in 1885 – “a new unification, this time with the European family” (Solomon Passy, 16 June 2004, Bulgarian National Television). The historical significance of accession has to surface above the every-day understanding of membership negotiations as closing of chapters and negotiating quotas. “These are not just agreements on quotas for milk, for meat, for wine, etc., etc. There is much more to it – Bulgaria has become a member of the European family” (Solomon Passy, 20 June 2004, bTV). The same type of discourse however emphasizes the reasons for national pride in entering the Union. An often repeated theme is that Bulgaria brings the Cyrillic alphabet to the EU “…we brought the Cyrillic alphabet into the EU while 1141 years ago we gave the Cyrillic alphabet to the whole world” (Solomon Passy, 30 October 2004, bTV). The EU as a super-priority is even portrayed in Biblical expressions: “We can already see the Promised Land on the horizon and we have been traveling not

\(^{5}\) The history of EU membership as a super-priority actually dates back to 1997 – 1998 and for NDSV it was rather an inherited political priority from the UDF government, to which NDSV-DPS coalition government (2001-2005) was holding on as means for proving their responsibility as government.
40 but only 8 years, so: Straight forward!” (Solomon Passy, 15 April 2005, “Dnevnik” Daily).

Thus the “communication game” of convincing the public of the benefits of EU accession is concerned primarily with building the picture of EU accession as a super-priority for Bulgaria and as an event of utmost historical significance.

4.2 Communication Game 2: To Win Elections /Utilizing Foreign Policy Successes/

Foreign policy priorities (and achievements) have been good means for several successive governments to gain electoral support. Examples can be provided for the operationalization of foreign policy issues and especially EU-related issues for sustaining the belief in the public that the governments have had certain political achievements, or in the opposite case – that difficult and unpopular domestic reforms have been imposed from abroad (“Brussels told us to do that”). This tendency can be easily observed in the case of accession negotiations in Bulgaria because EU membership has been top priority for the three successive governments in power since the initial phase of opening negotiations\(^6\). The successful signing of the Accession Treaty in April 2005, only two months before the next Parliamentary elections was used by the government (the National Movement “Simeon II” and the Movement for Rights and Freedoms coalition) as the main demonstration of the successful foreign and European integration policy of the government.

Foreign policy successes are underlined by using the strategy of “competition with the neighbor”. Thus, pre-election discourses depict Bulgaria as a competitor with Romania (the most obvious opponent) in the race for better readiness for accession. This is a trend in the communication process in Bulgaria where achievements have been best demonstrated by a comparison with the less developed and less prepared candidates for accession, instead of by comparing to the “Ten” (first accession group). An interesting evolution in this political discourse can be observed when Romania is no longer lagging behind but Macedonia applies for membership. The discourses of differentiation from the

“less prepared for accession” – primarily differentiation from Romania - shift at a later stage to differentiation from Macedonia. This occurs simultaneously with a shift in the discourses from EU membership as a competition to membership as a common effort. As a “leading candidate for membership” (Meglena Kuneva, 12 December 2003, “Darik” Radio), Bulgaria is determined to “help its neighbors” (Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, 16 March 2002, “Standard” Daily; Solomon Passy, 9 October 2004, “Nova” Television; etc.) in their accession process. Even though a “competitor”, Romania is portrayed in the political language as a neighbor that needs help, support and know-how from Bulgaria. “We wish all the best to our Romanian neighbors. We are ready to share with them our experience, gathered in concluding chapters and in negotiating” (Solomon Passy, 15 June 2004, BBC Radio). After the 2004, and particularly after 2005 Regular Reports, when Bulgaria is criticized strongly by the Commission for lack of reforms in the administration and the judiciary, these discourses shift towards Macedonia – a candidate whose negotiations are at initial phase: “We would share our experience, we would give and we do give our support to Macedonia (…) in its negotiations for EU accession” (Solomon Passy, 29 August 2004, Bulgarian National Radio).

