

From democracy to political electoral instability

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"To the people, by the people, for the people"
Abraham Lincoln

Bulgarian statehood was born after the liberation of Bulgaria from five centuries of Ottoman rule, with the recognition of the Bulgarian Exarchate. On September 30 and October 7, 1879, regular parliamentary elections were held in the Principality of Bulgaria, in which the liberal and conservative parties took part. The first ordinary national assembly is a fact, but only for the period of October 21 - 24, 1879, when Alexander Battenberg dissolves the assembly with a motive: *The coming political crisis!* His election as Bulgarian ruler did not happen without the help of the Great Powers, as according to the Berlin Treaty he was recorded with the name Alexander I of Bulgaria.

In 1886, the Regency Council¹ issued a decree for the elections, and from 1887 to 1914 Tzar Ferdinand (after September 22, 1908 known as king), issued the decrees for the elections and declared the Independence of Bulgaria. The longest-reigning monarch, 31 years, in the Third Bulgarian State, Tzar Boris III², also puts his signature on scheduling elections for the period from 1919 to 1939.

The Council of Regents, in 1945, scheduled elections that were preceded by a scheduled plebiscite with Decree No. 13 of July 31, 1946, abolishing the monarchy and declaring a People's Republic. The elections in the period 1940-1989 are scheduled by Decree of the Presidium of the National Assembly, and for the elections in 1976, 1981 and 1986 by the State Council of the People's Republic of Bulgaria (PRB). Since 1990, elections have been scheduled by Decree of the President of the Republic of Bulgaria.

Elections are seen as the most democratic form of government in a free society. The theory has various definitions of the specific content of democracy, as a modern form of government in which state power derives from the people (citizens) through:

- consensus - consensus democracy;
- conducting referendums - direct democracy;
- elected representatives – representative democracy.

Can we say today, in 2023, that Bulgaria dispute the words of Darai, announced in the 6th century BC, *that the best monarchy is better than the best democracy and the best oligarchy*³

There are many and characteristically different definitions of the content of democracy. Since Antiquity, democracy has been associated with two main values: **freedom and equality**.

Liberty guarantees rights dressed in legal form to every member of the society. In the preamble of the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria, freedom, along with other values such as peace, humanism, equality, justice and tolerance, are bound together in a common essence, with the sole purpose of **expressing the will of the Bulgarian people**.

The Constitution raises as a supreme principle the rights of the individual, his dignity and security, but also imputes the constitutional duty to protect the national and state unity of Bulgaria, **as a democratic, legal and social state**.

¹ In the Bulgarian history of the monarchy, regents on Bulgarian rulers manage the country on behalf of the incapacitated monarch, due to his minor age or until the election on new monarch. For example, Stefan Stambolov, Sava Mutkurov, Petko Karavelov and Georgi Zhivkov were regents after the abdication of Prince Alexander Battenberg. In ancient times, for example, after the death of Khan Omurtag, the regent was Kavhan Isbul of the minor Khan Malmir and of the minor Presiyan, etc.

² **Ferdinand Maximilian Karl Leopold Maria Saxe-Coburg and Gotha** was Tzar of Bulgaria from July 7, 1887 to September 22, 1908, when Bulgaria's Independence was declared.

³ Snell, Daniel C. [Flight and Freedom in the Ancient Near East](#). Brill Publishers, 2001. [ISBN 9004120106](#). p. [18](#).

Democracy worldwide is also a top priority for the European Union, declaring that it is the only system of governing where people can fully exercise their human rights as a factor in long-term stability. The legal basis is contained in Art. 2 and Art. 21 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) and Art. 205 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU). The approach is in the field of human rights, which is based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, international regulations and institutions, and elections.

EU support for democracy is developed in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which also develops 10 strategic objectives on:

- reduction of inequality;
- support for human rights and
- good governance.

The actual start was made on 17 November 2009 with the adopted conclusion by the Council on supporting democracy within the framework of the EU's external relations. In 2012, an agreement was reached on the Strategic Framework on human rights and democracy. The approach "*more for more*" is adopted as support for the democratic transition "*democracy in depth*".

Can it still be accepted today that democracy is an indisputable human rule and it provides:

- all power by and for the citizens, here and now;
- all individual responsibility in the hands of each citizen;
- as well as full actual information?

On the contrary, can it be perceived that democracy today is not - all power, information, capital and personal safety, because it is in the hands of a circle of politicians, rulers and monopolists, which some scholars define as dictatorship, even fascism and communism.

Then the question is:

What is democracy, equality, justice today?

Do they have real ground in our country?

What is freedom, accountability, responsibility today?

Are those values still valid or are there signs that peace is threatened, that war is possible, that nature is taking its revenge, that human life is unprotected.

