

UK Policy Towards Bulgarians and Stereotypes about them since 1989

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ABSTRACT

The article focuses on British politics and stereotypes about Bulgarian citizens in the period after 1989. The article is based on a review of official British documents concerning the migration of Bulgarians from 1990s onwards. Various data originating from tabloids from the period 2004-2015 that had an effect on Bulgarian migrants residing in the UK was also explored. The main part of the paper is based on a round of ethnographic field studies of Bulgarian immigrants multilocally conducted in Britain and in Bulgaria. It explores the influence of British immigration policy and media informations on Bulgarian movements and settlement in the UK. The special attention is put on Bulgarian feelings and perceptions of discrimination. The study seeks to answer questions about the effectiveness and appropriateness of British policies and the migrants' future adaptation and loyalty towards the host country.

KEY WORDS: migration, stereotypes, migration politics, discrimination, integration, loyalty.

The problem with the very strong migration movements to Great Britain and the formation of large immigrant communities in the country, especially from Eastern Europe in the last 12 years, provoked a wide public debate during a nationwide referendum on EU membership and especially after the decision for 'Brexit' in June 2016. The present study takes a narrower perspective. Its main focus is the situation of Bulgarians in the UK, which has attracted public attention both in Britain and Bulgaria in the recent years. My thesis is that the Bulgarian immigrants' lives and the attitudes towards them are largely predetermined by the situation in Great Britain. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to examine the policy of the host country towards them since 1989, which has defined the number, status, motivation and employment of the migrants in the new society. Moreover, the British official policy has a great impact on various stereotypes and prejudices regarding Bulgarians, as presented in the British tabloids for the period between 2006 and 2015. All factors mentioned

so far have mutually influenced one another. On the one hand, it creates a largely negative attitude towards people coming from Bulgaria, but on the other hand it influences the immigrants' perception of the new country and its citizens.

This article is based on three sources: A review of official British documents concerning the migration of Bulgarians from 1990s onwards. Various data originating from tabloids during the period 2004-2015 and affecting Bulgarian migrants residing in the UK was also explored. The main part of the paper is based on an ethnographic field study of Bulgarian migrants in Britain. During the study, classic ethnographic methods such as in-depth and semi-structured interviews, participant observation and autobiographical stories of the respondents were applied. The research was multilocal and conducted in different parts of the UK for a period of six years (2007-2013): London (2007, 2010-2011, 2013), Manchester (2010), Birmingham (2007), Chatham (2007 and 2010), Rochester (2010), Tonbridge (2007), Maidstone (2010-

2011), as well as in Bulgaria, Sofia (2009-2015) and Kardjali (2015). During the study, methods based on virtual ethnography as developed by Christine Hine were also used, such as online qualitative research of narratives from various forums and sites created by or for Bulgarian immigrants in Britain¹. The number of respondents exceeded 200 people and the study was conducted primarily among the Bulgarian community (both Christians and Muslims were considered), as part of a larger research project on Bulgarian immigrants in the UK. British policy towards Bulgarian citizens

British policy towards Bulgarians passed through various stages since 1989. Initially, up to 1993 Bulgarians could only enter Great Britain under a political refugee status. All other arrivals except for students and partners in mixed marriages with British citizens had to undergo visa application procedures. Some liberalization occurred from 2001 onwards when Britain allowed Bulgarian citizens to enter the country with working visas under employment programs and business schemes. The 'business visas' led to an increase in immigration by providing people with the possibility to work as self-employed and to start their own business in the UK. According to 2001 statistics 44 300 Bulgarians entered Great Britain in 2001. The following figures break down their reported purposes of entry: 8600 tourists, 7270 business people, 3220 students, 380 workers with permits for less than 12 months, 120 work permit holders for less than 12 months and 130 dependents of work permit holders².

1 Christine Hine, *Virtual Ethnography* (London: Sage, 2000) and Christine Hine, *Virtual Methods* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2005).

2 ONS, *Control of Immigration Statistics 2001*, UK (Norwich: The Stationery Office Limited, 2002): 48. Accessed December 10, 2016, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/251048/5684.pdf.

British policy towards Bulgarian citizens at the beginning of the 21st century is predetermined by the so-called 'managed migration' approach. The policy was introduced by the Home Office in 2002 and aimed at turning immigration into 'immigration, carefully managed to meet particular needs within a particular sector or at a particular skill level, to help to support these policies as we engage the entrepreneurship, drive and enterprise of those who have sought to make the UK their home. It is, however, in those communities least likely to have benefited from added value economic activity and entrepreneurship where the biggest challenge lies'³. The policy aims at achieving a positive economic impact and stronger macroeconomic health, giving alternative solutions to retired workers and increasing the natural growth of the population⁴. As spelled out in the documents: 'Permanent migrants must be as economically active as possible; put as little burden on the state as possible; and be as socially integrated as possible. The overwhelming majority of those seeking permanent settlement are young' (Home Office, 2005: 21). And since this policy applies only to A2 citizens (Bulgaria and Romania) and does not refer to migrants from A8 (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary and the Czech Republic) and the rest of the EU countries, it could be argued that the logic of discrimination still lies at its heart, albeit in more subtle forms.

3 Home Office, *Secure Borders, Safe Haven: Integration with Diversity in Modern Britain* (Norwich: The Stationery Office Limited, 2002), 12. Accessed December 16, 2016, <http://www.archive2.official-documents.co.uk/document/cm53/5387/cm5387.pdf>.

4 Carol Stanfield, Mike Campbell, Lesley Giles, "The UK workforce: realising our potential," SSSA Research Report 7, SSSA, Wath-upon-Deerne. 2004, accessed 16 December, 2016, https://www.academia.edu/23267480/The_UK_Workforce_Realising_our_Potential; Will Somerville, *Immigration under New Labour* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2007).