On the one hand, negotiated positions and the benefits from membership are attributed in the political discourse of the government primarily to its own capacity to lead the negotiations and to its ability to achieve beneficial conditions of membership. “What this government succeeded to negotiate with the EU regarding the financial terms of Bulgarian membership is more than what Bulgaria would have received had it been part of the “Marshall” Plan” (Solomon Passy, 20 June 2004, bTV). The controversial question concerning the “safeguarding clause” is tackled in one clear statement: “if this government stays in power until 31 December 2006, it is guaranteed that Bulgaria will be in the EU on the next day – 2007” (Solomon Passy, 6 October 2004, bTV). On the other hand, criticism by the European Commission towards the speed of reforms in Bulgaria is attributed to the current political situation in the Union, to the public attitudes in Europe, “the attitudes that resulted in negative referenda outcomes in France and in the Netherlands” (Solomon Passy, 3 June 2005, “Darik” Radio).

Electoral support of over 21% after periods of public support below 7% (opinion polls) for NDSV shows the political importance of the successful conclusion of the negotiations with the EU.

Conclusions can be drawn that this “communication game” rests primarily on the discourses building the picture of EU as a first-order priority and there is a direct relationship between the utilization of foreign policy (EU accession) for political reasons and communication of the accession benefits.
4.3 Communication Game 3: To Inform /Europe in Simple Images/

An old woman, dressed in traditional Bulgarian folk costume holding a jar of pickles in her hands wishes good future to her grandchildren in the European Union. This is an image of one of the commercials on TV, part of the “Communication Strategy” activities.

The political discourses which inform the Bulgarian public about the consequences of EU membership build the picture of Europe in simple images. Those images are, on the one hand, an answer to the tendency of the Bulgarian media and public debates in general to simplify the accession process, painting it with a broad brush of newspaper clichés such as “*they* are closing our nuclear plant”, “*they* don’t allow us to eat our tripe soup”, “we can’t distil brandy anymore”. On the other hand, such simplifications stem from the lack of clear and sufficiently precise messages from the political elites regarding the costs, benefits and obligations of EU membership.

Two characteristics of the information strategy can be outlined. Firstly, informative messages stress out the benefits of accession in the general terms of financial support and better social security, order, rules and norms. Those are the messages which the activities and projects developed in accordance with the “Communication strategy” aim to conduct. To the extent that costs and obligations from membership appear at all as a theme in the political discourses of the government, those are discussed in one general formula: the EU means “*a more competitive life*” (Meglena Kuneva, 11 March 2002, “Standart” Daily; 3 September 2003 Bulgarian National Radio, etc).

> “Indeed, membership to the EU has innumerable advantages and brings many benefits to people, after they join this structure. But the coin has two sides. The other side is called responsibility and discipline.”
> (Solomon Passy, 9 October 2004, Nova Television)

> “*We are moving towards a competitive world, towards equal opportunities*”.  
> (Meglena Kuneva, 12 November 2003, “Seven” Weekly)

Secondly, informative discourse on EU accession is primarily concerned with the speed of negotiations. Emphasis is placed on the need to overcome delays in the process of accession and thus a perception of activeness of the government in its foreign policy is created. “*If somebody uses the word *hurry* as regards the

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7 A general information campaign under the motto “Europe for me” was initiated in end-2003 and was based primarily on media – TV, radio, newspaper, billboard commercials.
negotiations, I can only say that, on contrary, we are very late. Bulgaria had a huge delay in the process of negotiations and what we are doing now is to compensate for this delay” (Solomon Passy, 12 June 2004, “Darik” Radio). The need to accelerate the negotiations is attributed to the fact that “negotiations become more difficult every day” (Solomon Passy, 21 November 2003, Bulgarian National Television) and the “arrangements we can stipulate become less beneficial for Bulgaria” (ibid.).

Thus the information “communication game” presents two main rules: building the picture of EU membership in simple images and emphasizing speed of the negotiations over content. This is related to the lack of public contestation of the decision to accede the EU and therefore the discourses related to a possible referendum will be analyzed below.

4.4 Communication Game 4: To Avoid Public Contestation /The Referendum Debate/

A referendum for accession of Bulgaria to the European Union (EU) is not required according to the current Bulgarian constitution. However, during the final phase of the negotiations for membership in the EU a debate was put forward (primarily by opinion leaders) with the suggestion for a change in the constitutional framework and for a referendum on the accession as an issue with historical consequences for the country. (A constitutional change was possible with the support of 2/3 of the Members of Parliament and such a proposal was favored by the opposition, so a referendum was indeed a possibility if there was political will on behalf of the government.) The debate was quite active for several months but it received no support from the political elite in power in Bulgaria and its relevance and the scope of public discussion was soon narrowed and negated.