Freedom is often associated with freedom of speech. For more than 30 years, we have been learning about democracy through the evaluation of freedom of speech. After Bulgaria's membership in the European Union, from 111th place in terms of freedom of speech, in 2023 we climbed 20 places higher in the annual ranking of Reporters Without Borders (RSF) to 71st place in the edition of the index out of 180 countries, at 91st place for the past year 2022. The progress of the legal indicator in the assessment for Bulgaria is due to the efforts to fight against "slap cases", also known as SLAPP⁴, in the same direction as the recommendations of RSF and in last year's report.

Freedom of expression is under pressure all over the world, which is a threat to democracy. This could be changed through solidarity and active work by journalists and active legislative mechanisms. As such measures is the opinion of the Information Bureau of the European Parliament from a round table held on the topic: "The Sakharov Prize of the EP, on November 19, 2022."

Equality is the other essential element of democracy after freedom. The Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria proclaims equality for all citizens before the law and equal access to power. The same constitution in art. 65 violates this right by limiting the possibility of Bulgarian citizens holding a dual citizenship to be representatives of the people.

There is no referendum on this issue, just as there is no possibility "to ask the people" other significantly very important issues: ". In support of this ban and expansion of its scope, many arguments can be presented, especially after Bulgaria's entry into the European Union in 2007.

⁴ Strategic affairs against public participation.

First of all, the question is those who do not live and work permanently in Bulgaria, which according to unofficial data are about 2 million, and a large part of them have dual citizenship, what contribution do they make to Bulgaria? Their knowledge, skills, professionalism and taxes go to the development of the other country, not to Bulgaria. Their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren are human capital for other countries, fresh forces for their science, education and economy. For Bulgaria, from a population of 9 million before 1989, as of December 31, 2022, according to the data of the National Statistical Institute, the population is 6,447,710. And as of December 31, 2023?, And next year?

Bulgarian citizens who do not speak and write the Bulgarian language, do not know Bulgarian history and values such as national flag, homeland, customs and do not contribute every year to the development of the economy and well-being of the country, with work, taxes and contributions - they are only Bulgarians on paper. Bulgarian citizens, who have only rights, without obligations, are violators of the principle of equality. If this is the case, justice demands that they do not vote in elections, referenda and polls. Justice to obligations, justice to rights, for all Bulgarian citizens who contribute to the state of Bulgaria, because democracy requires it.

In the welcoming speech on the occasion of May 1, 2023 - the Day of Labor and International Workers' Solidarity, the President of the Republic of Bulgaria defines our common task as: *"to defend the cause of social justice so that Bulgarians can confidently plan and build their future in their own our country"...* Only in solidarity and united, working for the interests of Bulgaria, can we successfully overcome the trials of today and tomorrow."⁵

Bulgarian citizens living and working outside the borders of Bulgaria do not pay tax on their wages and do not pay pension and health contributions, which is a solidarity tax for every Bulgarian citizen, due to the lack of income in Bulgaria, but they have all the rights - to vote, to determine for us, those that are permanently living in the homeland Bulgaria, who will govern us on our behalf in local, parliamentary and MEP elections. Where is the justice? Where is the equality? Where is the democracy?

The health system is solidarity. We all bring in, and those who need it use it. Almost 2 million do not pay tax because they have no income in the country, and on the other hand, 2 million pensioners also do not pay because the state takes care of them.. The state takes care of these pensioners and the children, the civil servants, until it goes completely bankrupt in conditions of political instability, which society calls "the political crisis of the assembly".

According to unofficial data, a Bulgarian born and completed his education in Bulgaria, and then emigrates, costs the state more than 50 thousand Bulgarian leva. How many are these and how much are they costing the state: the lost benefits, the vitality of labor for the economy, development, progress, prosperity and demographic problems.

Guided by these considerations, it is time to subject for public discussion the expansion of the characteristics of Art. 65, para. 1 of the Constitution, which limits the right of a Bulgarian citizen to be elected as a national representative, if he has another citizenship. On this basis, to supplement Art. 65, paragraph 1 of the KRB: to ban the right to vote in all statutory elections, referenda and hold public office, if in the last 10 years, there is no permanent contribution to the economy, tax and health legislation.

When it comes to democracy, scholars and researchers often look to Plato from the 4th century BC for the types of government systems and aspects of the Roman Republic for democracy. In modern history, the first country to adopt a democratic constitution was the Corsican Republic in 1755, which introduced suffrage for women and focused on public education. Three decades later, France adopted the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. In the US after 1840, restrictions on white citizens to vote were lifted and the system evolved from a Jeffersonian democracy to a Jacksonian democracy. Full voting rights of citizens were achieved with the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

The First World War and the collapse of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires created favorable conditions for the emergence of new nations in Europe, slightly democratically oriented. The Great Depression planted fascism and dictatorial regimes in Europe, such as Nazi Germany, Italy, Spain, Portugal.