According to J. Fox, L. Morosanu and E. Szilassy, the 'immigration controls against Romanians were not racially motivated, but did produce racialized effects. Romanians were symbolically stripped of their whiteness by an immigration policy that refused to recognize them as full Europeans with the associated rights (and colour) such a status would have otherwise availed them'⁵. The immigration control both Bulgarians and Romanians were subjected to as well as the refusal of the British government to recognize them as 'full-fledged' Europeans with all the associated rights undoubtedly reflects the public attitude towards them, which will be discussed further⁶.

The accession of Bulgaria to the European Union on January 1, 2007 marked a new stage in the British immigration policy towards its citizens. Despite the removal of visa regulations, Great Britain continued to impose restrictions on Bulgarians' labour market rights. This policy was influenced by the unforeseen high migration of A8 citizens (Polish in particular) and the view that vacancies in the UK would be filled by other people from A15, including countries which joined the European Union by 1996 (Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Denmark, Ireland, the United Kingdom, Greece, Portugal, Spain, Finland, Austria and Sweden).

Because of the new measures Bulgarian citizens had the right to reside in the UK without a visa for a period of up to three months subsequently to which they were required to provide residential and work permits. The British government took advantage of the stipulations of the Accession Treaty of 2005 according to which the country had the right to restrict the labour market access of Bulgarians and

5 Jon Fox, Laura Morosanu, Eszter Szilassy, "The Racialisation of the New European Migration to the UK," *Sociology* 46, no. 4 (2012), 684 - 685.

6 Ibid.

Romanians for a period up to seven years. However, Britain selectively opened its market to the self-employed (especially in construction and cleaning sector etc.), students⁷, family members⁸, skilled workers with work permits, low-skilled workers in seasonal agricultural (SAWS) (for six months)⁹ and food processing industries (for one year)¹⁰. Through

7 Students should obtain a registration certificate providing permission to work for up to 20 hours a week during term time and for an unrestricted period during vacations and as part of a vocational training course. (Home Office. Border and Immigration Agency, Living and Working in the UK. Rights and Responsibilities of Nationals from Bulgaria and Romania from 1 January 2007. May 2007: 9 - 10, accessed 9 December, 2016, http://www.haringey.gov.uk/sites/haringeygovuk/files/living_and_working_in_the_united_kingdom_-_bulgarian_and_romanian_nationals.pdf).

8 Migrants married to a UK national or a person settled in the UK or a family member of an EEA national who has a right to reside and is not subject to work authorisation requirements (Home Office. Border and Immigration Agency, Living and Working in the UK. Rights and Responsibilities of Nationals from Bulgaria and Romania from 1 January 2007. May 2007: 4, accessed December 9, 2016, http://www.haringey.gov.uk/sites/haringeygovuk/files/living_and_working_in_the_united_kingdom_-_bulgarian_and_romanian_nationals.pdf).

9 The maximum quota of workers from Bulgaria and Romania were 16 250. The SAWS workers carried out low-skilled work including planting and gathering crops; on-farm processing and packing of crops; and handling livestock (Migration Advisory Committee, The Labour Market Impact of Relaxing Restrictions on Employment in the UK of Nationals of Bulgarian and Romanian EU Member State (2008), 55 - 56, accessed December 13, 2016, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/257239/relaxing-restrictions.pdf).

10 The maximum allowance under the scheme for 2008 was 3,500 for both countries, broken down as follows: fish processing - 555 people; meat processing - 1945, mushroom processing - 1,000 (Migration Advisory Committee, The Labour Market Impact of Relaxing Restrictions on Employment in the UK of Nationals of Bulgarian and Romanian EU Member State (2008), 56 - 57, accessed December 13, 2016, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/257239/relaxing-restrictions.pdf). The Scheme had existed since the end of 1940. Workers were hired for seasonal agricultural (SAWS), which provided cheap seasonal labor (especially if foreign students) for

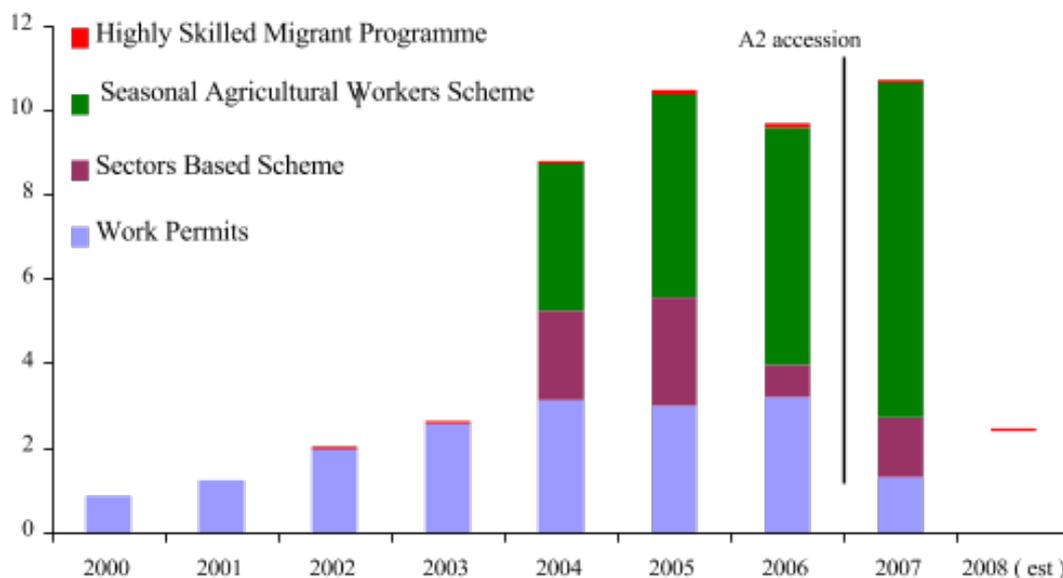


Figure 1. Employer-based permits issued for Bulgarian and Romanian nationals 2000-2008

Note: The Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme time-series begins in 2004; data is unavailable for 2008; Sectors Based Scheme time-series in 2003. 2008 estimates based on 8 month figures from 1 Jan to 31 August 2008.