The political discourse centered on the theme of possible referendum in Bulgaria for accession to the EU has to be analyzed in the light of the political importance of public contestation of governmental politics. Opinion polls show that around 65% of the Bulgarians are in favor of EU-accession. However, a referendum is a mobilizing factor. It means public contestation, it implies that opinions against EU membership might appear and they could perform an anti-EU membership campaigns. Consequently the government has to convince, to inform, to provide argumentation, to indeed “communicate”. A sheer PR-campaign might not suffice. Therefore the lack of public contestation of the decision to accede the Union is convenient and it can be defended by arguing that political responsibility
has to be taken when the future of a country is decided upon, because “a referendum is the best way for a people to self-punish themselves” (Solomon Passy, cit. in “Sega” Daily, 4 December 2002). Or as Meglena Kuneva puts it, agreeing with Jean-Luc Dehaene, Vice-President of the Convention on the Future of Europe, “a referendum can sometimes distort the perspective of a whole continent” (“Dnevnik” Daily, 28 November 2002). This reluctance towards direct public contestation of EU-accession is justified by referring to the need for accountability and for taking political responsibility.

“I have never hidden my personal preference that responsibility should be taken by politicians as they are chosen by the people. Responsibility shouldn’t be diluted among all the voters…”
(Solomon Passy, 30 October 2004, bTV)

However, on the occasion of a possible Bulgarian ratification of the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe through a referendum, the official position is that this case might be a “good occasion for a precedent to be established”: to organize a referendum (Solomon Passy, 30 October 2004, bTV). At the same time a possible referendum for accession is dismissed. Interestingly, when changes in the current Constitution were voted in the Parliament allowing for future accession to the EU, this parliamentary vote was qualified as “a referendum in which membership in the EU won 95% of the votes” (Solomon Passy, 20 February 2005, Bulgarian National Radio, alluding to the overwhelming majority of MPs who supported the changes in the Constitution).

Thus discourses on the issue of referendum for accession explicitly avoided the possibility for public contestation of the decision to join the EU.

4.5 Communication Game 5: To Discuss
/Approaches Towards the Stakeholders/

In an environment of unstructured interests and limited pressure from professional groups and stakeholders, the communication strategy of the government remains limited to emphasizing the speed of the negotiations as their main success. Negotiation chapters are closed as if they were the “jars of pickles” from the communication strategy commercial – one after the other, after the other. Emphasis is put on the speed rather than on the content of the negotiations and this is visible in the empirical material. Discourses of EU accession which are directed towards the key stakeholders are explicitly oriented towards debate, but implicitly debate is narrowed and negated particularly because stakeholders are unorganized and their interests are non-structured. The pre-accession public debates comprise virtually only one key case: the “Kozloduy” Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) debate. This is the only serious issue of public contestation and it has to be analyzed in the light of the underlying national context and economic
interests. “Kozloduy” is a key case because it is a demonstration of the collision between the “atomic lobby” in Bulgaria and the “European lobby” (the government; those arguing for EU membership at any cost). The serious underlying economic interests of the discourses arguing for negotiating better conditions for “Kozloduy” could be extrapolated on the fact that generations of Bulgarians were taught to take national pride in the fact that a small country like Bulgaria had a nuclear plant and was on its way to build a second one. Even this overwhelming issue, which was and continues to be in the center of attention since it was first brought up in 2002, succeeded no more but a public subscription of around 500 000 signatures for preserving the nuclear plant, which was lodged in the National Assembly to remain in its archives.

While the official position when closing Chapter 14 has been that “we want to prove and to check that third and fourth reactors of “Kozloduy” NPP are safe (...) we are obliged to try [and obtain a partnership check], moreover we can always reopen a negotiation chapter” (Solomon Passy, 26 September 2002, cit. in “Mediapool”), it soon becomes clear that this statement has been used only for tactical reasons of negating possible debates on Chapter 14. It can never be re-negotiated. The political message is soon transformed: “Chapter “Energy” particularly cannot be re-opened, this is impossible; practically it would bring the negotiations backwards” (Solomon Passy, 13 February 2004, Bulgarian National Television). The political discourse on this issue aims to persuade that everything possible has been done to protect the national interest on Chapter 14 and “we cannot change anything at the moment as regards “Kozloduy” NPP”. Thus the two discourses of EU as a super-priority and of negating possible debates actually stimulate each other:

“I will ask you: do we insist on being members of the EU in 2007 or we prefer to re-open Chapter “Energy” and wait for accession until 2020 or 2030.”
(Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, 21 November 2003, quoted by “Monitor” Daily)

EU as a super-priority is set against any discussions for re-opening of negotiation chapters and possible delays in the process of accession.