The Second World War led to a change of regimes and the creation of the Soviet Bloc. India's independence was defined as the largest democracy in the world during this period. Europe united and create a European Union of countries with different levels of democratic foundations and economic development.

In modern Bulgaria, democracy began after the November plenum of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) with the parliamentary elections for the Seventh Great National Assembly in 1990, and in 1991 it adopted the current Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria as a parliamentary republic with independent executive, legislative and judicial power.

⁵ Standard working hours, health insurance, paid leave and pensions are today rights won at the cost of many sacrifices. Their quality and compliance are an indicator of the maturity of our society. Our common task is to defend the cause of social justice . <https://epicenter.bg/article/Radev--Demokratiyata-i-razvitoto-obshtestvo-sa-nemislimi-v-otsastviето-na-sotsialna-spravedlivost/314688/2/0>

In 2007, Bulgaria and Romania joined the European Union. Bulgaria crosses the threshold of European democracy, weakly democratized and economically weak, but with high levels of comprehensive corruption in all spheres of public life and unstable political and managerial orientation. The following years are difficult for Bulgaria, placed under surveillance by the European Commission under the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism (CVM), for corruption, organized crime and reforms in the judicial system. The mechanism has been temporarily suspended, but not terminated, by the European Commission due to the introduction of a common mechanism for corruption in all EU member states. In 2023, the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism was finally terminated, but this did not prove to be enough to give our country a clear record for Schengen admission, which hinders Romania as well, which reports a significantly better performance of the indicators.

In November 2021, the EU launched the Team Europe initiative to increase support and impact for democratization worldwide, through common approaches and broad alliances. In this direction is the participation of the EU member states in UN and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) forums, with the main task being focused on the promotion and protection of democracy. In the same year, the European Commission participated in a US-led Democracy Summit to promote democratic renewal and to encourage leaders to respond together to the global trend away from democracy.

Since 2006, there has been a worldwide mechanism for evaluating democracy, called the "democracy index", based on 60 indicators and four regimes:

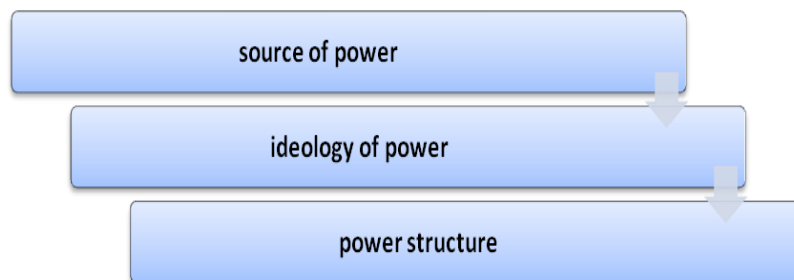
- full democracy;
- insufficient democracy;
- hybrid modes and
- authoritarian regimes.

For 2018, Bulgaria is ranked 46th with an index of 7.03 out of a maximum of 10. For 2022, it occupies 57th place out of 167 countries, which trend of retreating from democracy by 11 points answers all questions about the quality of the electoral and political system and the difficult control of entrenched corrupt practices in all spheres of public life.

The process of democratization can be influenced, even driven by:

- economic growth;
- transparency;
- accountability;
- bearing responsibility;
- freedom;
- equality;
- fair elections and
- active civil society.

Democracy is based on three basic forms of government:



Democracy also has its critics regarding its effectiveness. The leading motive is the so-called irrational voter. Voters who are grossly uninformed on a wide range of political and economic issues. At the same time, citizens have strong preconceptions on issues about which they have knowledge. Milton Friedman professes this ideology, not without valid arguments. In this direction are the positions, independent of each other, of the Italian philosophers of the twentieth century Vilfredo Pareto and Gaetano Mosca, that democracy is illusory and intended to cover up the reality of elite rule - an ideology they call an elitist oligarchy, but accept as a feature of human nature **that leads to apathy towards voting and to an ever-increasing division of the masses**.

Ideology is defined by philosophers as an organized system of views and ideas of a given social group, political party, even class, to express and defend its interests and goals. Elitism arose in Italy at the beginning of the 20th century motivated by Machiavelli's ideas on state governing. According to elitism, society consists of an elite and others. The democratic society which grants the right to vote to every citizen is denied, on the grounds that universal suffrage is unable to prevent the creation of an oligarchy, and that in turn of a ruling class, enabling the election of the permanent-eternal deputy, i.e. democracy makes oligarchy elective!