Source: UK border Agency administrative data, cited by Migration Advisory Committee, *The Labour Market Impact of Relaxing Restrictions on Employment in the UK of Nationals of Bulgarian and Romanian EU Member State* (2008), 63, accessed December 13, 2016, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/257239/relaxing-restrictions.pdf.

that policy, A2 workers were granted exclusive access to the above-enlisted low-skilled schemes that were previously reserved for workers from outside the EU¹¹. Gradually the UK started to remove all migration schemes for low-skilled workers from outside the EU and replaced them with low-skilled workers from Bulgaria and Romania. After one year of continuous employment (or five years for the self-employed), the citizens of A2 received a 'blue card' and unrestricted access to the labor market¹². The primary focus of occupational

farmers.

11 Jon Fox, Laura Morosanu, Eszter Szilassy, "The Racialisation of the New European Migration to the UK," *Sociology* 46, no. 4 (2012), 682.

12 Migration Advisory Committee, *The Labour Market Impact of Relaxing Restrictions on Employment*

schemes 'is on labour market effects, although we also take into account broader economic interests'¹³. However British policy towards A2 citizens put them in a much less favorable position than migrants coming from A8 countries¹⁴. The official immigration rules

in the UK of Nationals of Bulgarian and Romanian EU Member States (2008), accessed December 13, 2016, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/257239/relaxing-restrictions.pdf; Jon Fox, Laura Morosanu, Eszter Szilassy, "The Racialisation of the New European Migration to the UK," *Sociology* 46, no. 4 (2012), 685.

13 Migration Advisory Committee, *The Labour Market Impact of Relaxing Restrictions on Employment in the UK of Nationals of Bulgarian and Romanian EU Member State* (2008), 12, accessed December 13, 2016, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/257239/relaxing-restrictions.pdf.

14 Jon Fox, Laura Morosanu, Eszter Szilassy,

for work permits for citizens of both countries were visible in the statistics on Bulgarian and Romanian immigration. The figures suggest that by 2004 immigration from both countries included a small percent of highly qualified persons, but the largest share of arrivals received work permits.

Britain maintained its policy of 'managed migration' towards Bulgarians and Romanians until the end of 2013. Yet in the early years of the accession of the two new member states the expected immigration 'epidemic' gradually shifted to other countries that imposed restrictions on Bulgarian workers (such as Greece and Ireland). The UK was one of the few European countries where fears of Eastern European immigrants had a real legislative dimension, reflected in the closure of its labor market for citizens of Bulgaria and Romania for a period of seven years after their EU accession. The British authorities repealed the labor restrictions on A2 citizens at the last possible moment in January 2014, but the statistics show that long restrictions failed to prevent new moves in that direction.

Bulgarians in British tabloids

Undoubtedly, the policy of 'managed migration' reflected on the image of Bulgarians and Romanians in British tabloids. Due to their concurrent EU accession A2 nationals were pictured homogeneously among the public¹⁵. The attitude towards the citizens of the two countries in the media affected to the British public views towards them. These can be explained by the high criminality and corruption attributed to Romanians and Bulgarians, as well as the large number of Roma in the two countries who are subject to serious prejudice in Britain. The visa scandal that took place in the British Embassy in Sofia in 2004 confirmed the already existing view that the majority of A2 citizens were trying to cheat the UK system. That view was enshrined in a document produced by the British Home Office in 2006, which warned against the expected arrival of 45 000 criminals from Romania and Bulgaria¹⁶. A review of the British media, especially British tabloids, reflects the constant reporting of information about problems with immigrants from both countries. In the 2006-2013 period, these news items remained particularly relevant especially at the end of each year when the British government discussed the possible termination of labor restrictions for Bulgarians and Romanians. For example, for a period of a month in the summer of 2006 a large number of materials collected among those waiting for

15 "Bulgarians & Romanians in the British National Press. 1 December 2012 - 1 December 2013," Migration Observatory, Last modified August 18, 2014, <http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/reports/bulgarians-and-romanians-british-national-press>.

16 See Craknell 2006, cited by Dhananjayan Srisankarajah, Laurence Cooley, "Stemming the Flow? The Causes and Consequences of the UK's Closed Doors' Policy toward Roumanians and Bulgarians," in *Accession and Migration: Changing Policy, Society and Culture in an Enlarged Europe*, edited by J. Eade and Y. Valkova. Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2009), 48.

"The Racialisation of the New European Migration to the UK," *Sociology* 46, no. 4 (2012), 682.

a visa in front of the British consulate in Sofia and Bucharest appeared in British media. While the newcomers' citizenship was the basis of the above-discussed institutional discrimination in the immigration policy, the discriminatory line followed by tabloids is explicitly based on culturalist perspectives as a motive for exclusion¹⁷. In British tabloids Bulgarians and Romanians are presented as foreigners and are often implicitly or explicitly associated with racially-stigmatized previous migration waves¹⁸. The political and economic position of the citizens of A2 defined by the official state policy shows that 'the new Europeans' are perceived more negatively in comparison to previous migration waves, regardless of their European identity and cultural heritage. Such policy perspectives undoubtedly affect public opinion and media representations¹⁹. British tabloids provide different framings of these views. The first one emphasises numbers of arrivals from the two countries starting from a few thousand up to several million²⁰. This is reflected in Nigel Farage's speech in which he stated that 29 million Romanians and Bulgarians would be expected settling in Britain in the next few years²¹. The numbers

are often exaggerated in talks about expectations of floods of Eastern Europeans 'floods'. For example, Janice Atkinson, UKIP MEP for the South East, said that there were more Bulgarians and Romanians working in the UK than the total population of Folkestone and Hythe²². The categories tabloids use (stopping, controlling, blocking) in relation to migrants are directed towards efforts to prevent their movement²³. These terms are not neutral and represent immigrants in the best case as a nuisance and at worst as a threat²⁴. The texts are not openly rude or discriminatory; they rather hint and simultaneously validate assumptions about the relationship between immigration and 'race' accumulated from the past²⁵.