In order to sum up, the analyzed empirical material demonstrates that a ranking of importance of the different types of “communication games” cannot be absolutely clear-cut. The strategy towards “PR-discourses” for convincing the public of the gains from EU membership is overwhelmingly the main goal of the communication activities and this type of discourse penetrates the entirety of political messages related to the EU issues. At the same time this discourse is directly related to the discourse utilizing foreign policy successes for pre-election purposes. Thus prioritization between those two discourses is difficult as they are far too interrelated. Furthermore, during the pre-election stage it is obvious that the goal of winning elections through utilization of EU discourse will dominate
the rest of the communication games. Likewise, negating the referendum debate cannot be judged clearly as less important for the government than the other discourses. Yet its place in the bottom of the order of importance is determined by its short presence in the political communication.
5 Testing the Stability of the Discourses

5.1 Stability of the Analyzed Communication Games

In this chapter I will examine the stability of the characteristic features of the EU discourse of the governments in Bulgaria by looking at the post-electoral political messages related to EU accession. As stipulated in section 2.2.1, possible changes in the “communication games” might occur due to the advance of the accession process or due to changes in the governing coalition and in leadership.

As discussed above, the major pre-occupation of the political elite in Bulgaria is the forthcoming membership to the EU. Not surprisingly, “almost the entire post-electoral political debate” is driven by the issue of EU accession (IEP 2006: 29). In anticipation of the publishing of the monitoring report of the European Commission (on 25 October 2005) Bulgarian political debates rotate around the delay in preparation for accession, the delays in the reform process in general and the legislative process in particular. Delays are emphasized in order for the acceleration and the activeness of both the legislative process and the reforms to be given greater political importance and the perception to be preserved that a lot is now accomplished in very short time (basically immediately after the new Parliament and new government have been formed): “the Parliament will adopt 17 legislative proposals in just two months” (Sergey Stanishev, 16 September 2005, as cit. by Bulgarian Telegraph Agency). “We have delays in a number of spheres (...) we have a lot of work now and very little time” (Ivailo Kalfin, 9 September 2005, Bulgarian National Television; 1 September 2005, “24 Chassa” Daily) but on the other hand “we have a maximum level of mobilization” (Ivailo Kalfin, 25 September 2005, Bulgarian National Radio). Although “our delays are beyond any doubt”, “there is active work” (Ivailo Kalfin, 6 October 2005, as cit. by “Mediapool”); “The political atmosphere, political momentum and acceleration is preserved and since we have very little time this acceleration has to be speeded up” (Meglena Kuneva, 29 September 2005, Bulgarian National Television). Moreover, the perception is built up that the reform process is basically a legislative process of rapid adoption of legislation.
This emphasis on speed, time, delay and hurry serves one other instrumental function in the political discourse: it acts as a focal point of discussions, as a center of the attention of both the political elite and the public and very limited space is thus left for debate in substance about the negotiations, the accession responsibilities that have been taken and the costs and benefits of EU membership. Those are discussed in general and broad terms - “*membership in the EU entails taking responsibilities, fulfilling obligations*” (Ivailo Kalfin, 9 September 2005, Bulgarian National Television); “*as every competition, this one will give us a good opportunity*” (Meglena Kuneva, 21 September 2005, “Nova” Television). As for the substance of these responsibilities, they “*are extremely clear, they are to be found in the Treaty of Accession*” (Ivailo Kalfin, 25 September 2005, Bulgarian National Radio). The general public has to acquaint itself with them on its own.

The general messages, conveying the geopolitical and civilizational importance of EU membership, rotate around the point that “*Bulgaria will be one of the countries contributing to the stability and the influence of the European Union, the European identity*” (Ivailo Kalfin, 4 September 2005, Bulgarian National Radio).