As an ideology, elitism is opposed to egalitarianism, which in its meaning has two main essences. On one hand, it supports the thesis that people are equal as an ideological doctrine - economic, social and civil rights, and on the other hand, it is the social philosophy of eliminating economic inequalities and equal opportunities to manage material goods.

The last decade has highlighted the criticism of democracy as not offering enough political stability, which has led to frequent policy changes, both locally and nationally. Keeping one government in place for a longer period of time leads to protesting opposition, strong criticism, which often ends in unexpected political change, and the change in deterring and limiting economic growth. These arguments and criticisms define as the reason for imposing in developing countries with low economic growth the great poverty and high corruption.

According to Albert Camus " *Democracy is not the law of the majority, but the protection of the minority.* " Camus' view of democracy hardly fits into the theory that democracy means government on behalf of all the people and according to their will. Because of these differences of opinion, two essential questions and a solution arise:

- How is it managed on behalf of the Bulgarian citizens, if 2/3 of all those entitled refuse to fulfill their constitutional obligation to vote, or vote with "I do not support anyone"?

- How is it managed according to their will, after no party or coalition has asked the people for 30 years what their will is, at least on important public issues, which gives an answer to why five parliamentary elections and two rounds of elections are held in Bulgaria in two years, also presidential elections, and there is no stable government, despite the will of the people to form one?

According to the World Forum for Democracy, there are 120 electoral democracies in 192 countries, which is 58.2% of the world's population, with 85 countries with liberal democracies that respect basic human rights and the rule of law, representing 38% of the world's population.

Election observation is an essential EU tool for supporting democratic change, human rights and the rule of law, which not only contributes to, but also ensures the maintenance of peace and the limitation of conflicts. The established EU Election Observation Mission (EOM) is a short-term/long term observation mission observation mission, and the results are reflected in a report with conclusion and recommendations, which is publicly available.

The parliamentary elections held showed the factual reality of the state of the country, democracy and the response of the civil society to the governance, freedom, equality and well-being of the citizens expressed through their voice.

Table No. 1. Voter activity

no	Parliamentary elections - date Presidential elections - date	Voters- number	Number of voters who voted	Percentage difference	Difference Total
1	April 4, 2021 for the National Assembly	6,588,372	3,334,283	50.61 %	3,254,089
2	July 11, 2021 for the National Assembly	6,578,716	2,775,410	42.19 %	3,803,306
3	0October 02nd, 2022 for the National Assembly	6,602,990	2,601,963	39.41 %	4,001,027
4	April 02 nd , 2023 for the National Assembly	6,594,593	2,683,606	40.69 %	3,910,987
	Presidential elections				
5	1st round - November 14, 2021	6,594,593	2,683,606	40.69 %	3,910,987
6	2nd round – November 21, 2021	6,632,375	2,310,903	34.84 %	4,321,472

From the data published by the CEC on voter turnout in the six consecutive elections held over two years, of which 4 were parliamentary and 2 for president and vice president, the level of voter turnout is undisputed and extremely disturbing. The result is also a sign of people's confidence in electoral representative democracy, which is helpless and with an exhausted charge to achieve its goal of forming a government.

The average voter turnout for the National Assembly is 43.2%, or in absolute numbers there are 3,742,351 people who defiantly refuse to fulfill their constitutional obligation to vote, in the case of compulsory voting. The other hypothesis that is gaining more and more popularity is that signals in all spheres of public life are corrupt electoral practices, followed by parties running the same candidates for decades, who have gained a lot of negativity from wrong decisions and policy statements without seeking the opinion and the will of the citizens.

The same analytical conclusion can be drawn in the election for president and vice president. There is a drastic difference between the number of people who voted in the first round and those in the second round of 37.7%, as well as with the elections for people's representatives, where the average of the four elections is 43.2%.

The threats to representative democracy, after these 6 elections in just 2 years, and their results are reminiscent of Mark Twain - ***"If elections changed anything, they would ban them!"***

No, you can't ban elections, because it's like banning equality, freedom, the right to choose, but also to be elected, which the distorted form of representative democracy does not allow. This niche has long been mastered, conquered, even occupied by oligarchs, monopolies, politicians, rulers, appointed persons, lobbyists and institutions that prevent the possibility of a person being elected as a deputy without being represented by a party. This is just one of the legitimate symptoms of removing representative democracy as an already exhausted democratic mechanism.

The European Commission prioritizes the promotion of democracy and monitoring of elections worldwide, so that people can fully exercise their human rights and achieve long-term stability, according to Art. 2 and 21 of the Treaty on European Union.

The solution for the Bulgarian civil society is to convince itself and believe that it has the strength and can impose its will, but not by refusing to vote, but on the contrary - by mass voting!