The narratives directed towards Bulgarians and Romanians vary according to the existing problems in British society. In 2006 multiple articles warned about health problems and increasing death rates caused by AIDS and tuberculosis in the UK²⁶. Tabloids described the immigrants coming from A2 as physically dangerous for Britons' health because of the alleged flood of drugs and prostitutes. From 2007 onwards, when the number of Eastern European migrants²⁷ in the UK dramatically

17 Jon Fox, Laura Morosanu, Eszter Szilassy, "The Racialisation of the New European Migration to the UK," *Sociology* 46, no. 4 (2012), 685.

18 Jon Fox, Laura Morosanu, Eszter Szilassy, "The Racialisation of the New European Migration to the UK," *Sociology* 46, no. 4 (2012), 685.

19 See Roediger, 2002, cited by Linda McDowell, "Old and New European Economic Migrants: Whiteness and Managed Migration Policies," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 35, no. 1 (2009), 29.

20 Dhananjayan Sriskandarajah, Laurence Cooley, "Stemming the Flow? The Causes and Consequences of the UK's Closed Doors' Policy toward Roumanians and Bulgarians," in *Accession and Migration: Changing Policy, Society and Culture in an Enlarged Europe*, ed. J. Eade and Y. Valkova (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2009), 45.

21 "Nigel Farage about Bulgaria and Romania," Youtube, Last modified January 26, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_

embedded&v=pfosifjmm6s.

22 "Romanian and Bulgarian migration: Rise in workers in UK," BBC, Last modified February 18, 2015. <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-31519319>.

23 "Bulgarians & Romanians in the British National Press. 1 December 2012 - 1 December 2013," Migration Observatory, Last modified August 18, 2014, <http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/reports/bulgarians-and-romanians-british-national-press>.

24 Jon Fox, Laura Morosanu, Eszter Szilassy, "The Racialisation of the New European Migration to the UK," *Sociology* 46, no. 4 (2012), 685 - 687.

25 David Teo Goldberg, *Racist Culture, Philosophy and Politics of Meaning* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 55-56.

26 'The Sun Apologizes to Bulgaria over 'AIDS Threat,' Novinite, Last modified December 28, 2006, <http://www.novinite.com/articles/74667/The+Sun+Apologizes+to+Bulgaria+over+%22AIDS+Threat%22>

27 For a divergent attitude towards Eastern

increased tabloids changed perspective and presented migration from Bulgaria and Romania as a massive wave flooding the UK labor market and leaving Britons out of work. In the last few months of 2013 they gave a different angle to that problem – so-called ‘social tourism’. Tabloids played with the theme about the newcomers’ possibilities to receive welfare benefits, which would burden the already fragile British social welfare system. Public opinion forced the government to introduce 100 new criteria that the immigrants should meet before they receive income-related benefits such as housing benefit, income support and council tax benefits²⁸. According to another requirement, newcomers had to earn 149 pounds per week to be eligible to apply for benefits²⁹ – a requirement defined by researchers as ‘chauvinism of prosperity’ (‘welfare chauvinism’, understood as the extent to which people believe that welfare benefits should be restricted to citizens)³⁰.

The presentation of Bulgarians and Romanians’ crimes in British tabloids provides a

European immigration in the British press see Ekaterina Balabanova, Alex Balch, “Sending and receiving: The ethical framing of intra-EU migration in the press,” *European Journal of Communication* 25 (2010), 382 - 394.

28 Patrick Wintour, “EU migrants face 100 new questions to make it harder to obtain benefits,” *The Guardian*, December 13, 2013, accessed December 17, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2013/dec/13/eu-migrants-new-questions-benefits-romanians-bulgarians>.

29 “EU migrants must earn £149 a week to claim benefits,” *BBC*, Last modified February 19, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-26254735>. See also “Impact on households: distributional analysis to accompany Budget 2014”. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/national-minimum-wage-rates>, and Kevin Maguire “Where do you rank in the official earnings list? Figures reveal huge pay gap between rich and poor,” *Mirror*, January 9, 2014, update March 31, 2015, <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/uk-average-salary-26500-figures-3002995>.

30 Alex Balch, Ekaterina Balabanova, “Ethics, Politics and Migration: Public Debates on the Free Movement of Romanians and Bulgarians in the UK, 2006–2013,” *Politics* 36, no 1 (2016), 20.

permanent discriminatory framework. Publications describe the increased number of crimes in the UK as a result of the free entry of A2 citizens³¹. For example, in December 2013 ‘The Express’ published information on a Bulgarian who targeted English homes with the comment that this is one important reason to limit the movement of those citizens to the Kingdom³². Finally, it should be pointed out that the language used to describe Bulgarians presents them as a group without considering social differences³³. The media reports also talk about associations or overlaps between Bulgarians, Romanians and Roma³⁴, which also caused negative public perceptions³⁵. It should also be noted that tabloids often associate Gypsies with criminal, antisocial behavior or a nomad lifestyles³⁶.

Due to public discontent and strong activity of the opposition (especially the nationalist opposition), Bulgarians were constantly humiliated by the extension of labor restrictions

31 Matt Chorley, “We’re importing a crime wave from Romania and Bulgaria: Tory MPs around on ministers as immigration curbs are lifted,” *Daily Express*, December 19, 2013, accessed December 12, 2016, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2526486/Were-importing-crime-wave-Romania-Bulgaria-Tory-MPs-round-ministers-immigration-curbs-lifted.html>.