“We have to enter Europe not only pro forma; on 1 January 2007, we will wake up in the same country. So, everything will not blossom immediately, in the middle of winter. But our country will be decisively different from then on (...) to get the place which Bulgaria deserves, in the European family.”
(Sergey Stanishev, 21 October 2005, Bulgarian National Television)

The Monitoring Report of October 2005 and the frequent visits of Euro-officials in Sofia with comments about the lack of progress in administrative and judicial reforms, enhance the need for the government to explain the consequences of those criticisms for the accession on 1 January 2007. Thus, certain contradiction occurs between those criticisms and the confidence of the political elite that accession is inevitable. The messages on the question of the “safeguarding clause” and the postponement to 2008 are vague. On the one hand, “*our chances for EU membership on 1 January 2007 are not lost, because the speed of the reforms is quite high and Brussels perceives the new government as excellent*” (Sergey Stanishev, 27 October 2005, as cit. by “Sega” Daily) and “*we have all chances to manage with this date*” (Ivailo Kalfin, 9 September 2005, Bulgarian National Television). On the other hand, “*membership on 1 January 2007 is not endangered, but (...) it is far from certain*” (Ivailo Kalfin, 1 September 2005, Bulgarian National Television) because “*there is one step to EU membership, but it is a rather big one*” (Ivailo Kalfin, 1 October 2005 as cit. in “Politika” Weekly).

Explanation for criticisms and uncertainty is derived from the public attitudes in the EU itself. “*Bulgaria has to persuade the sensitive public opinion in some EU member states that its membership will not be a burden but rather a*
contribution in the EU” (Ivailo Kalfin, 4 September 2005, Bulgarian National Radio). Therefore “it is possible that Bulgaria becomes a victim of discords within the EU itself” (Sergey Stanishev, 2 September 2005, as cit. by “Sega” Daily). Criticism by the European Commission in its Regular Report in 2005 is attributed to the fact that “this report is different in its character from the previous Regular reports” (Sergey Stanishev, 21 October 2005, Bulgarian National Television) because “Bulgaria is now considered an undoubted future member of the Union” (ibid.) and “Europe now emphasizes the actual realization of the obligations that Bulgaria has taken” (Sergey Stanishev, 5 November 2005, as cit. by “Duma” Daily).

Testing the discourses developed after the adoption of the “Communication Strategy” (January 2002-June 2005) on the basis of the post-electoral political messages (June 2005-December 2005) was selected as important analytical tool for the present paper, because it allows for the stability of the discourses to be examines and thus to see whether the “rules” of the “communication games” change over time or whether their characteristic features persist in spite of objective changes. As the previous sub-chapter has shown, the dominating political message of the importance of EU accession, its benefits and the successful and active work of the government towards accomplishing this priority-goal, persist over time and despite changes in the political background. Vague messages on the responsibilities and obligations of EU membership dominate the discourses and speed in fulfilling the now already negotiated obligations (mainly through adopting legislation and not through substantial reform) remain in the center of the political language after June 2005. The narrowed referendum-issue is almost entirely missing in the post-electoral period as the accession target date approaches. The other distinctive feature of the convincing “communication game” – the competitive/supportive attitude towards the neighbors is slightly modified and the position (particularly towards Romania) is that it is not “appropriate to look for competition” (Sergey Stanishev, 2 September 2005, as cit. by Bulgarian Telegraph Agency). This can be attributed to the fact that the October 2005 Monitoring Report establishes a perception in the subsequent debates that Romania is no longer lagging behind Bulgaria, but rather the opposite.

Thus significant modifications of the “communication games” for EU accession to the public in Bulgaria cannot be observed in the post-electoral period. The distinct feature of all discourses remains the same: these are PR-strategies for convincing the public of the successful negotiation process and of the benefits of EU accession. In the next sub-section I will analyze the underlying political considerations for such design of the communication strategy for EU accession in Bulgaria.
5.2 Instrumental Use of Discourses for EU Accession

The analysis presented so far offers some clues on the answer of the “why-question”, related to the research subject:

Why are the EU accession discourses developed with those particular designs?

The answer was thus far related primarily to the inherent specifics of the Bulgarian civil society. The coin has one more side however and in this section I will continue elaborating on the instrumental character of political discourses focusing on political elites. However, I do not aim to do it in theoretical abstract terms. It is my firm belief that in pragmatic politics discourses are utilized in ways and for political aims, which the respective national context provides for. My analysis will therefore probably have the weakness of being too context-dependent and quite centered on details of the Bulgarian politics. But this focus on particularities does not exclude the possibility of obtaining generalizable conclusions about the pragmatics of political discourses on EU accession and their capacity for instrumental utilization. The particular direction which those discourses have taken towards building a positive image of the EU accession in general and broad terms for reasons of political utility and for securing electoral support and shifting responsibility and accountability towards the EU, is dependent on the national context but can also be compared to other CEE contexts where similar patterns have occurred and where public debates and participation has also been limited (Szczerbiak and Taggart 2004).

Thus the answer to the why-question can be very short and also quite detailed. One short answer lies in the centuries-old inclination of governments and decision-makers to turn their problematic domestic politics into foreign policy. This can be achieved through waging a war but it can be done in many other subtle ways. And indeed the European integration process gives innumerable opportunities for the national political actors to “hide” behind the excuse of “Brussels told us to do that” (Moravcsik 1993). Thus instead of answering the simple but important questions which are of great concern to the public – such as the standard of living – the public space is dominated by “general themes, mainly of foreign policy character or ceremonial character” (Zdravko Raikov, 5 May 2006). The longer answer, although dependent on the context of politics in the particular case of Bulgaria, is the more important one because it will give many valuable insights to a reader not acquainted with this particular background. I have chosen to embark upon it by presenting several examples of the political pragmatics of EU accession which will also shed light on the question why EU discourses take the general shape of a PR-strategy in the case of Bulgaria.
The political motivation for structuring EU accession communication in the configuration described above can be found both in pragmatic, utilitarian as well as in opportunistic reasons. Closer look has to be taken on both.

There is an old Bulgarian proverb that says “Walachians drown close to the shore of the Danube”\(^8\). In practice however the opposite happens and a strange situation occurs in the end of the “Bulgaria’s EU accession” saga. The “Walachians” have gathered strength and have given Europe the small gestures which it demanded from them. Bulgarian political elites however hesitate and answer in St. Augustine’s manner: “Give me chastity and continence, but not yet”. Since 1999 when a “Memorandum of Understanding”\(^9\) was signed by the UDF government with the European Commission, there has not been a domestic political act of a Bulgarian government that has been justified with a reason other than “this is what the EU requires” (Penchev 2005). Including actions which the EU has never required like changing the registration plates of automobiles which sent a million of automobile owners to queue for days in front of the transport control authorities. Less then a year before the expected accession date the EU requires a small gesture which demonstrates will for changes – to immediately take to court a “dirty dozen” of high-rank politicians\(^10\) – the government tripartite coalition denies to give this “offering for public health”. From being notorious as the “Yes, sir” diplomats when negotiating with the EU (as Richard Chernistki, Member of the European Parliament, is quoted to have observed), the Bulgarian political elite today hesitates to give this small gesture which the EU has requested. Paradoxically enough, the ruling majority engages in political bargaining as to the ratio in which the “sacrifice” will be given and the corrupt officials will be “nominated”. Formulas like a “8:5:3” ratio were discussed (“Monitor” Daily, 14 April 2006), reflecting the principle according to which the coalition government is formed.

Leaving away the fact that this dispute is a direct acknowledgement of the scale which corruption has reached, the motives for this practical decline to cooperate with the EU and its requirements have to be analyzed further. One of

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8 Walachians is an old name of Romanians used often in Bulgaria and roughly translated the proverb means “there’s many a slip ‘twixt the cup and the lip”.

9 This document provides for “acceptable dates” for closing of four aging nuclear plants in Kozloduy and after its signing Commissioner Verheugen, responsible for Enlargement at that time, has said that there was no longer “need to make the invitation [for opening accession negotiations] conditional” (BBC news web-site, 29 November 1999, (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/542236.stm); Last accessed on 24 April 2006). Thus the only key condition the EU has insisted upon – closing of the reactors – has been accepted by the Bulgarian government.

10 During his last visit in Bulgaria Commissioner Olli Rehn has asked for at least a dozen of corrupt politicians to be prosecuted and sentenced (“Monitor” Daily, 14 April 2006; “Standart” Daily, 12 April 2006).
the explanations for the political motives of the elite is that EU membership is viewed by the Bulgarian political class as a “done deal” and imminent (Shopov 2006b). There is a general awareness both at elite and at popular level that whatever action is taken (or not taken), Bulgaria will be granted membership. The worst that can happen is a delay in accession by one year as stipulated in the “safeguarding clause”. This denial of any political action and sheer anticipation of things to happen by themselves can also be further attributed to a technological power interlock in the complex construction of a tripartite coalition or to other possible deliberate (or even unintentional) motives.