32 Anil Dawar, “Bulgarian career criminal who targeted UK homes proves why we MUST control migrant influx,” *Sunday Express*, December 4, 2013, accessed December 12, 2016, <http://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/446711/Bulgarian-thief-proves-why-we-must-keep-controls-on-migrants-into-Britain>.

33 “Bulgarians & Romanians in the British National Press. 1 December 2012 - 1 December 2013,” *Migration Observatory*, Last modified 18 August, 2014, <http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/reports/bulgarians-and-romanians-british-national-press>.

34 *Ibid.*

35 Jon Fox, Laura Morosanu, Eszter Szilassy, “The Racialisation of the New European Migration to the UK,” *Sociology* 46, no. 4 (2012), 688.

36 “Bulgarians & Romanians in the British National Press. 1 December 2012 - 1 December 2013,” *Migration Observatory*, Last modified 18 August, 2014, <http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/reports/bulgarians-and-romanians-british-national-press>.

beyond 2013 and this topic was continuously discussed in Internet forums. There was information about Eastern Europeans already settled in the UK who were against the opening of the British market due to fears of falling wages and the arrival of new cheap labor. The migration debate in Britain in that period was so hot that even part of the political messages during the campaign for EU Parliament in 2013 included messages defined as 'racist' against Eastern immigrants³⁷. The propaganda against the opening of the labour market for A2 citizens took on an especially negative tone at the end of 2013. An example of this is the statement of the London councilor Nicky Aiken against the beggars in the central part of the capital: 'The tidal movement of East European rough sleepers in central London is something we have seen for months now... I can totally understand the frustration of residents and businesses that no sooner do we clear an illegal camp than a fresh batch arrive. The longer-term solution lies in stopping career beggars at the UK border.'³⁸

The migration debate was strongly influenced by the political situation in the UK³⁹. It included many celebrities. The opinion of the famous chef and restaurateur Jamie Oliver stood out among them. According to him, the res-

taurants would close without the Eastern European immigrants who were 'tougher' workers than younger Britons who were described as 'wet behind the ears' and easily tired after a 48-working week⁴⁰.

The above-mentioned aspects form a pattern which presents the people arriving from Bulgaria and Romania as a problem and as responsible for the UK's problems. Using the terminology of J. Fox, L. Morosanu and E. Szilasi racialization 'occurs when migrants are collectively disparaged with reference to a combination of cultural, social, and/or quasi-biological traits. This is not the crude discrimination /racism of epithets and insults; rather, innuendo and inference extend them to a larger and growing narrative that attributes the problems of migration to the essential characteristics of the migrants'⁴¹.

37 Tamara Cohen, "Ukip causes a stir with biggest ever poster campaign costing £1.5 million but they're immediately attacked as 'racist,'" Daily mail, April 24, 2014, accessed December 14, 2016, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2609583/New-Ukip-posters-focus-immigration-branded-racist-political-opponents.html>.

38 Anil Dawar, "Rough-sleeping East European migrant beggars set up camp in Marble Arch," Daily mail, September 13, 2013, accessed December 13, 2016, <http://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/428961/Rough-sleeping-East-European-migrant-beggars-set-up-camp-in-Marble-Arch>.

39 See Alex Balch, Ekaterina Balabanova, "Ethics, Politics and Migration: Public Debates on the Free Movement of Romanians and Bulgarians in the UK, 2006-2013," *Politics* 36, no 1 (2016), 19 - 35.

40 "Jamie Oliver: Migrants are tougher workers," BBC, Last modified August 28, 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/business-23860811>.

41 Jon Fox, Laura Morosanu, Eszter Szilassy, "The Racialisation of the New European Migration to the UK," *Sociology* 46, no. 4 (2012), 689.

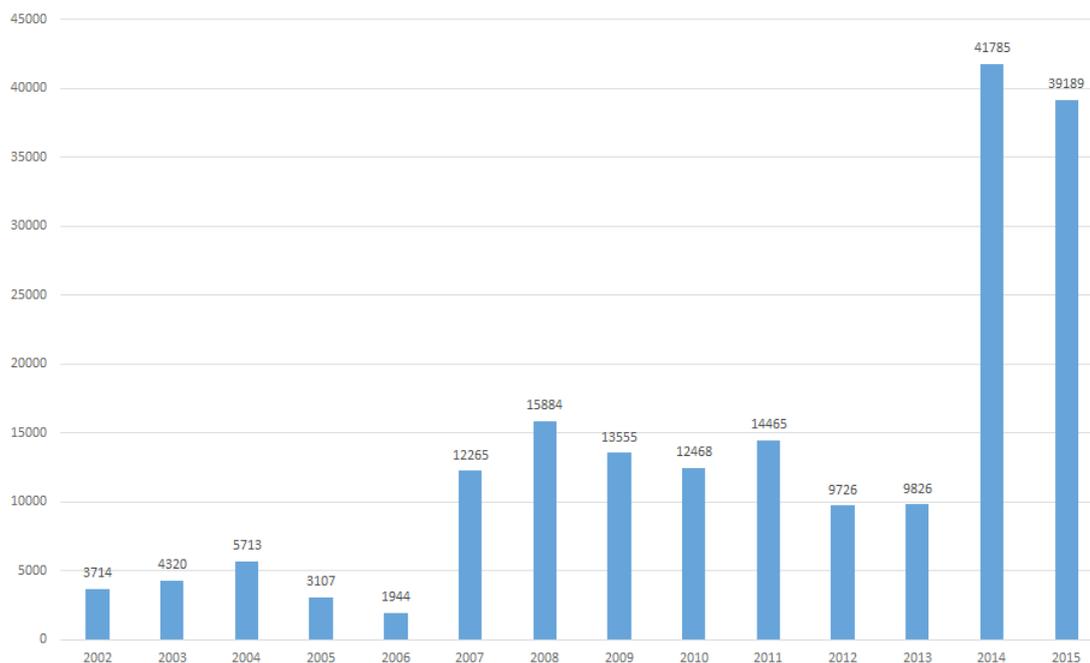


Figure 2. Number of Bulgarians receiving NINo (2002-2015), Source: Department for Work and Pensions, February 2016.