Another underlying political motif however is the syndrome of a common solidarity of the political class based on fear that if a precedent of a prosecuted and sentenced politician is established, the initiated process might slip easily out of control. The scale of corruption or at least the visibility of corruption has seized the entirety of the political elite. The lack of actions against the previous Saxe-Coburg-Gotha cabinet can be explained by the fact that it is still part of the current coalition government. This explanation was actually provided by Prime Minister Stanishev: “if we start prosecuting the former cabinet, the coalition will break down” (Sergey Stanishev, 12 April 2006 as cit. in “Standart” Daily). This however does not explain the lack of action against corrupt politicians from previous cabinets such as the UDF cabinet of 1997 – 2001. Where there have been attempts for fight against corruption the initiators of such actions have been marginalized and their initiatives have been negated. Parallel to this solidarity syndrome of the political elite is its conscious reluctance to give up its status of impunity. Most probably the motivation of the Bulgarian political elite is a complex combination of all those considerations.

Another factor also needs to be considered when evaluating the substance of the communication activities in the pre-accession period. Although a matter of secondary importance, the mode of management and mismanagement of the implementation of the “Communication Strategy” has also played a role in its ineffectiveness to generate genuine public debates. “Misuse of funds and badly thought-out project ideas have had a very negative impact not just on its substance but also on public perception” (Vladimir Shopov, 26 April 2006). Furthermore, the “Communication Strategy” and its related activities “lack unity, there is not even a uniform logo that can be generally distinguished”, the various activities are “torn between the different Ministries and each has its own vision on how to perform them” (Ingrid Shikova, 11 January 2006). The strategy has “failed to produce a clear and distinct message or messages” (Alexander Boshkov, 5 May 2006). This however only makes the political messages conveyed by political elites and addressed at the general public even more important for the formation of public perceptions on EU issues.

Thus the underlying reasons for such a design of the “Communication strategy” – one which emphasizes primarily the discourses for convincing the public of the positive aspect of EU accession and the successes of the negotiations
– is the need of the government to “justify their policies (even when they are ineffective or nonsensical)”, the attempt to “negate the criticisms coming from the Commission and its experts” (Rumyana Kolarova, 9 May 2006). The “entire information flow is dominated by the date and the conditions – the “safeguarding clause” (Dimitar Dimitrov, 9 May 2006). There is a “lack of serious public debate about alternative policies for the realization of the negotiated positions in the negotiation chapters” (Rumyana Kolarova, 9 May 2006) and this actually strengthens the high levels of public support for EU accession.

All the motivation factors described above, show features of utilitarian approaches to discourse but also opportunism and usage of political language and development of strategies depending on the current political situation.
6 Conclusions

6.1 Summary

The research question analyzed in this thesis was “what types of political discourses are developed in the communication of EU accession to the public in Bulgaria”. In answering this question I have analyzed the government discourses in Bulgaria on EU-related issues in the period January 2002 – December 2005, thus outlining the specific characteristic features of the various types of discourses (or, as I have metaphorically called them, ”communication games”). Theoretically I have distinguished between discourses aiming at informing the public of the costs and benefits of EU accession; discourses aiming at convincing the public of the domination of the positive aspects of membership; and discourses serving utilitarian political reasons (pre-election discourses, discourses using foreign policy successes, discourses negating particular debates and issues). Those separate political discourses can convey very specific messages and can have quite different designs. I have closely examined the Bulgarian context to see how those discourses appear in the political language of the government. My interest was to see what hierarchical configuration of discourses can be distinguished and how those are interrelated and subdued to one another.

6.2 Research Findings

6.2.1 How Many Different “Communication Games”?

Based on the analyzed discourses I have concluded that the different “communication games” have similar “rules”. The government is actually playing one single “communication game” and its overarching characteristic is the emphasis on the “domination of the positive aspects of the process” of Bulgaria’s integration to the EU (Communication Strategy p. 1). All political messages from the government, addressed at the civil society have one common goal: to keep the
public aware of EU accession issues only in general terms and with only vague notions of the complexity of EU integration process which involves significant losses and costs for each Member State. Changes in the government coalition, in the structure of the cabinet and the leadership, as well as the advance of the accession process have not shown significant influence over the design of the EU-accession discourses which remain stable over time. The “Communication strategy” and its related activities have the characteristics of a PR-strategy for convincing the public in Bulgaria of the positive aspects of EU membership. This overarching feature is found to be embedded in the specifics of the national context: super-prioritization of the accession issue; transformation of all domestic policy issues into foreign policy (EU requirements, obligations of membership, etc.), lack of genuine Euro-skepticism.

6.2.2 Domestic Contestation – Key Factor

Apart from the design and hierarchy of the discourses on EU accession, one other question was of interest in this thesis paper: the question of political utility and the pragmatic reasons for the development of EU discourses in this particular manner. On the basis of the research conducted in this thesis, key influence can be attributed to the factor of domestic public contestation of the government decision to join the European Union.

In the case of Bulgaria debate for possible public contestation was negated in a very early phase. And indeed, bearing in mind the level of awareness of the public on EU issues, there is a serious possibility that a possible referendum would be turned into choosing between “Kozloduy” NPP and the European Union. The public is provided only with a general notion of what EU means in terms of benefits from Structural Funds and in terms of geopolitical civilization choice for Bulgaria. Little is known about the meaning of the negotiated positions on the different negotiation chapters. A referendum for accession would then be no more than a referendum on a single negotiation chapter – Chapter 14 “Energy”. This is due however to the character of the communication activities of the authorities. In the semi-secretive or often out-rightly secretive manner of negotiating and closing chapters, there is a good probability that the public will indeed “self-punish” itself in an eventual referendum.

However, in the Bulgarian communication strategy case, domestic contestation of the accession decision is missing. The lack of referendum for accession means that there is no specific need for information and communication campaigns for the accession of Bulgaria to the EU. The “Communication strategy” of the government authorities can function as a PR-strategy and create especially a positive image of EU membership. This is why the referendum debate explains the “design” of the communication strategy for accession as a PR-
strategy of the government – a PR-strategy which is not contested by any opposing interests or visions.

6.3 Future Research

In the context of very limited research on communication strategies and government discourses on EU accession, the issue gives vast opportunities for examination. An interesting perspective to the question is the bottom-up approach, which was largely excluded from this thesis due to its concise nature. I find that the specifics of the political context in Bulgaria can be discussed in relation to the general post-communist transition background, thus allowing for generalizable conclusions to be made for the role of civic tradition for participation, initiation of debate as well accountability and transparency of the government authorities. Comparative analyses of the political discourses on EU-related issues can also prove to be interesting and valuable, due to the prioritization of EU membership in the political agenda in CEE countries as well as because of the relative comparability of the support levels for EU membership in those countries.
7 Bibliography

7.1 Books and Articles


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7.2 Documents

7.3 Interviews

**Ingrid Shikova** – Director, Information Center of the Delegation of the European Commission in Bulgaria
(11 January 2006)

**Vladimir Shopov** – Senior Research Fellow, Institute for Regional and International Studies
(26 April 2006)

**Rumyana Kolarova** – Jean Monnet Professor, Sofia University, Department Theory of Politics, Professor in Comparative Political Science
(9 May 2006)

**Dimitar Dimitrov** – Professor in Political Behavior and Electoral Studies, Sofia University, Department Theory of Politics; Member of the Bulgarian Central Electoral Committee, OSCE Expert in Electoral Laws and Reforms
(9 May 2006)

**Alexander Boshkov** – Co-Chair, Center for Economic Development, First Chief Negotiator with the European Union on Bulgaria's EU Accession (1999-2000)
(4 May 2006)

**Zdravko Raikov** – Professor, Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication, Sofia University
(4 May 2006)
8 Appendix 1 - Empirical Material

8.1 Interviews of Meglena Kuneva by Month and Year

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[Graph showing the data with lines for each year]
8.2 Interviews of Solomon Passy by Month and Year

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![Graph showing interviews by month and year]
## 8.4 Interviews of Ivailo Kalfin by Month and Year

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![Bar chart showing interviews by month and year for 2005]
### 8.5 Interviews of Sergey Stanishev by Month and Year

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![Graph showing interviews by month and year for 2005]