The effect of British policy and tabloid opinion on Bulgarian immigration and settlement in the UK

The policy of managed migration applied by the British government towards the Bulgarians and the Romanians is aimed at restricting their movement. Statistics from that period show, however, that the number of persons who came from Bulgaria gradually increased during the period after the collapse of communist rule in the country. The data show that the number of Bulgarian immigrants has increased by 382% since 2004 and reached 53'000 in 2011⁴². Other data suggest that there were

42 "One in a hundred Slovaks has come to live in Britain," Daily Mail, June 13, 2011, accessed December 13, 2016, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2002710/UK-immigration-1-Slovaks-come-live-Britain.html>.

47'000 Bulgarians in the UK in 2012⁴³ and about 50'000-60'000 in 2013⁴⁴. According to the British National Insurance Institute, 187,961 adult Bulgarian citizens received national insurance numbers between January 2002 and December 2015 regardless of labour restrictions⁴⁵.

Unofficial data from Bulgarian interlocutors, however, indicate that the number of Bulgarian citizens residing (including those who have temporary residence) in the UK exceed-

43 ONS, Population by Country of Birth and Nationality. Report, August 30, 2012, http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_277619.pdf.

44 ONS, Population by Country of Birth and Nationality tables. January 2013 to December 2013, August 2014, www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/...2014/rft-table-2---population-by-cob.xls.

45 ONS, National Insurance number allocations to adult overseas nationals to December 2015, February 28, 2016, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-insurance-number-allocations-to-adult-overseas-nationals-to-december-2015>.

ed 300'000 at the end of 2016. (the source is – Bulgarian interlocutors; not official info their own estimation).

Despite their influence on the number of immigrants, the British policies undoubtedly also affected the ways in which Bulgarians settle in the country. The period between 1989 and 2015 can be further divided into five main sub-periods⁴⁶. The first (1989-2001) was provoked by the collapse of the communist borders, the opening of the country to the West after 10 November 1989, and the increased interest in travelling and meeting new people and cultures. However, Bulgaria's transition from a centralised to a market economy with high rates of inflation and unemployment, tighter credit and fiscal policies and low levels of production. They all affected the entire country's population, resulting in a sharp drop in the living standards and strengthening the desire to emigrate. The removal of visa restrictions regarding travel to most countries in the EU in 2001 undoubtedly gave an impulse to Bulgarian migration. During the period between 2001 and late 2006, many Bulgarians wishing to live and work in Britain became self-employed. The country's accession to the EU and right to travel visa-free to Britain from 1 January 2007 definitely gave a boost to student and economic migration. The latest wave of migration began in mid-2010 and was stimulated by the economic crisis and market stagnation in Western Europe and Bulgaria. This

46 Chr. Nygaard, A. Pasierbek and E. Francis-Brophy divided Bulgarian immigration to the UK into three main periods: "before-2004", "after the accession of A8 countries to EU from 2004 to 2006" and "after A2 EU accession in 2007 and later" (Christian Nygaard, Adam Pasierbek, Ellie Francis-Brophy, "Bulgarian and Romanian migration to the South East and UK: profile of A2 migrants and their distribution. Report prepared for the South East Strategic Partnership for Migration," November 2013: 14, <http://www.reading.ac.uk/web/files/press-office/Migration-Dr-Christian-Nygaard-full-report-Nov2013.pdf>).

led to increased movement from Bulgaria and the relocation of representatives of the larger Bulgarian communities, such as those in Spain and Greece, to the UK. The study shows that in the last few years there were many cases of re-emigration by people who had settled in other European countries like France, Greece or Spain, but changed their destination for political, social or economic reasons. The last period began in 2014 after the abolishment of employment restrictions and the opening of the UK market for the Bulgarian citizens.

British policies also reflected on the ways in which the immigrants settled there. For example, most of the Bulgarians arriving in the 1990s stayed in Britain after the end of student brigades, festivals, concerts or football matches using opportunities for acquiring refugee status and applying for asylum until they fixed their documents:

There was a company that helped us with the documents. It helped us, but everyone invented a story about asylum seeking (AIEM №983-III: 58).

Although the applicants were not real refugees, they took advantage of asylum-granting policies in order to stay in the UK. After the initial rejection, the migrants waited years to appeal. Thus, despite the strict visa regime Bulgarians exploited administrative gaps:

Before being self-employed we all were asylum seekers; we sought refuge status... We won time there. It was a window of opportunity (AIEM №983-III: 59).

At the beginning of the twentieth century Bulgarians directed their efforts towards new legal possibilities to settle in the UK. Since 2001, business visas have become particularly

relevant. This practice was started in mid-90s by various companies, often with Bulgarian and British participation. For a large amount of money the future immigrants received not only the necessary documents to work and reside in the UK, but also good lawyers taking care of potential problems in the British Embassy in Sofia or conflicts with the authorities. The companies prepared immigrants' work plans and the business development documents in the coming years, sometimes of which were even fictitious.

The student brigades provided a second opportunity to leave Bulgaria after 2001. The narratives told of several cases of departure after false documents for student status were presented. An interesting case was one of students' who supported a private business in Bulgaria (furniture house) with periodic seasonal agricultural work in England. The student visas provided another possibility in that period. They were obtained after registration in a college for learning or improving English language skills. Generally, the enrolling students received a six-month or one-year visa, but were supposed to submit documents for admission, pay for accommodation and present a bank statement that allowed a longer stay in England:

I came as a student for three months, then I was issued a six-month visa ... no problem to open a bank account because the colleges work with certain bank branches... I borrowed 11-12 thousand dollars from my friends because I had to prove that I have enough money money to stay in the UK... I deposited it in a bank account, received an excerpt from the account and returned the money back to my friends (AIEM №983-III: 29).

The narratives showed that immigrants of-

ten combine different ways in order to secure their residence in the UK. For example, some of them came as "refugees". After a certain period, they enrolled in a language course at a college or something else, and then applied for self-employment in order to continue their stay there. The immigrants used all loopholes in the legal legislation, "all sorts of dealings" (AEIM №970-III: 24), often with the help of friends or different companies to survive and to "bypass" the limitations imposed on them by the British government. Therefore, Bulgarian narratives about the arrival in Britain were stories of survival and struggle with British laws and rules requesting "combinativeness and nerves" (AEIM №983-III: 92). Not everyone was lucky. Some were caught by the British authorities as illegal residents or workers and were returned to Bulgaria. Others were not permitted to enter the UK because of doubts about the legality of their visa.

The British policy of managed migration affected the employment status of newcomers too. In this way Bulgarians with Romanians contribute to "improving the efficiency of the labor market" but carry out activities that are avoided by locals for being "dirty," "difficult" and "dangerous" (known in the literature as 3D activities ("3D jobs - dirty, difficult (dull) and dangerous jobs"⁴⁷, low-paid domestic work, unskilled work in the informal sector, and work in sectors with strict seasonality such as agriculture, road building and construction, hotel, restaurant and other tourism-related services⁴⁸. Therefore, the Bulgarians

47 Julie Knight, "Migrant Employment in the Ethnic Economy: Why Do Some Migrants Become Ethnic Entrepreneurs and Others Co-Ethnic Workers?" *Journal of International Migration and Integration*. 16, no 3 (2014): 2, accessed December 16, 2016, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/272015962>.

48 Rayner Münz, Thomas Straubhaar, Florin Vadean et. al, "What are the migrants' contributions to employment and Growth? A European approach,"

claimed that they fit well into the economy by working in sectors undesired by Britons:

I do not think that we disturb the Brits. We are doing work that any Englishman would not be very happy to do (happy - m. B., MM) to to. I do believe that because I do not see Britons in such places (AEIM №983-III: 49).

The combination of labour restrictions and desire to immigrate to the UK was the reason for the Bulgarians to do jobs that they never did before. Therefore, the stories about the first encounters of immigrants with this kind of work were comical:

The first time in my life I held a drill and other construction tools (AEIM №983-III: 87);

I started painting. They hired us from several sites. The first time we started upwards and at lunch the man said, "Thanks a lot. You are done here" After two or three days, I went to the National Gallery, but I gave up work there. I started to learn slowly and I worked as a painter for a year and half (AEIM №983-III: 58).

The situation with migrant agricultural workers was similar:

We worked on a farm. There were different kinds of vegetables. It was quite difficult. That was my first encounter with fields. Beans, zucchini, potatoes. There were Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Poles, and Romanians. We were on this farm for three months and then went to another apple farm for two months (AEIM №983-III: 58).

Some narratives told of immigrants who engaged in activities that were considered dangerous for their health and they did not know how to do. One interlocutor began to work illegally and without documents with a big construction crane:

I worked anonymously and I thought that if I fall or something happens to me nobody knows who I am... I thought they would throw me in the trash and nobody will find me. Nobody knows who I am. I do not exist in any system. No documents, no money... (AEIM №983-III: 92).

The low-skilled jobs influenced the migrants' self perception. The lower social status, compared to the one they had in their homeland, is viewed highly emotionally and traumatically by the Bulgarians:

I cleaned hotel rooms and I cried everyday because I got off the stage (the interlocutor was a singer before emigration to the UK), because after parting with him (British husband - b.m.M. M.) and leave, I did not get a single penny ... I walked everyday and cried: "Where I come from and where I am now! (AEIM №983-III: 16-17).

The new lower social position is reinforced by the insulting attitude towards newcomers in the early periods of their settlement, "They watch us as we are slouch or wretch" (AEIM №983-III: 5). Most of the immigrants were comforting themselves with the thought that "there is no shameful work". Therefore, they often refused to define their employment with the phrase that they have "a business". For many of them the work, regardless what it is, is a way to achieve their goals, "because I was a queen in Bulgaria, but nobody is guilty I came here!" (AEIM №970-III: 30).

British official policy and negative stereotypes articulated by tabloids also affect the migrants'

perception of the new country. They felt detachment from other East Europeans, as citizens from different and lower level, and “less European”. All this creates an uncomfortable environment in which immigrants live. Many had a feeling that they were not well received by the local community and therefore they often reported incidents of discrimination. Bulgarians were not familiar with the UK historical accumulations, so they did not understand the British attitude towards the immigrants from the Commonwealth countries who have more rights and privileges than Eastern Europeans:

It is not right to discriminate us. Can someone from Africa come to enroll and take benefits?! But they raise hands of us(?) – Bulgaria and Romania. There are 15 million Indians and 1 million Pakistanis... Is not discrimination?! It sucks what they do for us. Otherwise... the English are quite tolerant but they do not put everyone on an equal footing (AEIM №983-III: 51).

The immigrants shared different explanations for the negative attitude towards them. Some Bulgarians looked for some accumulated Cold War stereotypes and insufficient knowledge of Bulgarians and their culture. Another reported reason was the large migration wave of Poles and other Eastern Europeans after 2004. Most immigrants spoke about the Polish ‘flow’ that had gripped Britain since 2004 and which shaped the negative expectations regarding the Bulgarians:

[...] Two million [Poles] came here. The Britons went crazy, the wave washed them away, those who have lived all their life here. If you want to work you should work under minimum wage. The Poles never earn such money and the Englishmen hate

them. All the negatives pertain to the Poles. Many of them are hated... When they heard that we will go, they just trembled: ‘O, how many Poles came! Now Bulgarians and Romanians will come here!’ (AEIM №983-III: 92).

According to the opinions of interlocutors the people from Eastern Europe were artificially divided by the British government. The UK immigration policy separated people who have similar origin (Slavic ethnic roots; common Communist past; similar social and professional experience) and gave them or deprived them of available employment opportunities.

In interviews conducted between 2010 and 2013, they were adamant that after removal of labour restrictions in 2014 a large influx of Bulgarians should not be expected because:

... Those who wanted to come had already managed to cheat the system. They [Britons] are waiting for the big rush but Bulgarians are already here. Whoever wanted to escape – had already escaped (AEIM №983-III: 92).

Negative public attitude towards immigrants from Bulgaria, as represented by British media and political discourse, gave rise to incomprehension and resentment among Bulgarians:

Although we have long been accepted in the EU, they still hold this negative attitude and don’t allow us to work. And at the same time, we see how many people from the Arab world invaded unobstructedly and they study, live and run their businesses here. The Britons are afraid of them, just spy them... and there has been such an attitude towards us ... I don’t hear about a Bulgarian involved in murders or fights. More Poles do it but they have the right to come and work. I have not

seen drunken Bulgarians falling on the street. So, I cannot explain why there is such an attitude towards Bulgarians (AEIM №983-III: 24).

According to the immigrants, the media images, together with the real migration situation and image of Bulgarians, prevent them from finding better jobs and integrating in the UK. However, they recognize that anthropological reasons very often make them difficult to distinguish from other Eastern Europeans, which in its turn helps them to find a place in the new society.

The strong negativity towards the further opening of the labour market for Bulgarians and Romanians by January 2014 and the unclear policy of the British government were the reasons for organized protests by Romanians and Bulgarians in late 2013 and early 2014 in London and other major cities. This was their attempt to attract the attention of the British government towards their problems. For that purpose, the 'Alliance Against Romanian and Bulgarian Discrimination'⁴⁹ was created. The protests grew due to the discontent over discrimination of all immigrants, regardless of their ethnic origin. Strong anti-immigrant sentiments in Britain were the reason why in August 2015 the Polish community organized a strike against "the lack of respect" for their contribution to the economy and against poor working conditions⁵⁰.

49 Alliance Against Romanian and Bulgarian Discrimination, <http://www.aarbd.org/>

50 Jonathan Owen, "Thousands of Polish workers to take part in the first ever migrant workers strike in Britain" Independent, August 8, 2015, accessed December 12, 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/thousands-of-polish-workers-to-take-part-in-the-first-ever-migrant-workers-strike-in-britain-10445970.html>. The strike failed because it was not consistent with the unions and the Federation of Poles in Great Britain, and according to the majority of them Poles were satisfied with the opportunities that the country gave them ("Polish 'strike' - much ado

At the same time, Bulgarians were unhappy that their own country did not oppose public discrimination⁵¹:

Why did the ambassador not come out and say something about the restrictions? Here all Bulgarians work hard but enjoy fewer social benefits. Such a system' (AEIM №979-III: 24); And the worst is that no one from the Bulgarian side came and defended us, ... We're pretty well integrated here' (AEIM №983-III: 50).

Thus immigrants felt rejected by the host and home country. Although public awareness of Bulgarian and Romanian immigrants dropped in the summer of 2015 and attention shifted to the refugees trying to cross the Channel, Nigel Farage mentioned Bulgaria and Romania as the main culprits for the increase migration to the UK last year. He also spoke about the discrimination of immigrants from non-European countries at the expense of those from Europe⁵².

about nothing?" BBC, Last modified August 20, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34012684>. The strike has partly evolved into a campaign for blood donations („Polish blood“) with the idea of gratitude of immigrants to the host country (Caroline Davies, Aisha Gani, Vincent Wood, "Few demonstrators attended the strike rally called for by Polish migrant workers," The Guardian, August 20, 2015, accessed December 20, 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/aug/20/polish-workers-strike-blood-donation-nhs-uk>).

51 Вж. The protest letter of Dimitar Dimitrov. Available at: http://petel.bg/edin-varnenets-na-ostrova-tuk-ni-narichat-marlyavi-sanlivtisi--a-darzhavata-balgariya-spi-__30596.

52 "Nigel Farage blames European Union for migrant increase," BBC, Last modified August 27, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-34076034>.

Some conclusions

Having examined the British policy towards the Bulgarians and the results based on statistics and interviews, the following conclusions can be outlined. Regardless of the political and media campaigns, the number of Bulgarians in the UK has slowly and gradually increased and they have become more visible in British society. Although the immigration to the UK was relatively low for a number of years compared to the Bulgarian movements towards other countries such as Germany, Greece or Spain which intensified immediately after the collapse of the communist regime, the “British dream” (Goodhart 2013) has managed to create a large community in the UK. Notwithstanding the labour restrictions, the number of Bulgarians increased especially after the country’s accession to the European Union on January 1, 2007. The immigrants found different ways to settle in the UK, using all possible official opportunities, often consecutively or combining them.

The British immigration policy, which sought to fill in gaps in the labour market due to the lack of interest of locals to take such positions, failed because a large number of immigrants did not possess the required qualifications. This problem raises the question about the appropriateness and effectiveness of the British migration policy. On the one hand, a similar state policy leads to a decrease in the abilities and knowledge of immigrants as a result of the more unskilled work they are supposed to do. In this relation scholars are even talking about “brain loss”, in the cases of higher qualified immigrants. On the other hand, due to the official requirements the people who are hired

are not qualified, which makes the situation difficult for the employers and even dangerous for peoples’ life and health. All this reflects on the migrants’ feelings concerning the host country. The negative attitude is reinforced by the media information that contributed to the establishment of stereotypes forcing many Bulgarians to feel uncomfortable upon their arrival in the new community. Perhaps most migrants would more easily accept the hard and unacceptable labor rather than the discrimination and crimes which occurred after the Brexit referendum in June 2016. Everything mentioned so far raises questions about the migrants’ future adaptation and loyalty towards the host country.

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